



**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE**

**COURSE CODE:ENG355**

**COURSE TITLE:INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLINGUISTICS**

**COURSE  
GUIDE**

**ENG355  
INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLINGUISTICS**

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## **Introduction**

Welcome to ENG355: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLINGUISTICS

**ENG355: Introduction to Sociolinguistics** is a three-credit one-semester undergraduate course. It comprises 25 study units, subdivided into five modules. The materials have been developed with the Nigerian context in view. This course guide gives you an overview of the course. It also provides you with information on the organization and requirements of the course.

### **Course Aims**

- To expose students to the concept of sociolinguistics
- To make the students understand sociolinguistics in the Nigerian context
- To give students insight into the nature of sociolinguistics in Nigeria
- To improve students' knowledge of language use in the Nigerian society
- To acquaint students with the necessary sociolinguistic requirements for English usage in the Nigerian society

### **Course Objectives**

To achieve the aims above, we have some overall objectives. Each unit also has objectives. These will guide you in your study. They are usually stated at the beginning of each unit; and when you are through with studying the units, go back and read the objectives. This would help you accomplish the task you have set out to achieve. On completion of the course, you should be able to:

- a) Find out the importance of sociolinguistics in Nigerian English usage
- b) Discuss the major roles sociolinguistics plays in Nigerian English usage
- c) Recognise that there are sociolinguistic factors affecting English in Nigeria
- d) See that sociolinguistics studies the reasons for language varieties
- e) Explain the major reasons for language variation in the Nigerian society
- f) Apply sociolinguistic maxims in appreciating Nigerian English usage.

### **Working through the Course**

To complete the course, you are required to read the study units and other related materials. You will also need to undertake practical exercises for which you need a pen, a notebook, and other materials that

will be listed in this guide. The exercises are to aid you in understanding the concepts being presented. At the end of each unit, you will be required to submit written assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of the course, you will write a final examination.

## **Course Materials**

The major materials you will need for this course are:

- Course guide
- Study units
- Relevant textbooks, including the ones listed under each unit
- Assignment file
- Presentation schedule

## **Study Units**

There are 25 study units in this course, as follows:

### **Module 1 Basic Concepts in Sociolinguistics**

- Unit 1 What is Sociolinguistics?
- Unit 2 Sociolinguistics and Language Variation
- Unit 3 Language in society
- Unit 4 General Rules and Individual Use
- Unit 5 Sociolinguistic Differences

### **Module 2 Language Use in Society**

- Unit 1 Speech Communities
- Unit 2 Speech Acts and Speech Events
- Unit 3 Dialects, Idiolects, Sociolects
- Unit 4 Code Mixing and Code Switching
- Unit 5 Register, Style and Usage

### **Module 3 Language Variation in Society**

- Unit 1 Pidgins and Pidginisation
- Unit 2 Creoles and Creolization
- Unit 3 Concept of Standard Usage
- Unit 4 Slang and Clichés in Sociolinguistics
- Unit 5 Taboos and Profane Usage

### **Module 4 Language Forms in Society**

- Unit 1 Language and Class
- Unit 2 Monolingualism and Bilingualism

Unit 3 Language Contact and Multilingualism

Unit 4 Diglossia and Polyglottism

Unit 5 Language Use in Interaction

### **Module 5 Language and Sociolinguistic Determinants**

Unit 1 Language Ideology

Unit 2 Language and Geography

Unit 3 Language and Gender

Unit 4 Language and Identity

Unit 5 Language and Culture

### **Textbooks and References**

Certain books are recommended in the course. You may wish to purchase them for further reading.

### **Assignment File**

An assignment file and a marking scheme will be made available to you. In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the assignment file itself and later in this Course Guide in the section on assessment.

### **Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs)**

You will need to submit a specified number of Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs). Every unit in this course has a tutor-marked assignment. You will be assessed on four of them, but the best three (that is, the highest three of the 15 marked) will be counted. The total marks for the best three assignments will be 30 per cent of your total work. Assignment questions for the unit in this course are contained in the Assignment File. When you have completed each assignment, send it, together with the Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA) form to your tutor. Make sure each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline for submission. If, for any reason, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor to discuss the possibility of an extension. Extension will not be granted after due date, unless under exceptional circumstances.

### **Final Examination and Grading**

The final examination of ENG355 will be of three hours' duration. All areas of the course will be examined. Find time to read the unit all over

before your examination. The final examination will attract 70 per cent of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercises and tutor-marked assignments you have previously come across. All areas of the course will be assessed. You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will also find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

### Course Marking Scheme

The following table lays out how the actual course marks allocation is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignments (Best three assignments out of four marked)	30%
Final Examination	70%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Presentation Schedule

The dates for submission of all assignments will be communicated to you. You will also be told the date for completing the study units and dates for examinations.

### Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activities	Assessment (end of unit)
	Course Guide		
<b>Module 1 Basic Concepts in Sociolinguistics</b>			
1	What is Sociolinguistics?	Week 1	Assignment 1
2	Sociolinguistics and Language Variation	Week 1	Assignment 2
3	Language in Society	Week 2	Assignment 3
4	General Rules and Individual Use	Week 2	Assignment 4
5	Sociolinguistic Differences	Week 3	Assignment 5
<b>Module 2 Language Use in Society</b>			
1	Speech Communities	Week 3	Assignment 1
2	Speech Acts and Speech Events	Week 4	Assignment 2
3	Dialects, Idiolects, Sociolects	Week 4	Assignment 3



4	Code Mixing and Code Switching	Week 5	Assignment 4
5	Register, Style and Usage	Week 5	Assignment 5
<b>Module 3 Language Variation in Society</b>			
1	Pidgins and Pidginisation	Week 6	Assignment 1
2	Creoles and Creolization	Week 6	Assignment 2
3	Concept of Standard Usage	Week 7	Assignment 3
4	Slang: Clichés and Jargons	Week 7	Assignment 4
5	Taboo and Profane Usage	Week 8	Assignment 5
<b>Module 4 Language Forms in Society</b>			
1	Language and Class	Week 9	Assignment 1
2	Monolingualism and Bilingualism	Week 9	Assignment 2
3	Language contact and Multilingualism	Week 10	Assignment 3
4	Diglossia and Polyglottism	Week 10	Assignment 4
5	Language Use in Interaction	Week 11	Assignment 5
<b>Module 5 Language and Sociolinguistic Determinants</b>			
1	Language Ideology	Week 12	Assignment 1
2	Language and Geography	Week 12	Assignment 2
3	Language and Gender	Week 13	Assignment 3
4	Language and Identity	Week 14	Assignment 4
5	Language and Culture	Week 15	Assignment 5
	Revision	Week 16	
	Examination	Week 17	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17 weeks</b>	

## How to Get the Most from This Course

In distance learning, the study units replace the university classroom lectures. This is one of the advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might give you some reading to do, the study units contains instructions on when to read your set books or other materials. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole.

Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the units, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this, you will significantly

improve your chances of passing the course. The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from your course guides. The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into trouble, telephone your tutor. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it. Follow the following advice carefully:

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly, it is your first assignment.
- Organise a study schedule. Refer to the Course Overview for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you chose to use, you should decide on and write your own dates for working on each unit.
  - Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
  - Turn to Unit 1 and read the Introduction and the Objectives for the unit.
  - Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'Overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
  - Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit, you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
  - Review the objectives for each unit to be informed that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
  - When you are confident that you have achieved the objectives of a unit, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to space your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
  - When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to

your schedule. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.

- After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the objectives of the unit (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the Course Objectives (listed in the Course Guide).
- Keep in touch with your study centre. Up-to-date course information will be continuously available there.

### **Facilitators/Tutor and Tutorials**

There are eight hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion group if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary. Contact your tutor if:

- You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings,
- You have difficulty with the self assessment exercises,
- You have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face-to-face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

### **Summary**

This course guide gives you an overview of what to expect in the course of this study. **ENG355: Introduction to Sociolinguistics** introduces you to the major concepts in sociolinguistics. It examines the basic

concepts in sociolinguistics, sociolinguistic applications and the various sociolinguistic paradigms affecting the study of English in Nigeria. Attention is drawn to the importance of sociological studies in the Nigerian linguistic environment.

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## **MODULE 1      BASIC CONCEPTS IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS**

Unit 1	What is Sociolinguistics?
Unit 2	Sociolinguistics and Language Variation
Unit 3	Language in society
Unit 4	General Rules and Individual Use
Unit 5	Sociolinguistic Differences

### **UNIT 1      WHAT IS SOCIOLINGUISTICS?**

#### **CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	General Overview
3.2	Sociolinguistics Factors
3.3	Why a Social Study of Language?
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading
<b>1.0</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>

In this unit, we will begin this course by introducing the concept of sociolinguistics as an academic discipline. We will study also the applications of sociolinguistics and find out the essence of the social function of language. Language and society are intertwined because a society moves with language. When communication takes a proper process whereby meaning is generated, and a society moves with the pace of the language. A language defines the linguistic behaviour of a group of people in a given society. We will find out what sociolinguistics means by examining the various definitions and unearth their points of convergence.

#### **2.0      OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- state the meaning of sociolinguistics
- examine the various perceptions of sociolinguistics
- identify the various applications of sociolinguistics
- describe the study of language in society
- discuss sociolinguistics as an important aspect of language study.

#### **3.0      MAIN CONTENT**

### 3.1 General Overview

There are numerous definitions of sociolinguistics. However, each of these definitions does not fail to acknowledge that sociolinguistics has to do with language use and a society's response to it. Let us examine them.

1. The study of the relationship between language and society, of language variation, and of attitudes about language.
2. A branch of anthropological linguistics that studies how language and culture are related, and how language is used in different social contexts.
3. A study of the relationship between language and social factors such as class, ethnicity, age and sex.
4. The study of language in social contexts.
5. The study of the sociological factors involved in the use of language, including gender, race, class, etc.
6. The study of stylistic and social variation of language (vernacular).
7. The study of language in relation to its socio-cultural context.
8. Sociolinguistics is the study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context on the way language is used.
9. The study of social and cultural effects on language.

In all these definitions, it is clear that sociolinguistics is a discipline that yokes sociology with linguistics. It is a branch of sociology and as a concept, it is concerned with how language use is a determinant of a given society's linguistic requirements. Every society has linguistic codes acceptable for communication and interaction. Sociolinguistics show how groups in a given society are separated by certain social variables like ethnicity, religion, status, gender, level of education, age, etc. and how adherence to these variables is used to categorise individuals in social class or socio-economic classes. The social study of language is a modern linguistic paradigm because it was the modern linguists who first acknowledged and accepted that language by its nature is totally a social phenomenon. All the definitions here acknowledge that sociolinguistics has to do with language use and a society's response to it.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the relationship between sociology and linguistics in all the definitions above.

### 3.2 Sociolinguistics Factors

Sociolinguistics is a developing branch of linguistics and sociology which investigates the individual and social variation of language. Just as regional variation of language can give a lot of information about the place the speaker is from, social variation tells about the roles performed by a given speaker within one community, or country. Sociolinguistics is also a branch of sociology in that it reveals the relationship between language use and the social basis for such use. Sociolinguistics differs from sociology of language in that the focus of sociolinguistics is the effect of the society on the language, while the latter's focus is on the language's effect on the society. Sociolinguistics is a practical, scientific discipline which researches into the language that is actually used, either by native speakers or foreigners, in order to formulate theories about language change. There are numerous factors influencing the way people speak which are investigated by sociolinguistics:

1. **Social Class:** the position of the speaker in the society, measured by the level of education, parental background, profession and their effect on syntax and lexis used by the speaker. An important factor influencing the way of formulating sentences is, according to sociolinguists, the social class of the speakers. Thus, there has been a division of social classes proposed in order to make the description accurate. Two main groups of language users, mainly those performing non-manual work and those with more years of education are the 'middle class', while those who perform some kind of manual work are 'working class'. The additional terms 'lower' and 'upper' are frequently used in order to subdivide the social classes. Therefore, differences between upper middle class can be compared with lower working class.
2. **Social Context:** the register of the language used depending on changing situations: formal language in formal meetings and informal usage during meetings with friends, for example. It is notable that people are acutely aware of the differences in speech patterns that mark their social class and are often able to adjust their style to the interlocutor. It is especially true for the members of the middle class who seem eager to use forms associated with upper class; however, in such efforts, the forms characteristic of upper class are often overused by the middle class members. The above mentioned process of adapting own speech to reduce social distance is called *convergence*. Sometimes, however, when people want to emphasise the social distance, they make use of the process called *divergence*, purposefully using idiosyncratic forms.
3. **Geographical Origins:** slight differences in pronunciation between speakers that point at the geographical region which the

speaker comes from. Sociolinguistics investigates the way in which language changes, depending on the region of the country it is used in. To describe a variety of language that differs in grammar, lexis and pronunciation from others, the term *dialect* is used. Moreover, each member of community has a unique way of speaking due to the life experience, education, age and aspiration. An individual personal variation of language use is called an *idiolect*.

4. **Ethnicity:** differences between the use of a given language by its native speakers and other ethnic groups. There are numerous factors influencing idiolect, some of which have been presented above; yet two more need to be elucidated, namely jargon and slang. Jargon is specific technical vocabulary associated with a particular field of interest, or topic. For example words such as convergence, dialect and social class are sociolinguistic jargon. Whereas slang is a type of language used most frequently by people from outside of high-status groups, characterised by the use of unusual words and phrases instead of conventional forms. For example, a sociolinguist might determine, through study of social attitudes, that a particular vernacular would not be considered appropriate language use in a business or professional setting; she or he might also study the grammar, phonetics, vocabulary, and other aspects of this sociolect much as a dialectologist would study the same for a regional dialect.
5. **Nationality:** clearly visible in the case of the English language: British English differs from American English, or Canadian English; Nigerian English differs from Ghanaian English; The study of language variation is concerned with social constraints determining language in its contextual environment. Code-switching is the term given to the use of different varieties of language in different social situations. William Labov is often regarded as the founder of the study of sociolinguistics. He is especially noted for introducing the quantitative study of language variation and change, making the sociology of language into a scientific discipline.
6. **Gender:** differences in patterns of language use between men and women, such as quantity of speech, intonation patterns.
7. **Age:** the influence of age of the speaker on the use of vocabulary and grammar complexity.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Discuss the various factors with which sociolinguists are concerned in studying the relationship between society and language.

### 3.3 Why a Social Study of Language?

Saussure (1916) posed the question: “But what does a language look like, what is it like at a particular moment?” (p. 98). We know languages change from one moment to another, but what are their characteristics, if we could hold them still, freeze them, at one moment in time? The question was posed in a series of lectures Saussure gave at the University of Geneva between 1903 and 1904. After his death, several of his students produced, from lecture notes that they had made, *Course in General Linguistics* in 1916. Of course, ideas of such significance do not occur in isolation, even if we can identify one individual as the seeming originator of them – they are 'about' at the time, however subtly that may be. It is that 'aboutness' which ensured that out of the rich and complex set of questions in the *Course* (many of them social and historical), this one became focal for linguistics in the 20th Century. The strand of linguistics that it gave rise to is generally referred to as 'structuralist'. It became the dominant mode of intellectual inquiry, not only in that century nor only in linguistics, but throughout the humanities and beyond. The fundamental question posed in structuralism is that of the characteristics of the system. What are the elements of a structure (whatever it may be), and what are the relations between the elements? Saussure himself gave a complex answer in which the focus was on the sign, and on the all-encompassing entity in which signs exist, language as such or what Saussure called *langue*.

For Saussure, individuals make use of the structures and elements that are there, but they do not change them. The arrangements and elements are pre-given by society. This question of agency has been one of the central issues in the turn to a social view of language. A second consequence, perhaps the central one in structuralist linguistics, is that of meaning. If, in arranging the comfortable corner, I only have the *one easy chair, coffee table and sofa*, I simply use what I have. Of course, I can arrange them in different ways, and that makes a difference in how the room feels in its 'meaning'. But as I had no choice in what to use, no meaning attaches to my use of the three items. Meaning of one kind arises from the possibilities of selection from a range of elements within one paradigm. A second kind of meaning arises from the fact that different types of *chairs* are, in fact, cultural encodings of different possible forms of behaviour: *A stool asks me to sit differently to an easy chair. Setting up the room for a job interview with a stool for the interviewee and easy chairs for the interviewers – to make a ridiculous example – would set the tone decisively.* The elements in systems of choice have meaning because they refer to elements (objects or

practices) in other systems of choice. For Saussure, both kinds of meaning were important. On the one hand, to put it too simply, the sign is based on the relation of reference. The sign is a device for permitting form to express meaning because it is a means for allowing one element to be the form (the signifier) through which another element, the meaning (the signified) finds its realisation; its expression. A *rose* can be the form for the expression of the meaning 'love'. A connection is made between an element in the system of language, and an element in the system of culturally salient values. The former 'refers' to the latter.

*Langue*, the system of a particular language, is the expression of a social force both by making the arbitrary connection and in sustaining it in convention. The individual may make use of the system, in *parole*; but the individual cannot change the system, the language. The relation of form and meaning is motivated, not arbitrary, and, at the same time, it is sustained by convention in particular ways. However, the significant point here is that Saussure's views on the characteristics of systems, structure, signs, on *langue* and *parole*, shaped the development of mainstream and non-mainstream linguistics in the 20th Century. In the mainstream, these views allowed emphasis to be placed on relations within the system rather than on reference; on structure rather than on function; on arbitrariness, thus eliminating the force of individual agency, whether from the individual sign or from the system of signs, the *langue*; and to treat *langue* as a phenomenon not directly connected to the social.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Explain 'langue' and 'parole' in relation to the social function of language?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Sociolinguistics is an important discipline which studies the effects of language use on a given society. Sociolinguistics studies those types of language variation which result from the correlation between language and social factors, such as social stratification (status), role, age, sex, ethnicity. Depending on the degree and pattern of their actualisation, participants select from a variety of available codes (languages, dialects, varieties), they may switch between them, accommodate or mix them. The social status indicates an individual's social position in a society, which is based on power differences, prestige and social class, along with the associated rights and duties. The broadest social class categories are upper, middle and lower classes which correlate with accents (e.g., posh, refined, RP vs. low, uneducated, regional, local

dialect) and speech varieties (Standard English vs. non-standard varieties).

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In sociolinguistics, it can be shown that speakers change the forms of language they use in quite precisely describable social circumstances. Speakers might switch from a 'high' form of their language to a 'low' form as and when the social environment suggests that they should do so: they speak, for instance, a standard educated form of their language in formal situations, and use a dialect form (whether social or geographical or both) of their language in informal, casual situations. Speakers are seen to be aware of the 'correlations'; that one social situation demands the use of a particular form of the language and that another social situation demands another. The role of the social is to establish the correlation; the role of the individual is to implement and instantiate it as appropriate sociolinguistic behaviour. Speakers demonstrate a competence that goes well beyond the grammatical/syntactic competence proposed by Chomsky. Thus, sociolinguistics relates linguistic behaviour with social demands.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the relationship between language and society.
2. What are the social factors that influence language use?
3. Discuss the role played by Ferdinand de Saussure in the study of language and society.
4. Distinguish briefly between sociolinguistics and sociology of language.
5. Explain Saussure's perception of language and society.

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## **UNIT 2      SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE                  VARIATION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Notion of Sociolinguistic Variation
  - 3.3 Spoken and Written Varieties
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will study language varieties as they pertain to sociolinguistics. In every aspect of human endeavours, there are varieties of languages that are applied in that setting. Every social situation has a linguistic bias appropriate for it. At the primordial classification, a language has three varieties: the sign, the written and the spoken, and each of these types has various ways by which it is used or applied. Whenever a spoken variety is written down, it is often distinguished because of the colloquial qualities inherent. We study the difference between the written and the spoken varieties here and the notion of sociolinguistic variation in language use in a society.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the concept of language varieties properly
- discuss the concept of variation in sociolinguistics
- distinguish between written and spoken varieties of a language
- explain that variation in language is determined by social situations
- identify the variations of language in a given social setting.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**



### 3.1 General Overview

Language, as it is described in books and articles on morphology or semantics, is often presented as a uniform entity. However, even within one language community, such as country or state, significant differences can be seen. Such regional variation of languages is also subject to linguistic investigations. General descriptions of languages focusing on pronunciation, or grammar, usually provide information about the standard variety of a given language. Nonetheless, that does not mean that it is in any respect better than its other varieties. The standard language is chosen for such accounts because it is frequently the official kind, and, in the case of English, an idealised version that learners of English as a second language usually attempt to learn.

One of the most easily noticeable features characterising some regional feature of a language is most certainly accent. Although it is generally believed that some people speak with an accent and others do not, this is not true. Every language speaker utters words with some kind of accent which can tell the listeners where the speaker is from, as the very term, accent, is characterised as: the way of pronouncing words characteristic of a group of people, showing which country, or part of a country, the speaker is from. Accent is frequently confused with the term dialect which denotes aspects of pronunciation together with words and syntax slightly different from the standard variety. Although various dialects of one language possess grammar rules and vocabulary characteristic to them, speakers of different dialects of one language understand each other without major difficulties. Moreover, one language user can speak two different dialects, or varieties of one language. In countries like China or Malta, there are distinct forms of language used on everyday basis and on special occasions. Such a linguistic situation, when one variety of language is considered more prestigious and one more vernacular, but both are in use depending on situation, is called diglossia.

Apart from regional variations of a language within the boundaries of a country or speech community, there are other factors influencing language change. In certain areas of the world, English has been used as a lexifier, that is, a language which is a source of words, for varieties of language called pidgins. A pidgin, or a contact language, is a mixture of two other languages, created usually because of trading purposes between peoples who do not share a common means of communication. English-based pidgins are used in India, Cameroon, and Nigeria, for example. Such varieties of language often have limited vocabulary, poorly developed grammar and are used only when other types of communication are impossible. When a pidgin begins to be used by a

larger number of people, its vocabulary and grammar expand, and it starts to be used in a wider context. As it is developed as a contact language, pidgin does not have any native speakers, yet if it is used on a wider scale, children of people using it might acquire it as their mother tongue. When such a language starts to be used by a second generation of speakers, it is called a creole. It is the next stage of development for pidgin and it is characterised by different grammatical features such as avoidance of passive voice, lack of case distinction in pronouns, and different word order. Some English-based creoles include: Gambian Creole, Hawaiian Creole, and Australian Creoles.

As the process of the development of a pidgin into a creole is called creolisation, there is also a process of decreolisation, which stimulates further change of a language. When people using a creole have some contact with the standard language, they tend to shift from one form to the other, thus often changing the structures of creole to make it resemble the standard version, which is perceived as having a higher social prestige.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Discuss the determinants for the choice of varieties by a speaker of a language.

### **3.2 Notion of Sociolinguistic Variation**

A variety of a language is a form that differs from other forms of the language systematically and coherently. Variety is a wider concept than style of prose or style of language. Some writers in sociolinguistics use the term *lect*, apparently a back-formation from specific terms such as dialect and idiolect. Varieties such as dialects, idiolects, and sociolects can be distinguished, not only by their vocabulary, but also by differences in grammar, phonology and prosody. For instance, the tonal word accents of Scandinavian languages have differing realisations in many dialects. As another example, foreign words in different sociolects vary in their degree of adaptation to the basic phonology of the language. Certain professional registers such as legalese show a variation in grammar from the standard language. For instance English journalists or lawyers often use grammatical moods such as subjunctive mood or conditional mood, which are no longer used frequently by other speakers. Many registers are simply a specialised set of terms (see technical terminology, jargon). It is a matter of definition whether slang and argot are to be considered included in the concept of variety or of style. Colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions are usually understood as limited to variation of lexicon, and hence of style.

The concept of language varieties in general, and language registers in particular, can be of great help in translating as well as in evaluating translations. It will be useful sometimes to refer to considerations of register. Since the concept of a “whole language” is so broad and therefore rather loose, it is not altogether useful for many linguistic purposes, whether descriptive or comparative. In other words, the concept of language as a whole unit is theoretically lacking in accuracy, and pragmatically rather useless. Consequently, the need arises for a scientific classification of sub-language or varieties within the total range of one language.

These varieties, or sub-languages, may be classified in more than one way. The suggested classes include idiolects, dialects, registers, styles and modes, as varieties of any living language. Another view is that of Pit Coder (1973), who suggests dialects, idiolects, and sociolects. Quirk (1972) proposes region, education, subject matter, media and attitude as possible bases of language variety classification of English in particular. He recognises dialects as varieties distinguished according to geographical dispersion, and standard and substandard English as varieties within different ranges of education and social position. Language registers are recognised as varieties classified according to different subject matters. We acknowledge varieties distinguished according to attitude, which are called “styles,” and varieties due to interference, which arise when a foreign speaker imposes a grammatical usage of his native tongue upon the language, which he is using. For example, a Frenchman might say “I am here since Friday.” This is lexically English, but grammatically French. Another way of classifying language varieties is according to the user or the use of language. Thus, in the first category, we may list social dialects, geographical dialects, and idiolects, whereas the second category includes language registers.

The total range of a language may be described in terms of its grammatical, phonological, and, sometimes, even graphological systems. Similarly, the language varieties of any given language have certain linguistic features in common. These common features of all the varieties of one language constitute the common core of that language. Apart from this common core of the language concerned, there are other lexical, grammatical, and stylistic features of each individual language variety, and so these could serve as formal linguistic as well as stylistic markers of the language variety in question. It may be worth noting in this respect that these variety markers may exist on any level: phonetic, syntactical, stylistic and, above all, lexical.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Discuss region, education, subject matter, and media as parameters for sociolinguistic investigation.

### 3.3 Spoken and Written Varieties

There are two varieties of language – the spoken and the written within standard (literary) language. This differentiation is predetermined by two distinct factors, namely, the actual situation in which the language is being used and the aim of communication. The situation in which the spoken variety of language is used and in which it develops, presupposes the presence of the interlocutor, whereas, the written variety presupposes the absence of the interlocutor. The spoken language has a considerable advantage over the written because of such factors as human voice, all kinds of gestures, which give additional information.

The written language has to seek means to compensate for what it lacks. This is the reason why the written language is more carefully organised, more explanatory; the word choice is more deliberate. The spoken language is spontaneous, momentary. It vanishes after having fulfilled its purpose, which is to communicate the thought, no matter how trivial or important. The idea remains, the language disappears. The written language is able to live forever with the idea it expresses.

The spoken language cannot be detached from its user; the written language can be detached and objectively looked at. The writer has an opportunity to correct and improve what has been put on paper. The written language bears a greater volume of responsibility than its spoken counterpart. The spoken language differs from the written language phonetically, morphologically, lexically and syntactically. The most striking difference between the spoken and the written language is in the vocabulary used. There are words and phrases typically colloquial, on the one hand, and typically bookish, on the other hand. If colloquial words and phrases find their way into the written language, they immediately produce a marked stylistic effect and can be used for the speech characterisation, for example. The spoken language widely uses intensifying words. These are interjections and words with strong emotive meaning, as oaths, swear-words and adjectives which have lost their primary meaning (*He dropped my paper down. I am very sure.*). The spoken language is characterised by the insertion into the utterance of words without any meaning, which are called “fill-ups” or empty words (*as well, and all, so to say, whatever, you know, that is, etc.*).

The essential difference between the two varieties of language is evidently reflected in the syntactical structure. The syntactical peculiarities of the spoken language are omission of the part of utterance easily supplied by the situation in which the communication takes place (*Who you with? Tell you what?*). Tendency to use the direct word-order in questions or omit auxiliary verb, leaving it to the intonation to indicate the grammatical meaning (*He knew she was dead?*) unfinished sentences (*If I were you...*).

- a) Usage of a construction with two subjects (a tautological subject) (*Helen, she was there.*)
- b) Absence of connecting words (*Came home late. Had a cup of tea. Went to bed soon after that.*)
- c) Syntactical structures, expressing definite emotions, which can be understood only through a proper intonation design (*Isn't she cute! Don't you tell me that! It's a lie!*)
- d) The written language is characterised by the exact nature of the utterance (the abundance of all kinds of connecting words) the bookish "space-wasters" (*despite the fact; reach a decision*)
- e) The use of complicated sentence-units (long periods are more frequent than short utterances)
- f) An essential property of the written variety of language is coherence and logical unity backed up by purely linguistic means.

The choice of colloquial vocabulary falls into the following groups or varieties of choice, depending on the user's intent, social situation and immediate need:

### **1. Common Colloquial Words**

Slang is the most extended and vastly developed subgroup of non-standard colloquial layer of the vocabulary of a given type of language. Besides separate words, it includes also highly figurative phraseology. Slang occurs mainly in dialogue, and serves to create speech characteristics of personages).

### **2. Professional and Social Jargons**

A jargon is a special type of vocabulary in a given language. They are used in emotive prose to depict the natural speech of a character within the framework of such device as speech-characterisation. They can show vocation, education, breeding, environment and even the psychology of a personage. Slang, contrary to jargon, needs no translation, jargon is used to conceal or disguise something.

### 3. Vulgarisms

Vulgarism is a term in ordinary people's language. It is a word or phrase from the language spoken by people generally, as contrasted with a more formal or refined usage of such language. Vulgarisms are divided into *expletives* and *swear-words*, used as general exclamations and obscene words. They are emotionally and strongly charged and can be used for speech-characterisation.

### 4. Dialectal Words

Dialectal words are special word forms that indicate the linguistic origin of the speaker. They are introduced into the speech of personages to indicate their region. The number of dialectal words and their frequency also indicate the educational and cultural level of the speaker.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Clearly differentiate spoken variety from written variety of a language.

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

A variety of a language is a form that differs from other forms of the language systematically and coherently. Variety is a wider concept than style of prose or style of language. Some writers in sociolinguistics use the term *lect*, apparently a back-formation from specific terms such as dialect and idiolect. Sociolinguistics is the study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on the way language is used. Certain professional registers, such as *legalese*, show a variation in grammar from the standard language. For instance, English journalists or lawyers often use grammatical moods such as subjunctive mood or conditional mood, which are no longer used frequently by other speakers. Many registers are simply a specialised set of terms. *Legalese* is the term given to the special technical terminology of any given language (usually English) in a legal document. In linguistics, many grammars have the concept of grammatical mood, which describes the relationship of a verb with reality and intent. There are various ways of classifying choice of words or varieties in sociolinguistics but the immediate requirement is the need to use a given variety according to the immediate social requirement.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In sociolinguistics, we investigate variations in language according to certain parameters. The essence is to determine the factors that influence varieties. Many varieties emerge out of stated historical linguistic parameters while some are based on individual yardsticks. As explained in sub section 3.2 on the notion of sociolinguistic variation, it is clearly stated that marked varieties in every language has a hinge on the social requirements of the users at every given situation. Sociolinguistics is an investigative science that determines language variation according to societal requirements.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the expression 'language variety'.
2. Distinguish between spoken and written varieties of language.
3. Discuss the various categorisations of language varieties.
4. Elaborate on the essence of varieties in sociolinguistics.
5. Examine the statement: 'varieties result from social situations'.

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## **UNIT 3     LANGUAGE IN SOCIETY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Society and Language Determinants
  - 3.3 Language Use in the Nigerian Society
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will study the essence of language in societal development. Since a society is made up of people that interact in order to pass across messages, there are bound to be basic requirements for the choice of language used in each given situation. We will study the linguistic determinants for language use in a given setting. We will also take a look at how language aids social development and come down to language use in the Nigerian society.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- identify the relationship between language and society
- find out that every society has language requirements
- see how language use helps in societal development
- assess language use in the Nigerian society
- recognise that every society is built on language use.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 General Overview**

The speaker/writer makes complex sets of choices which lead to the realisations of the meaning in an actual structure. The systems are grouped into three broad functions which correspond to the tasks that any communicational system is asked to perform. These functions are: saying something about the state of events in the world, which Halliday (1973) calls 'the ideational function'; saying something about the state



of the social relations between those who are interacting by means of the communicational system, which he calls ‘the interpersonal function’; and saying something about the organisation of the structure as a message, which he calls ‘the textual function’. Speakers choose simultaneously from options in each of these functions. So, for example, I might choose, within the ideational function, to have a clause-type which highlights agency [*rioters burn ten cars*]; within the interpersonal component of the grammar, I might choose a statement so that the speaker has the role of someone who gives information (rather than ask a question or give a command) which would make it acquire different social relation between the people interacting within the textual component; I might choose to highlight the agents of the action – *it was the rioters who burned ten cars*. The role of the speaker here is very different from that in the correlational view. Here they are active in selecting from the range of options available to them in response to the social contingencies in which they find themselves.

Each of the choices made in the brief examples above can be shown to be made as a result of the speaker’s assessment of the environment in which the speaker made the choice. Instead of ‘rioters burn ten cars’ we could have had ‘ten cars burned in riots’; instead of a statement we could have had the questions: ‘was it ten cars that were burned?’; ‘Did the rioters burn ten cars?’; and instead of highlighting the agents, we could have had ‘some loss of property in demonstrations’. If the speakers’ actions in choosing options are prompted by their assessment of the social situation in which they find themselves, then we can, in principle at least, track back from the texts which have been produced to uncover the choices that have been made, and why. Laying bare the choices revealed in the structures is to lay bare the structures of the environments in which the choice was made.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Relate Halliday’s Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual paradigms to language use in society.

### **3.2 Society and Language Determinants**

In every society there are factors that determine language use. The determinants of language use in a society are the factors that determine acceptable linguistic forms in a given society. The language in use in some situations is not appropriate in some others. Since language does not occur in a vacuum, it is made possible through the basic requirements in a given society. Apart from the general societal requirements, there is also language use required in certain situations of professional touch. In certain situations requiring professional touch or

vocational appeal, there are linguistic requirements for such situations. For instance, in a school environment, it is expected that the teacher should be careful in his language use since he has learners all around him, because they may learn all that he says or does; therefore any linguistic aberration by the teacher may be copied as appropriate by the learners.

Social life, including language use, is governed by norms – socially shared concepts of appropriate and expected behaviour. The most basic of these concepts are acquired in early childhood through socialisation. In the case of language norms, this means that the first language norms adopted are the ones of everyday spoken language. Compared to the prescriptive norms of the standardised language, these uncodified norms are perhaps less conscious, yet more natural, in every sense of the word: they are more numerous, acquired earlier in life and mastered by all native speakers. They also historically precede the norms of the standard language, and in communities without a written language they are the only norms available. Labov (1972) stressed the importance of these naturally occurring norms for linguistic description. He both encourages to take the norms of the vernacular as the basis of grammatical description as well as to discuss more thoroughly the nature of language norms. Norms are inherently social. Therefore it is especially interesting to ask whether these principles are realised in sociolinguistic description.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

What are the determinants of language use in a society?

### **3.3 Language Use in Nigerian Society**

Nigeria is a multilingual country. However, the arrival of English language has helped in several ways in solving the complexity since the vast multilingual populace could communicate in English, no matter the level of competence of each user of the language. Nigeria is the most populated black nation in the world, with over 400 languages and thousands of dialects. Nigeria has three major regions with 36 states and each region and state has a complex linguistic structure.

There are big cities in each state. These cities harbour many people from different ethnic divides. English language becomes the only interactional language among the vast and mixed populace in each of these cities. Then, many sociolinguistic factors determine the use of English in these cities. The issues of education, status, location and gender determine the use of English in these cities. For instance, in Lagos many factors determine the use of English. The inhabitants of

locations like Ikoyi, Victoria Island and Lekki areas are better in the use of Standard English because the areas encompass the educated, the rich, the wealthy and the influential in Lagos. Other areas like Surulere, Ikeja and Yaba inhabit the middle class; hence there is the tendency of the use of mixed English varieties like the standard and sub-standard forms. In areas like Ajegunle, Okokomaiko, Ojo, Oshodi, Mushin, Oyingbo, Ipaja, Agege, Ikotun etc, there is the tendency to hear a more sub-standard form of English than the standard form. It is in these areas that we have common use of pidgins and creoles develop in some clusters.

Lagos has a very complex linguistic structure. In some areas with large clusters of same ethnic group, there is the tendency that English will be rarely used as the inhabitants would prefer the use of their mother tongue. For example, in areas where the Yoruba are more in number, they would prefer to speak Yoruba instead of English or pidgin. Even though, Lagos is a Yoruba state, there are areas developed and lived in by the Igbos, so Igbo language is more widely spoken there than English. The Hausa communities in Lagos are known to live in colonies or clusters in many parts of Lagos and they speak purely Hausa or Fulani as the case may be instead of English or Pidgin.

In a city like Warri in Delta State, the English language use has developed into a kind of creole because of the complex nature of the place. Warri has over 10 languages like Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijaw, Ika, Okpe, etc, and Igbo, Edo, Hausa, Yoruba, with the influx of the other ethnic groups, as well as some European languages, with the immigration of Europeans into the city because of the various oil firms. The English language in use in the city thus degenerated as the inhabitants have a mixed form of English with the native languages. Standard English is rarely used by the educated populace whenever they are interacting in the public, except when they are in their corporate settings. Almost all the tribes in Nigeria live in Warri but their use of English is determined by the linguistic need in the city.

Other cities like Calabar, Owerri, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Kaduna, Kano and Benin City amongst other numerous cities in the 36 states have marked complex sociolinguistic make up. The English in use in each of these cities is determined by the social setting and the cultural environment.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Explain the factors responsible for the complex linguistic nature of Nigeria.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Sociolinguists believe that language occurs in social contexts and norms. As an approach that studies everyday spoken language in its social context, sociolinguistics provides a fruitful starting point for these considerations. The central questions in this case in general are: what kinds of situations and norms determine the theoretical basis of variation studies and, more particularly, what is the role of spoken language norms in these dimensions? Before language is used, there are determinants which are societal based. In Nigeria, the language variants, especially with regard to English language, derives from the societal reactions to language use resulting from mixed linguistic backgrounds of the language users. In many big cities in Nigeria, language use has been a result of the linguistic orientation of the inhabitants and the issues of class, gender and location. We have corrupt versions of English and other languages as a result of the people's attempts at fostering communication in the vast complex linguistic settings. Even the local languages are corrupted as codes are mixed and switched intermittently.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

The nature of norms and language use in sociolinguistics is explicitly in connection to the notion of speech community. Especially, if we accept William Labov's definition that describes the speech community as a group of people with a set of shared norms. The aim of elucidating the way in which norms are conceptualised and the way in which language is formed in society in order to foster communication is to reveal that language and society are intertwined since language does not occur *in vacuo*. On the linguistic nature of Nigeria, it is clear that the mixed and complex nature of the country have resulted in mixed or complex linguistic structure and the contribution to this state of affairs is that the people living in big cities devise codes for ease of communication.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Discuss Halliday's views about the relation of language and society.
2. Explain the social determinants of language use.
3. How does the society affect individual language use?
4. Describe the linguistic nature of the Nigerian society.
5. What are the effects of mixed language forms on societies?

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## **UNIT 4      GENERAL RULES AND INDIVIDUAL USE**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Langue and Parole
  - 3.3 Competence and Performance
  - 3.4 Points of Convergence and Divergence
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will study two basic theories of language acquisition and language use which have influenced sociolinguistic studies. The first of the theories is the theory of ‘Langue and Parole’ by Ferdinand de Saussure while second of the theories is ‘Competence and Performance’ by Noam Chomsky. The basic notion of these theories is hinged on the concept of language, acceptability of language use and individual application of language codes. We will study the points of convergence and divergence between the theories and the sociolinguistic implications.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the theories of langue and parole
- discuss the theories of competence and performance
- distinguish between the two theories
- identify the implication of the theories for sociolinguistics
- recognise that individual language use must be in line with societal needs.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 General Overview

Language acquisition and use is related to a society's growth and development. In traditional grammar and philosophy, language was also seen as prescriptive and not descriptive, whereby the users accept the structure and usage as it were. In 1916, the publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (posthumously by his students) marked a turning point in the study of the human language. It marked a revolutionary turning point in linguistics as a discipline for the scientific analysis of the human utterance. De Saussure recognised the concept of 'Langue and Parole' in human language. Simply translated, "langue" and "parole" are "language" and "speech"; however, such a translation is misleading because those terms are almost synonyms. Jonathan Culler, an American Deconstructionist who has written extensively on Saussure, defined langue and parole in the introduction as Saussure's most fundamental contribution, on which all of modern linguistics rests and the step by which he postulated a suitable object for linguistic study. If linguistics tries to concern itself with every fact relating to language, it will become a confused morass, he avers. The only way to avoid this is to isolate a coherent object which will provide both a goal for analysis and a principle of relevance. This, he notes, is precisely what Saussure did, distinguishing with a bold stroke between language as a system (*la langue*) and the actual manifestations of language in speech or writing (*la parole*).

This distinction between *langue* and *parole* has been important, not only for linguistics but for other disciplines as well, where it can be rendered as a distinction between institution and event, or between the underlying system which makes possible various types of behaviour and actual instances of such behaviour. Study of the system leads to the construction of a model which represents the various possibilities and their derivation within the system, whereas study of actual behaviour leads to the construction of statistical models which represent the probabilities of particular actions under specified conditions. Roy Harris in his version of the *Course in General Linguistics* translates *la langue* using the terms linguistic structure (a bold and excellent translation). Three points are crucial to *la langue*:

- 1) Its theoretical character (it is invented to explain the occurrence and distribution of forms in *parole*),
- 2) Its systematic or relational character (its terms mutually define and compete with each other)
- 3) It is an "institution" or social construct and by definition the inheritance of the many.

*La langue* then is shared linguistic structure. Saussure explained *la langue* as a fund accumulated by the members of the community through the practice of speech, a grammatical system existing potentially in every brain, or more exactly, in the brains of a group of individuals; for the language is never complete in any single individual, but exists perfectly only in the collectivity of the individuals (*Course in General Linguistics*, Harris translation, 13). Note that this definition avoids aligning *la langue* with any particular definition of a language or a dialect: the “collectivity” remains undefined.

However, among scholars, these concepts have generated a lot of controversies. Noam Chomsky gave his own version but he has a slight shift from those of Saussure. The publication of *Syntactic Structures* (1957) by the American linguist, Noam Chomsky, initiated what many view as a scientific revolution in linguistics. Chomsky sought a theory that would account for both linguistic structure and for the creativity of language – the fact that we can create entirely original sentences and understand sentences never before uttered. He proposed that all people have an innate ability to acquire language. The task of the linguist, he claimed, is to describe this universal human ability, known as *language competence*, with a grammar from which the grammars of all languages could be derived. The linguist would develop this grammar by looking at the rules children use in hearing and speaking their first language. He termed the resulting model, or grammar, a *transformational-generative grammar*, referring to the transformations (or rules) that generate (or yield) sentences in the language. Certain rules, Chomsky asserted, are shared by all languages and form part of a universal grammar, while others are language specific and associated with particular speech communities. Since the 1960s, much of the development in the field of linguistics has been a reaction to or against Chomsky’s theories.

At the end of the 20th Century, linguists used the term *grammar* primarily to refer to a subconscious linguistic system that enables people to produce and comprehend an unlimited number of utterances. Grammar thus accounts for our linguistic competence. Observations about the actual language we use, or language performance, are used to theorise about this invisible mechanism known as grammar.

The orientation toward the scientific study of language led by Chomsky has had an impact on non-generative linguists as well. Comparative and historically oriented linguists are looking for the various ways linguistic universals show up in individual languages. Psycholinguists, interested in language acquisition, are investigating the notion that an ideal speaker-hearer is the origin of the acquisition process.



## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the contributions of Ferdinand de Saussure to modern linguistics.

### 3.2 Langue and Parole

Saussure focuses on what he calls language, that is “a system of signs that express ideas,” and suggests that it may be divided into two components: *langue*, referring to the abstract system of language that is internalised by a given speech community, and *parole*, the individual acts of speech and the “putting into practice of language”. Saussure argued against the nineteenth-century popular organicist view of language as a natural organism, which, without being determinable by the will of man, grows and evolves in accordance with fixed laws. Instead, he defined language as a social product, the social side of speech being beyond the control of the speaker. According to Saussure, language is not a function of the speaker, but is passively assimilated. Speaking, as defined by Saussure, is a premeditated act.

While speech (*parole*) is heterogeneous, that is to say composed of unrelated or differing parts or elements, language (*langue*) is homogeneous, composed of the union of meanings and ‘sound images’ in which both parts are psychological. Therefore, as *langue* is systematic, it is this that Saussure focuses on since it allows an investigative methodology that is rooted, supposedly, in pure science. Beginning with the Greek word ‘*semîon*’ meaning ‘sign’, Saussure names this science *semiology*: ‘a science that studies the life of signs within society’.

*Langue* and *parole* are more than just ‘language and speech’ (although this is a useful, quick way of remembering them). *La langue* is the whole system of language that precedes and makes speech possible. A sign is a basic unit of *langue*. Learning a language, we master the system of grammar, spelling, syntax and punctuation. These are all elements of *langue*. *Langue* is a system in that it has a large number of elements whereby meaning is assumed in the arrangements of its elements and the consequent relationships between these arranged elements.

*Parole* is the concrete use of the language, the actual utterances. It is an external manifestation of *langue*. It is the usage of the system, but not the system. By defining *Langue* and *Parole*, Saussure differentiates between the language and how it is used, and therefore enabling these two very different things to be studied as separate entities. As a structuralist, Saussure was interested more in *la langue* than *parole*. It

was the system by which meaning could be assumed that was of interest rather than individual instances of its use.

Marxist Mikhail Bakhtin (1929) criticised the splitting of *langue* and *parole* as separating individuals and society where it matters most, at the point of production. He developed a 'dialogic' theory of utterances, where language is understood in terms of how it orients the speaker/writer to the listener/reader. Words are subject to negotiation, contest and struggle. Language is strongly affected by social context. Modification of *langue* at the point of *parole* is used to create assumed meaning, either where the speaker has limited grasp of language or where deliberate distortion is used.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Clearly differentiate *Langue* from *Parole* with examples.

### 3.3 Competence and Performance

The limitations of current language processing systems are not surprising: they follow immediately from the fact that these systems are built on a competence-grammar in the Chomskyan sense. Chomsky made an emphatic distinction between the *competence* of a language user and the *performance* of this language user. The competence consists in the knowledge of language which the language user in principle has; the performance is the result of the psychological process that employs this knowledge (in producing or in interpreting language utterances). The formal grammars, that theoretical linguistics is concerned with, aim at characterising the competence of the language user. But the preferences that language users display in dealing with syntactically ambiguous sentences constitute a prototypical example of a phenomenon that in the Chomskyan view belongs to the realm of performance.

There is ambiguity-problem from an intrinsic limitation of linguistic competence-grammars: such grammars define the sentences of a language and the corresponding structural analyses, but they do not specify a probability ordering or any other ranking between the different sentences or between the different analyses of one sentence. This limitation is even more serious when a grammar is used for processing input which frequently contains mistakes. Such a situation occurs in processing spoken language. The output of a speech recognition system is always very imperfect, because such a system often only makes guesses about the identity of its input-words. In this situation the parsing mechanism has an additional task, which it doesn't have in dealing with correctly typed alpha-numeric input. The speech recognition module

may discern several alternative word sequences in the input signal; only one of these is correct, and the parsing-module must employ its syntactic information to arrive at an optimal decision about the nature of the input. A simple yes/no judgment about the grammaticality of a word sequence is insufficient for this purpose: many word sequences are strictly speaking grammatical but very implausible; and the number of word sequences of this kind gets larger when a grammar accounts for a larger number of phenomena.

To construct effective language processing systems, we must therefore implement performance-grammars rather than competence-grammars. These performance-grammars must not only contain information about the structural possibilities of the general language system, but also about 'accidental' details of the actual language use in a language community, which determine the language experiences of an individual, and thereby influence what kind of utterances this individual expects to encounter, and what structures and meanings these utterances are expected to have.

The linguistic perspective on performance involves the implicit assumption that language behaviour can be accounted for by a system that comprises a competence-grammar as an identifiable sub-component. But because of the ambiguity problem this assumption is computationally unattractive: if we would find criteria to prefer certain syntactic analyses above others, the efficiency of the whole process might benefit if these criteria were applied in an early stage, integrated with the strictly syntactic rules. This would amount to an integrated implementation of competence – and performance – notions.

But we can also go one step further, and fundamentally question the customary concept of a competence-grammar. We can try to account for language-performance without invoking an explicit competence-grammar. (This would mean that grammaticality-judgments are to be accounted for as performance phenomena which do not have a different cognitive status than other performance phenomena).

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Examine the statement that competence-grammar forms the basis for performance-grammar.

### **3.4 Points of Convergence and Divergence**

There is a similarity between Chomsky's *competence* and *performance* and Saussure's terms *langue* and *parole*. Chomsky explains *competence* as a factor that refers to a speaker's knowledge of his language that enables him to understand an infinite number of sentences often never

heard or produced before. Similarly, in Saussure's point of view, the term *langue* represents the general system of language. *Performance* refers to the actual use and realisation of language, which is alike to *parole*, that relates to the appliance of language, the actual process of speaking.

To exemplify how Chomsky and Saussure thought and why they used the terms they did, one can use the phrase 'structure rules'. A sentence can be fragmented into single units that describe the structure of a sentence. S can be analysed into NP (Noun Phrase) and VP (Verb Phrase), NP (Noun Phrase) into DET (Determiner) and N (Noun) or into PN (Phrasal Noun) for example. A (native) speaker applies all these rules, even though he might not be completely aware of them. The general concept of the internalisation of the rules is similar to *competence* while usage of them can be referred to as *performance* and *parole*. *Langue* and *competence* are not too similar here, because *langue* does not contain any dynamic rules, but is only a system of signs.

Apart from this affinity, there is an important difference that has to be mentioned. Chomsky sees *competence* as an attribute of the individual person, whereas Saussure stated that language exists perfectly only within a collectivity. Another important difference is that *langue* only refers to the sign system.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Outline clearly the similarity between Saussure's and Chomsky's theories.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In linguistics, the innateness hypotheses assume that every human being has a mental language faculty. It states that human beings are genetically equipped with a Universal Grammar. This contains basic principles and properties that are common to all human languages and therefore it represents the basis for language acquisition by supporting and facilitating it. The main reason for proposing this theory is called the "poverty of the stimulus". It describes the gap between the information about the grammar of a language that we are exposed to during our childhood and the knowledge that we ultimately attain. The stimulus, the linguistic experience, of a child is not sufficient in order to construct the grammar of his/her language. In fact, there are several inadequacies in the stimulus: first, not every sentence a child is exposed to is grammatical. Second, the received information is limited, and third, children gain knowledge without further evidence. Nevertheless, the child succeeds in obtaining linguistic competence; so, there must be an

additional element for support. Thus, language acceptability and use is determined by the stated rules of communication from which the individuals operate. The child in the social milieu performs from the existing linguistic phenomena around him and this makes him belong to that society properly.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

The essence of language use is communication. Correlation establishes a close connection between language and the social, but does so by leaving each as quite separate entities and leaving language as autonomous; language itself is not changed by the actions of individuals. The distinction between *langue* and *parole* by Saussure is to create an enabling understanding between language use and language acquisition. He believes that language is a system of signs and that people in a given society use these signs to communicate ideas. He thus postulates that these signs form the core from which other people draw in order to transmit ideas and information. While *langue* can be acquired, Chomsky believes that competence is an idealised phenomenon which may not be learnt. In this vein, competence is not an achievable phenomenon but performance can be achieved since it is judged based on individual performance. In sociolinguistics, individuals perform language in order to belong to the society while a society may use a language form that is acceptable by the entirety of the people in order to foster harmony in communication.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the contributions of Saussure to modern linguistics.
2. Discuss Chomsky's *competence* and *performance*.
3. Compare *langue* with *competence*.
4. Explain the relationship between *performance* and *parole*.
5. Relate these theories to sociolinguistic studies.

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## **UNIT 5      SOCIOLINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Differences According to Geographic Origins
  - 3.3 Differences According to Ethnicity
  - 3.4 Differences According to Nationality
  - 3.5 Differences According to Occupation
  - 3.6 Differences According to Class
  - 3.7 Differences According to Age Groups
  - 3.8 Differences According to Gender
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading
- 1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will study sociolinguistic differences that are necessary in the understanding of language use in society. There are other differences but we shall concentrate on differences in class, age groups, and gender. These differences are based on sociolinguistic enquiries about the social changes in human language. The interpretation of speeches is based on a society's acceptability. We will study these differences and examine the implications in sociolinguistics. This will enable us understand how language is interpreted in the larger society.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- identify the differences in sociolinguistic data
- recognise the differences and their implications
- distinguish each difference from another
- relate these differences to sociolinguistic studies
- identify each difference as basic to sociolinguistic studies of language use.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### 3.1 General Overview

There are numerous factors influencing the way people use language, and these have been investigated by sociolinguists over the years. They include:

#### 1) Social Class

The position of the speaker in the society, measured by the level of education, parental background, profession and their effect on syntax and lexis used by the speaker.

#### 2) Social Context

The register of the language used, depending on changing situations, formal language in formal meetings and informal during meetings with friends, for example:

- a) **Geographical Origins:** slight differences in pronunciation between speakers that point at the geographical region which the speaker comes from;
- b) **Ethnicity:** differences between the use of a given language by its native speakers and other ethnic groups;
- c) **Nationality:** clearly visible in the case of the English language: British English differs from American English, or Canadian English; Nigerian English differs from Ghanaian English
- d) **Gender:** differences in patterns of language use between men and women, such as quantity of speech, intonation patterns.
- e) **Age:** the influence of age of the speaker on the use of vocabulary and grammar complexity
- f) **Occupation:** differences in language use with regards to professional jargons, slang and professional codes and signs.

We will discuss these differences in detail in the subsequent subsections. The aim is to help you to make the students know the sociolinguistic effects of these social contexts with regard to determining language use.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the need for studying differences in language use.

### **3.2 Differences According to Geographical Origins**

There are slight differences in pronunciation among speakers of a language that point at the geographical region which a given speaker comes from. In Nigeria, it is remarkably easy to understand the geographical origin of any user of English because of the marked phonological differences existing among the users of English resulting from the effects of the speakers' mother tongues. For instance, in the northern part of Nigeria, there are marked aberrations in the use of the plosive /p/ and the fricative /f/ as in 'people' /pi:pl/ being pronounced as /fi:fl/ or 'federal' /fedræl/ being pronounced as /pedræl/, etc. In the south eastern part, the Igbos and the Efik/Ibibio have the tendency of misapplying the lateral sound /l/ where /r/ should be the correct sound as in [load] for [road] or [lice] for [rice]. In the southwest, some speakers of the Yoruba dialects are known for some marked phonological peculiarities as in using the fricative sound /s/ in place of /ch/ as in [sapter] instead of [chapter]; [sors] for [church], etc.

In Africa generally, it is possible to identify a Ghanaian user of English as different from a Nigerian, Kenyan or Liberian. The Ghanaian users are known for their good use of the fricatives, plosives and dental fricatives. It has often been discussed among African linguists that Ghanaian English pronunciation seems closer to the 'Received Pronunciation' (RP) pattern of Standard British English (SBE). The Liberian users of English include elements of Americanism in their use of English because of their history. The South African user of English language speaks with the phonological intrusions of the Zulu language, especially those from the Zulu axis.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Carefully discuss the marked phonological differences used in identifying Nigerian speakers of English.

### **3.3 Differences According to Ethnicity**

There are marked differences between the use of a given language by its native speakers and other ethnic groups. This brings in one of the major reasons for the varieties of a particular language. English language has ethnic influence. The British English is different from American English in form and style because of certain ethnic reasons. The native English speakers use English as mother-tongue, which means that there is no negative external effect on their English use, unlike the second language



learners of English in Nigeria or Ghana. Canadian and Australian English users are different and reflect the ethnic bias of each user of the language.

In Nigeria, there are marked ethnic reflections in the use of English and other languages. The Igbo language in use in Enugu, Imo and Anambra states are different from the minute varieties of Igbo in use in many parts of Delta and Rivers states. The speakers of Kwale, Ika, Aniocha and Oshimili Igbo use different varieties as a reflection of their ethnic background. Even in the western part, there are marked ethnic differences among the Ijebu, Oyo, Ife and Badagry users of Yoruba language. In the north, it is possible to distinguish a Fulani speaker of Hausa from a middle-belt speaker of Hausa. This also shows in the various ways by which each of these groups use English to communicate with the other ethnic parts of the country. This could be related to dialectical variation of the languages in question.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Every language use has ethnic basis. Use the Nigerian situation in your discuss.

#### **3.4 Differences According to Nationality**

There are clearly visible cases of linguistic differences in the use of English language in many countries: British English differs from American English, or Canadian English; Nigerian English differs from Ghanaian English, etc. Nigerian English has been adapted to the Nigerian environment in order to meet the second language requirements of the people. It is not surprising that there are different varieties of the English language in Nigeria: Educated Nigerian English (ENE), Popular Nigerian English (PNE), Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) and Creole English. Jowitt (1981) identified several varieties of English language in use in Nigeria because, being a second and a national language in Nigeria, English language is serving several purposes in the areas of education, business, communication, official matters and international relations.

We see this same phenomenon in the American use of English. American English has elements of Americanism but there are other marked varieties like the 'General America' (GA) used in official and government circles different from African American English or Black English, which has elements of profanity, raw and unpolished use of English words. English language in Britain has marked class consciousness, differentiating the royals from the commoners; the educated from the uneducated, etc. English, like French and other world

languages, reflect the nationality of the users. However, it is not surprising that the nationality of any speaker of English could be identified merely by listening to his phonological and morphological applications of English.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Every language adapts to its environment. Discuss the manner of adaptation of English as a national language in some countries.

### **3.5 Differences According to Occupation**

There are marked differences in language use with regard to professional jargons, slang and professional codes and signs. Every profession has a register and ways of applying words in discourse. In the legal profession, certain common English words like ‘bench’, ‘wigs’, ‘bar’ are given specified meanings, which are different from the general use. Hence, ‘bench’ is not a kind of ‘seat’ but a group of prosecutors in a law court; ‘wigs’ are not what women adorn their hairs with, but rather a kind of ‘dress code’ that reflects a lawyer as a learned man; and ‘bar’ is not a place for drinking or eating like *a pub* or *restaurant*, but rather means the association of lawyers. This is a common phenomenon in the use of language in many professions.

In the medical profession words like ‘injection’, ‘drugs’, ‘antibiotics’, ‘malaria’, ‘diabetes’, ‘hypertension’, ‘cancer’, etc are often used to reflect sicknesses and the processes of curing sicknesses. It is not wrong to hear these words being used in a general sense as in: “I *injected* patience into my mind when I was waiting for him” or “His general behaviour has a *cancerous* effect on the entire students in the school”. Note that these words, even in their adapted use, still reflect the medical semantics.

In sociolinguistics, every profession or occupation has ways by which words are adapted to suit their routines. This occupational language use makes it easy in identifying professions, their basic linguistic requirements and the society’s needs for such uses in education and interaction.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5**

Explain the importance of language in the identification of occupations.

### **3.6 Differences According to Class**

Sociolinguistics as a field was pioneered through the study of language variation in urban areas. Whereas dialectology studies the geographic distribution of language variation, sociolinguistics focuses on other sources of variation, among them class. Class and occupation are among the most important linguistic markers found in society. One of the fundamental findings of sociolinguistics, which has been hard to disprove, is that class and language variety are related. Members of the working class tend to speak less standard language, while the lower, middle, and upper middle class will in turn speak closer to the standard. However, the upper class, even members of the upper middle class, may often speak 'less' standard than the middle class. This is because not only class, but class aspirations, is important.

In class aspiration, studies, such as those by William Labov in the 1960s, have shown that social aspirations influence speech patterns. This is also true of class aspirations. In the process of wishing to be associated with a certain class (usually the upper class and upper middle class) people who are moving in that direction socio-economically will adjust their speech patterns to sound like them. However, not being native upper class speakers, they hypercorrect, and end up speaking 'more' standard than those whom they are trying to imitate. The same is true for individuals moving down in socio-economic status.

An important factor influencing the way of formulating sentences is, according to sociolinguists, the social class of the speakers. Thus, there has been a division of social classes proposed in order to make the description accurate. Two main groups of language users, mainly those performing non-manual work and those with more years of education are the 'middle class', while those who perform some kind of manual work are 'working class'. Additional terms 'lower' and 'upper' are frequently used in order to subdivide the social classes. Therefore, differences between upper middle class can be compared with lower working class in any society.

It is notable that people are acutely aware of the differences in speech patterns that mark their social class and are often able to adjust their style to the interlocutor. It is especially true for the members of the middle class who seem eager to use forms associated with upper class, however, in such efforts the forms characteristic of upper class are often overused by the middle class members. The above mentioned process of adopting own speech to reduce social distance is called convergence. Sometimes, however, when people want to emphasise the social distance, they make use of the process called divergence, purposefully using idiosyncratic forms.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6**

How does class determine language use in societies?

### **3.7 Differences According to Age Groups**

There are several different types of age-based variation one may see within a population. They are: vernacular of a subgroup, with membership typically characterised by a specific age range, age-graded variation, and indications of linguistic change in progress. One example of subgroup vernacular is the speech of street youth. Just as street youth dress differently from the “norm”, they also often have their own “language”. The reasons for this are to

- (1) enhance their own cultural identity,
- (2) identify with each other,
- (3) exclude others, and
- (4) invoke feelings of fear or admiration from the outside world.

Strictly speaking, this is not truly age-based, since it does not apply to all individuals of that age bracket within the community. Age-graded variation is a stable variation which varies within a population based on age. That is, speakers of a particular age will use a specific linguistic form in successive generations. This is relatively rare. People tend to use linguistic forms that were prevalent when they reached adulthood. So, in the case of linguistic change in progress, one would expect to see variation over a broader range of ages.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7**

Age grades are likely to use same language forms. Discuss this phenomenon in sociolinguistics.

### **3.8 Differences According to Gender**

Men and women, on average, tend to use slightly different language styles. These differences tend to be quantitative rather than qualitative. That is, to say that women make more minimal responses than men is akin to saying that men are taller than women (i.e., men are on the average taller than women, but some women are taller than some men). The initial identification of a women's register was by Robin Lakoff (1975), who argued that the style of language served to maintain women's (inferior) role in society (“female deficit approach”). A later refinement of this argument was that gender differences in language reflected a power difference (O'Barr & Atkins, 1980) (“dominance theory”). However, both these perspectives have the language style of men as normative, implying that women's style is inferior.

More recently, Deborah Tannen (1991) has compared gender differences in language as more similar to ‘cultural’ differences (“cultural difference approach”). Comparing conversational goals, she argued that men have a report style, aiming to communicate factual information, whereas women have a rapport style, more concerned with building and maintaining relationships. Such differences are pervasive across media, including face-to-face conversation. Communication styles are always a product of context, and as such, gender differences tend to be most pronounced in single-gender groups. One explanation for this is that people accommodate their language towards the style of the person they are interacting with. Thus, in a mixed-gender group, gender differences tend to be less pronounced. A similarly important observation is that this accommodation is usually towards the language style, not the gender of the person. That is, a polite and empathic male will tend to be warmed up to on the basis of their being polite and empathic, rather than their being male.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8**

Discuss the likely areas of difference in language use between men and women.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The basic question in sociolinguistics is: What is it that gives rise to difference in language use? This question forms the basic reason for sociolinguistic inquiries. Differences in use determine all linguistic (inter)action, and much of the work of sociolinguistics focused on the working of differences in linguistic practices. Of course, to focus on differences as the motor for linguistic production, as the generative principle of the very forms of linguistic utterances, was to invert the relation between the linguistic and the social, and to make the social prior. For Gumperz, as for Labov, the social caused selections of different codes, but it did not reach into the organisation of code: language remained a discreet autonomous system. For Halliday, the social was responsible for the shape of the system – for him, language is as it is because of its social functions - and the individual chooses within the potential of the system. Yet the conditions prompting the choice of the individual and the social conditions of the choice are based on select differences. In sociolinguistics, the social is seen as a field of power and the linguistic action of socially formed and positioned individuals is seen as shaped first and foremost by differences in social situations. All linguistic interactions are shaped by differences of varying kinds, and no part of linguistic action escapes the effects.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Language is a means to instantiate, to realise and to give shape to (aspects of) the social. There is no linguistic action other than as part of the unfolding making of text in social/linguistic action. In linguistics, action, as social action, is central, and with that the question of the agency of individuals also moved to centre stage. Linguistic is linked with the social. The individual has the knowledge of codes, including codes which link the social and the linguistic. For Halliday, the linguistic is a socially shaped resource, organised as a system of choices in which the action of the individual in making choices produces meaning. Text, as the manifestation of social action is central to sociolinguistics. This is the case, both for its meaning-aspect and its form-aspect. The meaning of the text arises out of the meaning of the social, and the form which the text 'has' – whether in its material manifestation such as a talk of 15 minutes or a story of three pages length; whether in its generic shape or in its intra-textual organisation; in the very form of its sentences and the shape of its syntax and its words – all arise out of the social conditions and the interaction of the participants who shape the text in their social/linguistic situation and the differences aid in sociolinguistic investigation of human utterance.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the importance of sociolinguistic differences.
2. How do sociolinguistic differences affect human speech?
3. Relate linguistic applications to sociolinguistic difference.
4. Discuss gender as an important difference in sociolinguistics.
5. Assess the role of class difference in sociolinguistics.

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Unit 1	Speech Communities
Unit 2	Speech Acts and Speech Events
Unit 3	Dialects, Idiolects, Sociolects
Unit 4	Code Mixing and Code Switching
Unit 5	Register, Style and Usage

## **UNIT 1 SPEECH COMMUNITIES**

### **CONTENTS**

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3.0	Main Content
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3.2	The Concept of Speech Communities
3.3	Speech Communities in Nigeria
4.0	Conclusion
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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will study the concept of speech communities in sociolinguistics. Speech communities involve language use within a sub-part of a wider society. These sub-parts or groups exhibit similar linguistic behaviour that fosters coherence within them. Sociolinguists believe that these groups within the society have influence within the wider society because their linguistic act is recognised as restricted forms and sometimes they are revered. We will examine the concept, the history and the characteristics.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- state the concept of speech communities
- recognise their place in the larger society
- see that the language use in speech communities is restricted
- trace the history of speech communities
- distinguish between speech communities and other sociolinguistic norms.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 General Overview**



The adoption of the concept ‘speech community’ as a focus of linguistic analysis emerged in the 1960s. This was due to the pioneering work by William Labov, whose studies of language variation in New York City and Martha’s Vineyard in the United States of America laid the groundwork for sociolinguistics as a social science. His studies showed that not only were class and profession clearly related to language variation within a speech community (e.g. Martha’s Vineyard), but that socio-economic aspirations and mobility were also of great importance.

Prior to Labov’s studies, the closest linguistic field was dialectology, which studies linguistic variation between different dialects. The primary application of dialectology is in rural communities with little physical mobility. Thus, there was no framework for describing language variation in cities until the emergence of sociolinguistics and the concept of speech community, which applies to both rural and urban communities.

Since the 1960s a number of studies have been undertaken that have furthered our knowledge on how speech communities work and extended its use. Notable sociolinguists who have worked on speech communities include William Labov, John J. Gumperz, Lesley Milroy, Mary Lakoff, and Penelope Eckert. The notion of speech community is most generally used as a tool to define a unit of analysis within which to analyze language variation and change. Stylistic features differ among speech communities based on factors such as the group's socioeconomic status, common interests and the level of formality expected within the group and by its larger society. Speech community is any human aggregate characterised by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage

In Western culture, for example, employees at a law office would likely use more formal language than a group of teenage skateboarders because most Westerners expect more formality and professionalism from practitioners of law than from an informal circle of adolescent friends. This special (use of) language by certain professions for particular activities is known in linguistics as register; in some analyses, the group of speakers of a register is known as a discourse community, while the phrase “speech community” is reserved for varieties of a language or dialect that speakers inherit by birth or adoption.

Understanding language in society means that one also has to understand the social networks in which language is embedded. A social network is another way of describing a particular speech community in terms of relations between individual members in a community. A

network could be loose or tight depending on how members interact with each other. For instance, an office or factory may be considered a tight community because all members interact with each other. A multiplex community is one in which members have multiple relationships with each other. For instance, in some neighbourhoods, members may live on the same street, work for the same employer and even intermarry. The looseness or tightness of a social network may affect speech patterns adopted by a speaker. A social network may apply to the macro level of a country or a city, but also to the inter-personal level of neighbourhoods or a single family. Recently, social networks have been formed by the Internet, through chat rooms, MySpace groups, organisations, and online dating services.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Explain the major factors that gave rise to the concept of speech communities.

### **3.2 Concept of Speech Community**

According to Gumperz (1968), a 'speech community' is "any human aggregate characterised by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage". A more restrictive concept, assuming a shared set of grammatical rules, emphasises linguistic contrast with outsiders. Gumperz also argues for regular relationships between language use and social structure. "The speech varieties employed within a speech community form a system because they are related to a shared set of social norms" but may overlap language boundaries: e.g. Czech, Austrian German, and Hungarian speakers may share norms for speech acts, topics, conversational participation, etc. while Labov (1972: 36) explains that "The speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms. These norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behaviour, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage."

However, Hudson (1996:58) says that the term 'speech community' misleads "by implying the existence of 'real' communities 'out there', which we could discover if we only knew how... Our socio-linguistic world is not organised in terms of objective 'speech communities'." Furthermore, he holds "It is impossible to understand the relationships that really matter to a sociolinguist except at the micro level of the individual person and the individual linguistic item turn out to be too fluid and ill-defined to be seriously studied in their own right", while

Bucholtz (1999:103) adds contrarily that in sociolinguistics, social theory is rooted in the concept of the speech community... a language-based unit of social analysis... indigenous to sociolinguistics [which] is not connected to any larger social theory. He recognised six ways in which the speech community has been an inadequate model; and they are:

- (a) tendency to take language as central,
- (b) emphasis on consensus as the organising principle of community,
- (c) preference for studying central members of the community over those at the margins,
- (d) focus on the group at the expense of individuals,
- (e) view of identity as a set of static categories,
- (f) valorisation of researchers' interpretations over participants' understandings of their practices.

Speech community is a concept in sociolinguistics that describes a more or less discrete group of people who use language in a unique and mutually accepted way among themselves. Speech communities can be members of a profession with a specialised jargon, distinct social groups like high school students or hip hop fans (e.g. *ghetto lingo*), or even tight-knit groups like families and friends. In addition, online and other mediated communities, such as many internet forums, often constitute speech communities. Members of speech communities will often develop a slang or jargon to serve the group's special purposes and priorities. The definition of speech community is debated in many sociolinguistic literatures. These definitions tend to involve varying degrees of emphasis on the following:

- i. Shared community membership
- ii. Shared linguistic communication

However, the relative importance and exact definitions of these also vary. Some would argue that a speech community must be a 'real' community, i.e. a group of people living in the same location (such as a city or a neighbourhood), while more recent thinking proposes that all people are indeed part of several communities (through home location, occupation, gender, class, religious belonging, and more), and that they are thus also part of simultaneous speech communities. Similarly, what shared linguistic communication entails is also a variable concept. Some would argue that a shared first language, even dialect, is necessary, while for others the ability to communicate and interact (even across language barriers) is sufficient.

The underlying concern in both of these is that members of the same speech community should share linguistic norms. That is, they share

understanding, values and attitudes about language varieties present in their community. While the exact definition of speech community is debated, there is a broad consensus that the concept is immensely useful, if not crucial, for the study of language variation and change.

A person can (and almost always does) belong to more than one speech community. For example, an area boy would likely speak and be spoken to differently when interacting with his Nigerian peers or his co-touts. If he found himself in a situation with a variety of in-group and/or out-group peers, he would likely modify his speech to appeal to speakers of all the speech communities represented at that moment. (A variation on this concept is code-switching, which is usually observed among speakers of two or more languages who switch between them based on the content or pragmatics of their conversation.)

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

What are the opposing reasons against the concept of speech communities?

### **3.3 Speech Communities in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, speech communities exist in several forms. We have different groups with similar means of communication restricted to them. These groups are like cults and associations with the same goals. We have such groups as Rotary Club, Lions Club, Jaycee Club, Reformed Ogboni Fraternity, Brotherhood of the Sun, Rosicrucian Order, and Women Groups, etc. These groups have similar language patterns that are used in communicating common interests. These communication patterns include both symbolic and verbal forms. They have patterns of greetings (that is, phatic greetings, general greetings of well-being), patterns of handshake, patterns of movement, and patterns of response, etc. With the divisions in Christian and Islamic religions, there emerged different groups with similar patterns of communication and recognition. Each of these groups constitutes a speech community. Even schools with a unique curriculum constitute a speech community because they do not use the forms and patterns that are conversant in the other schools. In the Open University system, there are different terms, courses and academic procedures that are not found in other universities. Hence, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is a speech community with a unique curriculum, language patterns, and communication procedures that are restricted to it.

In Nigeria, we have different groups, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), religious bodies, political parties and pressure groups that constitute speech communities. Each of these groups has internal

communication procedures which mark them out and which people outside the group do not know. Nigeria, like other countries around the world, is made up of hybrids of speech communities that form parts of the larger populace and which are recognised for their positive or negative impacts in the country. One obvious thing about Nigerian speech communities is that they have language forms and other means of communication recognised by the larger populace but are used as references in describing these groups and their operations.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Discuss the language pattern of any speech community in Nigeria you know.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The concept of speech communities in sociolinguistics gives insight into small language use in minority group based on certain unifying linguistic harmonies. In studying speech communities, there are political, cultural and economic considerations but also of the language varieties themselves. That is, in speech communities we do need to look at vowels, consonants, lexis and syntax. The major focus has to do with variety in language use within a larger linguistic group. The fact about speech communities in linguistics is that there is still, in the world as a whole, a hybrid of language varieties which are better categorised within the boundaries of language functions and meaning within select groups. Speech communities seem to be most prevalent where one would expect it least: amongst certain members of the intelligentsia, the literati, the journalists, the politicians, the opinion-makers amongst other sub groups. They value great secrecy, abhor general or communal codes, and are fanatical about the preservation of what they call “standards” in speaking and writing. They support the fallacy that appears everywhere in their own language, that their members do not write or speak in the forms known to the general public.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

There has been no compromise regarding the linguistic boundaries of speech communities. It is recognised as language use within static groups with a unifying interest; yet there are no agreed forms of standardisation. But a closer examination shows that what respect they

have for language is confined to varieties spoken by their very small proportion of the population. The only languages which they deem worthy of respect, and which they recognise as valid, are the little codes in their languages, more than those with millions of speakers. And the only varieties of those languages which they respect are the standard varieties which define their operational codes. In other words, we are presented with a phenomenon which we can call: the denigration of language to suit minority interest. That is, there is a widespread view that some varieties of language are somehow more worthy, more valid, in some mysterious way simply because they serve interests of a few. Sociolinguistic studies have proved that speech communities reveal the complexities of language use in society as every individual within the larger society belong consciously or unconsciously to several speech communities which make up the society. It is an inevitable aspect of the linguistic complexity of every society.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain in your own words what speech communities mean.
2. Show how it is possible to belong to more than one speech community
3. Discuss speech communities as forms of language varieties.
4. What are the arguments against speech communities in sociolinguistics?
5. Identify the characteristic nature of speech communities.

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## **UNIT 2      SPEECH ACTS AND SPEECH EVENTS**

### **CONTENTS**

#### 1.0    Introduction

- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Speech Acts
  - 3.3 Speech Events
  - 3.4 Implications in Sociolinguistics
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will study two basic concepts that are necessary in the understanding of language use in society. The first is speech acts theory while the second is speech events theory. These theories are based on the interpretation of speeches as they relate to society's acceptability. We will study these theories and examine the implications in sociolinguistics. This will enable us understand how individual language is interpreted in the larger society

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this study, you should be able to:

- state the theory of speech acts
- identify the theory of speech events
- distinguish the theory of speech acts from that of speech events
- relate these theories to sociolinguistics
- identify speech acts and speech events as sociolinguistic dichotomies.

## **4.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Overview**

Speech acts and speech events relate to language performance in society. Every aspect of language use has a function. This is where linguists have paid attention to individual use of language in society in terms of meaning and usage. Linguists do tend to be better informed than most about the situations in which linguistic groups find themselves. There are two respects, however, in which linguists are much better equipped for analysing the situations in which minority languages are spoken and for defending the rights of minority groups than other professionals. Firstly, and paradoxically, since linguists seem to be the only people who are fully aware of the extent to which the question of whether a



linguistic variety is a language or not (as opposed to a dialect) is a truly linguistic matter at all, we are very well placed to defend linguistic minorities against attacks which are aimed at – and to help with problems and misconceptions that are associated with – the linguistic status of their mother-tongue.

The speech act and speech event are the locus of most sociolinguistic and anthropological-linguistic research, indeed all linguistic research that is accountable to a body of naturally-occurring speech or signed data. They represent the social and linguistic boundaries within which analysts locate, and seek to describe and account for, language variation and change, ways of speaking, and patterns of choice among elements in a linguistic repertoire. It is thus on a par with other basic notions such as ‘language’, ‘dialect’ or ‘grammar’ as a primary object of description and theorising in our discipline. They both grapple with speech situations in the community focused on “shared ways of speaking which go beyond language boundaries” or ‘language bond’, involving “relatedness at the level of linguistic form” (Romaine 1994: 23) – both of which emphasise the production of speech itself over perception or attitudes.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Speech acts and speech events relate to language application in every society. Explain.

### 3.2 Speech Acts

Speech acts are the routine ways of speaking; utterances that involve both language and social information like promise, argue, joke, utter, dare, curse, disdain etc. In this theory, it is believed that every speech or language use has a function to perform in the place and time of usage. This theory was proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). Speech acts, according to them, have four important categories:

- i) **Locutionary acts** are simply acts of uttering sounds, syllables, words, phrases, and sentences from a language. From a speech act point of view, these are not very interesting; because an utterance act *per se* is not communicative (a parrot can do one).
- ii) **Illocutionary acts** are performed in doing something with an utterance.
- iii) **Perlocutionary acts** are performed by producing an effect on the hearer with an utterance.
- iv) **Propositional acts** have to do with the content of utterances, the basic acts of referring and predicating, wherein a speaker refers to something and then characterises it.

Illocutionary acts can often be successfully performed simply by uttering the right sentence, with the right intentions and beliefs, and under the right circumstances, e.g.

- a. I (hereby) order you to leave.
- b. I (hereby) promise to pay.
- c. I (hereby) appoint you chairman.

Unlike perlocutionary acts, illocutionary acts are central to communication. Our conversations are composed of statements, suggestions, requests, proposals, greetings and the like. When we do perform perlocutionary acts such as persuading or intimidating, we do so by performing illocutionary acts such as stating or threatening. Illocutionary acts have the feature that one performs them simply by getting one's illocutionary intentions recognised.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

With concrete examples, explain the concepts of locution, illocution and perlocution in speech acts.

### **3.3 Speech Events**

The concept of speech event relates to social interactional events involving communication; how speech resources of the community are largely put to use. This theory was propounded by Dell Hymes (1972). According to Hymes, the components of a speech event are:

#### **i) Setting**

This is the scene or situation where interaction takes place. It is the spatial contact point for the application of language. It is the society where the linguistic forms are applied.

#### **ii) Participants**

These are the speakers, receivers and the other participants in the speech situation. Since language is functional as a means of communication among people, it brings people together and they understand each other by that means.

#### **iii) Ends**

These are the outcomes and goals of each speech situation. Every communication process has a target, a goal to achieve.

**iv) Act Sequences**

These are the forms and contents of speech situations. This includes the message being communicated and the means of such communication whether oral or written, formal or informal.

**v) Key**

This is the manner of speech events. This has to do with the way that communication is effected, whether it is through discussion, discourse or performance.

**vi) Instrumentalities**

This is the channel or code of communication. This has to do with what is used in effecting the communication. Does the communication have to do with a computer, radio, audio-visual instrument or telephone?

**vii) Norms**

These are behaviours and interpretations given to speech events. This has to do with the reactions given to the thing being communicated. Did the people involved scream, shout, cry or laugh?

**viii) Genre**

This is the style of communication in the speech situation. This has to do with the process of the communication like lecture, chat, discussion, etc

The students should note that these eight components of speech events can be formally summed up in the memory using the mnemonic acronym SPEAKING to identify the components at a go.

**SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Using a practical discourse as reference, describe the eight components of speech events.

**4.0 CONCLUSION**

Speech acts and speech events are sometimes described as uniform entities; however, even within one language community such as country or state, significant differences can be seen in the ways and manner of communication. These sociolinguistic norms are often subject to linguistic investigations. General descriptions of languages focusing on

pronunciation, or grammar usually provide information about the standard variety of a given language; nonetheless, that does not mean that it is in any respect better than its other varieties. Speech acts and speech events account for the ways that language is put to use by individuals in the society. Every language speaker uses language within given frameworks in the society he belongs and which he hopes to use for the sake of making an impact. Although various dialects of one language possess grammar rules and vocabulary characteristic to them, speakers of different dialects of one language understand each other without major difficulties with regard to the speech acts and events expressed in them.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Speech acts and speech events by one language user who can speak two different dialects or varieties of one language will show the same results when analysed. Speech acts, according to Austin and Searle, is developed with the intention to reveal the basic acts or functions of speech in a given society. Since people within a society communicate with language, there are basic intentions, interpretations and meanings that follow such acts. However, on speech events, Dell Hymes is interested in giving adequate interpretation to communication within the society. He proposed eight different components for analysing human speech in order to reveal the social situations within which communication prevails. Both concepts aim at showing human communication as bearer of meaning relating to a society's use of language since language does not occur *in vacuo*.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the basis for speech acts theory.
2. Discuss 'key' and 'norm' as components in speech events.
3. Distinguish between speech events and speech acts.
4. What is the basic interest in speech event analysis?
5. Analyse any speech of your choice with speech events components.

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### **UNIT 3     DIALECTS, IDIOLECTS, SOCIOLECTS**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content

3.1	General Overview
3.2	Concepts of Dialects and Dialectology
3.3	Concept of Idiolect
3.4	Concept of Sociolect
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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will study about some aspects of language use in society which have to do with dialects, idiolects and sociolects. Each of these *lects* has to do with the general and the individual application of acceptable language norms in a given society. A dialect is as wide as a language because of its coverage in society while idiolects and sociolects are restricted to specified groups and individuals. We will study these concepts in order to know their relevance in sociolinguistics.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the concepts of dialects and dialectology
- appreciate the existence of idiolects
- recognise that sociolects are a special usage
- distinguish the concepts with reference to the Nigerian society
- identify each code in use in a given society.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Overview**

Understanding language in society means that one also has to understand the social networks in which language is embedded. This may apply to the macro level of a country or a city, but also to the inter-personal level of neighbourhoods or a single family. Sociolinguistics relates to the study of the relationship between language and society, of language variation, and of attitudes about language. Variation may occur at all levels of the grammar. In the study of language variation, it is believed that no two speakers of a language speak exactly the same way. Between group variation is called intergroup variation. No individual speaker speaks the same way all the time. Within-speaker variation is called intraspeaker variation. However, a lect is a variety of a language spoken by a group of people or an individual that is characterised by systematic features (e.g., phonological, lexical, grammatical) that

distinguish it from other varieties of that same language. An idiolect is the speech variety of an individual speaker. Sociolinguists believe that an idiolect is a continuum of dialects.

*Lects* are the varieties of language use. *Lects* exist because of isolation or long term separation of groups. Isolation can be across time, geography or social barriers. However, idiolects exist as variations of individual performance or usage. Dialects exist because clusters or groups of people share common linguistic behaviour. Before a group linguistic use is called a dialect, there must be observable consistent linguistic acts. Two types of “dialects” have been recognised by sociolinguistics. They are:

- (1) **Sociolects or “social dialects”:** linguistic differentiation based upon membership in a longstanding socially-isolated or separate group
- (2) **Regional dialects:** linguistic differentiation based upon membership in a longstanding geographically-isolated or separate group

As we learnt in Module 1 Unit 5, Basil Bernstein’s theory of ‘Restricted Code’ was an example of the speech patterns used by the working-class. He stated that this type of code allows strong bonds between group members, who tend to behave largely on the basis of distinctions such as ‘male’, ‘female’, ‘older’, and ‘younger’. This social group also uses language in a way which brings people together, and members often do not need to be explicit about meaning, as their shared knowledge and common understanding often bring them together in a way which other social language groups do not experience. The difference with the restricted code is the emphasis on ‘we’ as a social group, which fosters greater solidarity than emphasis on ‘I’.

Basil Bernstein also studied what he named the ‘elaborated code’. He explained that in this type of speech pattern, the middle and upper classes use this language style to gain access to education and career advancement. Bonds within this social group are not as well defined and people achieve their social identity largely on the basis of individual disposition and temperament. There is no obvious division of tasks according to sex or age; and, generally, within this social formation, members negotiate and achieve their roles, rather than have them there ready-made in advance. Due to the lack of solidarity, the elaborated social language code requires individual intentions and viewpoints to be made explicit, as the ‘I’ has a greater emphasis with this social group than the working class.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Relate *lects* to Bernstein's theory of restricted and elaborated codes.

### 3.2 Concepts of Dialects and Dialectology

Any variety of a language characterised by systematic differences in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary from other varieties of the same language is called a dialect. Everyone speaks a dialect – in fact, many dialects at different levels. The people who speak a certain dialect are called a speech community. Some of the larger dialectal divisions in the English speaking world: British English vs. American English vs. Nigerian English (along with others), Northern Nigerian English, Southern American English, etc. A dialect spoken by one individual is called an *idiolect*. Everyone has small differences between the way they talk and the way even their family and best friends talk, creating a “minimal dialect”. This is different from Accent. An accent is a certain form of a language spoken by a subgroup of speakers of that language which is defined mainly by phonological features.

Everyone has an accent, just as everyone speaks a dialect. It is not a question of “having” or “not having” an accent or dialect, it is a question of which accent or dialect you speak with. Note that you can speak the same dialect as someone else while using a different accent (though frequently the two vary together). Thus, people from Ibadan and Lagos use about the same dialect of English, but their accents are radically different. It is very rare, however, that a speech community defines a “pure” dialect. There is always some overlap between members of that group and other dialects.

#### i. How Do We Tell a Language from a Dialect?

This is not always easy. The clearest definition would seem to be that speakers of the same language can understand each other. This is the principle of mutual intelligibility: that is, if two speakers can understand each other, then they speak two dialects of the same language; if they cannot understand each other, then they speak two different languages. But this does not capture everything. There is a continuum between the two in many cases. The example of Chinese: there are different parts of the country that are mutually unintelligible, but have very cohesive cultural history, which translate to one language, but various dialects. The case in Edo State is slightly different in that the dialects of Edo are somewhat intelligible to the speakers of the Edo language but without achieving the necessary total mutuality in intelligibility in most parts of the State.



Standard English is just a variety or dialect of English. It cannot even legitimately be considered better than other varieties. All languages and all dialects are equally “good” as linguistic systems. All varieties of a language are structured, complex, rule-governed systems, which can adequately meet the needs of their speakers for communication. It follows that value judgment of languages are social rather than linguistic. Attitudes toward non-standard varieties are attitudes which reflect the social structure of the society. The difference one wishes to capture when labelling dialects as “standard” or “nonstandard” is this: a dialect is “standard” if it fulfils some general guidelines, such as being used in schools, being taught to foreigners learning the language, being used by the media, etc. Nigerian English dialects are idealisations, not actual well-defined dialects of a given language. Nobody actually speaks, for example, Standard Nigerian English (SNE). Many people almost speak it. For the particular case of Nigerian English, we are more interested in grammar than we are in accent (pronunciation) features. The reason is social – regional pronunciation variation is not considered in Nigeria to be very important socially, so people with a large range of accents can still be considered to be speaking the standard dialect. Contrast this with British English, where societal divisions correspond rather closely to pronunciation patterns. Examples: Senators, governors, presidents, and other high-ranking government officials are generally considered to be prime examples of NE, yet they exhibit a huge amount of variation in pronunciation.

A standard dialect or standard language (British English — BrE) is a dominant dialect used in school, print, mass media, taught to the non-native speakers in Nigeria as a second language, and associated with wealth, education, literature, political leadership and high social status. These characteristics all have in common the concept of prestige. That is, the standard dialect is the dialect which is associated with those who hold prestige and power in the society it is spoken in. If a group of people are more or less isolated or are prevented from freely mingling with nearby populations due to mountains, rivers, forests, etc., then those populations will develop unique linguistic characteristics which will eventually become distinguishing elements of their dialects.

## ii. Dialectology

Dialectology is the study of regional dialects, or dialects defined by geographical regions. This was done originally by travelling around a country and asking the people living in various locales what words or phrases they use for particular objects and concepts. The most famous American study was performed by Hans Kurath in the second quarter of

the last century, and covered most of the east 1/4 of the U.S. What Kurath (and all dialectologists) looked for were isoglosses (iso=same; gloss =speech) – boundaries separating regions of a country which uses different words or constructions to describe the same things. What Kurath found in some parts of the country were that the isoglosses for several unrelated words fell in practically the same locations, forming bundles of isoglosses. These bundles were significant discoveries, as they indicated the existence of a real correlation between speech patterns and region. These bundles also provided a living linguistic reminder of the patterns of migration of Americans moving westward.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Every language has dialects, yet dialects are not complete languages. Explain this statement thoroughly.

### **3.3 Concept of Idiolects**

An idiolect is a variety of a language unique to an individual. It is manifested by patterns of word selection and grammar, or words, phrases, idioms, or pronunciations that are unique to that individual. Every individual has an idiolect; the grouping of words and phrases is unique, rather than an individual using specific words that nobody else uses. An idiolect can easily evolve into an ‘eclect’ – a dialect variant specific to a household.

Forensic linguists can use idiolects to decide if a certain person did or did not produce a given piece of writing (or transcribed speech). While often passing unnoticed in speech, some idiolects, particularly unusual ones employed by famous individuals, are immortalised in the form of nicknames. Depending on whom you ask, either idiolects are derived from abstract, standardised language ideas, defended by “authorities” (such as dictionary editors), or languages are congruencies of idiolects and thus exist only in the intersection between individual speakers. While the truth most likely lies on a continuum between these extremes, each proposition provides a useful model for language analysis. A more traditional scientific approach is encapsulated in the first sense. The second sense of the idiolect has become a base for investigating language evolution on a genetic model: the existence of the species (individual language) is extrapolated from a multitude of organisms (idiolects) with common features. Each species evolves through changes in the individual organisms.

Idiolects change through contact with other idiolects, and change throughout their lifetime as well as from generation to generation. Overall, languages must select for compatibility with the learning

capacity of immature human brains. Idiolects, however, have such a large capacity for change, particularly in the current era, with increasing contact between many different people, that the systematic aspects of language that are the traditional arena of linguistic study are constantly in flux.

As of yet, there is no general theory of communication based on idiolects. Most importantly, however, whether language is a pre-determined convention or a fluid construction of each moment of communication, there are general cognitive abilities that all humans share in order to communicate. These tools, inherent to symbolic communication, include the ability to assess a situation and provide appropriate information, access to both short and long term memory functions, the ability to differentiate and conceptualise past, present, and future, and the ability to recognise that other human brains also use these and other tools to represent their internal states and understand the representation of others' internal states.

There is also the concept of 'Idioglossia' which, refers to an idiosyncratic language, one invented and spoken by only one or a very few people. Most often, idioglossia refers to the private languages of young children, especially twins. It is also known as cryptophasia, and commonly referred to as twin talk or twin speech. Children who are exposed to multiple languages from birth are also inclined to create idioglossias, but these languages usually disappear at a relatively early age, giving way to use of one or both of the languages introduced.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Describe the characteristics of idiolects in sociolinguistic situations.

#### **3.4 Concept of Sociolects**

The issue of social dialects is extremely complex. Each social dialect is adequate as a functional and effective variety of English or other languages. Each serves a communication function as well as a social solidarity function. It maintains the communication network and the social construct of the community of speakers who use it. Furthermore, each is a symbolic representation of the historical, social, and cultural background of the speakers. For example, there is strong evidence that many of the features of Black English represent linguistic Africanisms. However, society has adopted the linguistic idealisation model that Standard English is the linguistic archetype.

Standard English is the linguistic variety used by government, the mass media, business, education, science, and the arts in Nigeria. Therefore,

there may be nonstandard English speakers who find it advantageous to have access to the use of Standard English. It is indeed possible for dialect speakers to have linguistic disorders within the dialect. An essential step toward making accurate assessments of communicative disorders is to distinguish between those aspects of linguistic variation that represent the diversity of the English language from those that represent speech, language, and hearing disorders.

In linguistics, a sociolect is the variety of language characteristic of a social background or status. It is a portmanteau term combining the morphemes “socio-,” meaning social and “-lect,” meaning a variety of language. A dialect which evolves from regional speech may also have sociolectical implications. For example, Standard British English is a dialect in that it is particular to Britain; yet, being the national language of Nigeria, it is also a sociolect in that it carries a certain prestige from being the lingua franca throughout the country – both in broadcasting, in the press, and by people of high social status.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Identify the basis for sociolects in societies.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

*Lects* refer to variations in the use of the same language by groups and by individuals. Sometimes, *lects* result from social status. The social status indicates an individual’s social position in a society which is based on power differences, prestige and social class, along with the associated rights and duties. Basic power categories include higher, equal and lower position which correlate with levels of formality (or speech styles: more formal, neutral, more colloquial), with address forms. The social role includes expected behaviour associated with a particular status. It is more flexible than status and varies also according to the speech situation. Incompatibility of requirements imposed by roles upon individuals may result in a role strain and role conflict (e.g., a politician, being also a citizen, may have inhibitions as to adopting important decisions; conversely, in his election campaign speech s/he may try to diminish distance and establish closeness/familiarity with the fellow citizens). Thus, *lects* have boundaries but sometimes they get mixed up. A speaker of a given dialect might switch to a sociolect in order to reflect his status. He also has personal idiosyncrasies in his use of language which mark him out in his social situation.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

*Lects*, whether idiolect, dialect or sociolect, have consistent linguistic forms that mark them out wherever they are used. Every speaker of a language has personal linguistic mannerisms even though he speaks a given variety of a language that belongs to his sub-group in the society. He may even belong to a group within his group which has another identifiable linguistic behaviour. Each linguistic code expressed by each member of the groups is either restricted or elaborated within the confines of its application. As to the choice of the type of code, there are more possibilities to select from since a particular national language (e.g., the English language) is not a monolithic structure but a sum of all its dialects (Englishes) of which one functions as the standard variety (Standard British or American English). Standard variety is associated with the highest status in the community because it is based on the speech of and is spoken by the highest social classes and by educated people; it is used in the media and literature, taught in schools and to foreign learners. The two principal types of variation of national language manifested in pronunciation (accent), grammar and vocabulary are the regional variation (regional dialects) and the social variation (social dialects, sociolects, also genderlects, jargon, slang, argot; though these are not full-fledged codes). Idiolect represents a speech pattern by which an individual is recognised; it includes one's interaction habits (e.g., a tendency to produce lengthy conversational turns or to make pauses before the completion of turn constructional units), favourite turns of phrase (catchphrases) as well as recognisable features of voice (pitch, timbre) and penmanship. There is a certain degree of predictability as to the code selection, since the choice of code is motivated by the purpose, situation, characteristics of interlocutors (age, education, ethnic background), etc.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Differentiate between dialect and dialectology
2. Discuss idiolects as individual style of usage
3. Explain sociolect as a product of class and status
4. Identify the characteristics of restricted and elaborated codes
5. Relate language to dialect in social situations.

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## **UNIT 4      CODE MIXING AND CODE SWITCHING**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives

- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Concepts of Code Switching and Code Mixing
  - 3.3 The Differences between Code Switching and Code Mixing
  - 3.4 Some Countries with Code Switching and Code Mixing
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will study about the concepts of code switching and code mixing in sociolinguistics. Both concepts talk about the use of different language codes in speech. These concepts have been of great concern to sociolinguists because of their effects in the language use in societies. Many people speak and switch or mix their general use of language with their mother tongues, especially in communicating with people who understand the different codes they use in a given social situation. We will differentiate the concepts properly and take a look at countries with high code switching and code mixing characteristics.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- state what code switching and code mixing are all about
- differentiate between the concepts of code switching and code mixing
- identify the factors responsible for them
- name the countries with high code-switching and code-mixing
- recognise that code-switching and code-mixing are important sociolinguistic paradigms.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Overview**

Code-mixing is the change of one language to another within the same utterance or in the same oral/ written text. It is a common phenomenon

in societies in which two or more languages are used. Studies of code-mixing enhance our understanding of the nature, processes and constraints of language and of the relationship between language use and individual values, communicative strategies, language attitudes and functions within particular socio-cultural contexts.

The functional head constraint says that code-switching cannot occur between a functional head (such as a complementiser, determiner or inflection) and its complement (a sentence, noun phrase or verb phrase). Note that some of these constraints make specific assumptions about the nature of syntax, and are therefore controversial, especially among linguists who make different theoretical assumptions. Scholars use different names for various types of switching. We will show examples using English and Igbo languages:

1. Inter-sentential switching is switching outside the sentence or clause level, for example at sentence or clause boundaries. Example, *He came here because akporo m ya na fonu*. [He came because I called him on phone]
2. Intra-sentential switching is switching within a sentence or clause. Example, *Please, biko, call him* ['biko' is 'please' in Igbo]
3. Tag-switching is switching a tag phrase or word from language B into language A. (This is a common intra-sentential switch.) Example, *O biara because a chorom ichu ya n'oru*. [He came because I wanted to sack him from work]
4. Intra-word switching is switching within a word itself, such as at a morpheme boundary. Example, *God is imirimi* [*imirimi* in Igbo means mysterious, deep or complex but the suffix 'ous' is English and helps in giving the word *imirimi* an English status].

A family that has recently immigrated to a country where a different language is spoken may switch back and forth between that language and their mother tongue, while they are learning the new language (this phenomenon is frequently noted amongst first and second-generation immigrants to France from its former North African, Arabic-speaking, colonies; now the Maghreb countries of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria).

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the possible situations that could result in code switching and code mixing in Nigeria.

### 3.2 Concepts of Code Switching and Code Mixing



Code-mixing refers to any admixture of linguistic elements of two or more language systems in the same utterance at various levels: phonological, lexical, grammatical and orthographical. In essence, code-mixing may be more adequately seen as occurring as a kind of intra-sentential switching where code-switching more readily describes the phenomenon that occurs at the inter-sentential level of linguistic usage. Code-switching is thus a term in linguistics referring to the use of more than one language or variety in conversation. Bilinguals, who can speak at least two languages, have the ability to use elements of both languages when conversing with another bilingual. Code-switching is the syntactically and phonologically appropriate use of multiple varieties.

Code-switching can occur between sentences (inter-sentential) or within a single sentence (intra-sentential). Although some commentators have seen code-switching as reflecting a lack of language ability, most contemporary scholars consider code-switching to be a normal and natural product of interaction between the bilingual (or multilingual) speaker's languages. Code-switching can be distinguished from other language contact phenomena such as loan translation (calques), borrowing, pidgins and creoles, and transfer or interference.

There are different perspectives on code-mixing and code-switching. A major approach in sociolinguistics focuses on the social motivations for switching, a line of inquiry concentrating both on immediate discourse factors such as lexical need and the topic and setting of the discussion, and on more distant factors such as speaker or group identity, and relationship-building (solidarity). Code-mixing may also be reflective of the frequency with which an individual uses particular expressions from one or the other language in his/her daily communications; thus, an expression from one language may more readily come to mind than the equivalent expression in the other language.

A second perspective primarily concerns syntactic constraints on switching and mixing code usage. This is a line of inquiry that has postulated grammatical rules and specific syntactic boundaries for where a switch may occur. While code-switching had previously been investigated as a matter of peripheral importance within the more narrow tradition of research on bilingualism, it has now moved into a more general focus of interest for sociolinguists, psycholinguists and general linguists. Code-switching can be related to and indicative of group membership in particular types of bilingual speech communities, such that the regularities of the alternating use of two or more languages within one conversation may vary to a considerable degree between speech communities. Intra-sentential code-switching, where it occurs,

may be constrained by syntactic and morpho-syntactic factors which may or may not be universal in nature.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Using Nigeria as reference point, discuss the various forms of code switching and code mixing.

### 3.3 The Differences between Code Switching and Code Mixing

Code switching involves the movement, whether psychologically or sociologically motivated, from one discrete code (language or dialect) to another within a communicative event. Code mixing, on the other hand, means the blending of two separate linguistic systems into one linguistic system. A very helpful analogy to clarify the differences between code switching and code mixing comes from chemistry. Code switching is similar to the phenomena of suspension where the material is mixed into a suspended medium wherein the parts eventually separate and settle out of the mixture. Code mixing is comparable to the phenomena of a solution where a type of bonding occurs that prevents the mixed elements from separating. Obviously, an intra-sentential mixture of codes in the course of discourse output is a little bit more complex than when a definite switch is made between two languages in the course of moving from one language to another in course of providing two different sentences. For example:

A: *Awon omo yen wa very sorry fun awon nonsense ti won vomit lana.*

B: *They took the boy away. Won ni wipe ole ni.*

Apparently, a person that is not a Yoruba bilingual will find it easier to follow Example B more than A. This is because the linguistic elements in A require a bit of fluent control of the two codes mixed in A to make a complete sense whereas B seems more straightforward due to completeness of the distinct meanings in the distinct codes used in the two sentences.

The main motivations to switch or mix are: to joke, means of expression, lack of language knowledge, change in members, and to maintain a sense of comfort. There are two distinct fields of approach applied to the study of bilingual language use: the grammatical perspective and the socio-functional perspective. The grammatical perspective analyses structural components within utterances, whereas the socio-functional perspective analyses the social implications demonstrated in a language interchange situation. Traditionally, the

sociolinguists examine key social variables such as the identity of the speaker (gender, age, occupation, etc.), his or her relations with the other participants in a conversation (e.g., whether they are friends or distant acquaintances), or the formality of the context.

In the interpretation of the meaning of code switching or code mixing, the “we/they” codes portray social distance or authority. An individual makes a rational choice in determining the costs or benefits of the usage of a linguistic code or in some cases linguistic codes. Code switching labelled as “unmarked” or “smooth switching” occurs frequently and is considered an accepted switch between languages. Code mixing is not considered that way. Unmarked language switches conforms to the communities language and social norms. Marked switches are in direct opposition of pre-established language and social norms and as a result social distance is created between the community and the individual who made the marked language choice.

Speakers use their language choice to portray their perception of who they are, “their self”. We also have the terminology of the matrix language and the embedded language. The matrix language refers to the language that is more dominant or more prevalent language in daily discourse. The embedded language consists of fragmentary elements form another language that is worked into the matrix language.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Explain the major differences between Code Switching and Code Mixing. Use practical examples.

#### **3.4 Some Countries with Switching and Mixing Situations**

In countries with a large number of people from different ethnic backgrounds, communities will commonly switch between the language of their indigenous roots, and the language of the country they are living in. Examples:

##### **1. Basque Country**

In the Basque Country in Spain and France, code-switching occurs frequently between Basque and Spanish, between Basque and French.

##### **2. Canada**

Code-switching may occur in communities in Canada with both Francophone and Anglophone populations. It is common enough that a slang term, *Franglais*, has developed.

### **3. China**

In China, code-switching occurs very frequently in regions where the spoken variety differs greatly from Standard Mandarin, the lingua franca. Many regions speak three varieties, along with Mandarin. As a former British colony, code-switching in Hong Kong switches between Cantonese and English.

### **4. Finland**

Especially younger speakers of Finland Swedish (a dialect of Swedish) frequently switch between Swedish and Finnish.

### **5. Germany**

In Germany, code-switching is particularly common among third-generation descendants of post-World War II immigrants from Turkey, Italy and other Southern European countries, as well as among the many so-called Russian Germans, who are Russian/former Soviet Union nationals with German ancestry that have been allowed to migrate to Germany since the early 1990s.

### **6. Gibraltar**

Code-switching can be seen by people in Gibraltar, who speak a unique mixture of English and Spanish called Llanito.

### **7. South Asia**

In countries such as India and Pakistan, where English is a lingua franca, educated people whose first language is a language other than English but who are also practically fluent in English and Hindi and Urdu often employ code-switching by inserting English words, phrases or sentences into their conversations. This has given rise to dialects referred to jokingly as ‘Hinglish’, ‘Tanglish’ ‘Engdu’ (from English and Urdu) and ‘Banglish’ (from Hindi, Tamil and Bangla). In fact, close examination reveals that in normal conversation, an average sentence spoken by a person(s) from South Asia (even if said to be in a native language) invariably contains words from both English and the relevant native language. Code switching may also occur among native languages, and also between English and multiple native languages, so that several languages may be used in the same conversation. This happens naturally, and indeed people may find it more difficult to converse continuously in one language in an informal social setting. Examples of this type of code-switching can be heard in many Bollywood films.

## **8. Ireland**

Code switching occurs in Ireland often: People in Irish-speaking communities may insert English into their sentences. This is evident in the Irish soap opera *Ros na Rún*, where people may insert English words into everyday Gaelic. Conversely, Gaelic may be inserted into English conversation; 'Slán' (Bye) or 'Dún an doras' (Close the door) being two examples. This is usually with humorous intent, using school phrases that are remembered by most of the population.

## **9. Israel**

As a result of the huge number of new immigrants living in Israel, code-switching is very common. New immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the biggest group of new immigrants in Israel, switch between Russian and Hebrew. Code-switching is also common with the native-born Israeli (Sabra) using words and expressions from Arabic and English in Hebrew. Code-switching between Hebrew and Arabic is also common among Palestinians in an Israeli Hebrew-speaking environment (e.g. working in an Israeli workplace, prisoners in Israeli prisons who interact with Hebrew-speaking guards, members of the Druze community who are conscripted to the Israeli army).

## **10. Japan**

Another example of this phenomenon is the mixing of Japanese and English by Western-educated Japanese and half-Japanese children, most notably those living in bilingual environments (e.g., attending international schools in Japan). Code switching is also widely seen among Americans of Japanese descent.

## **11. Kenya**

English being the official language and Kiswahili the national language, code-switching occurs frequently in almost all conversations, even professional (although to a lesser extent). With 42 languages in the country there is also mixing of English and tribal languages. Code-switching between tribal languages is rare as most people will only be able to speak one tribal language. Asian (that is, Indian) communities also introduce code switching among Kiswahili, English and various South Asian languages (e.g. Gujarati, Hindi, Kutchi).

## **12. Lebanon**

Not only does the Arabic dialect spoken in Lebanon contain an amount of English and French words unparalleled by any other Arabic dialect,

but it is also very common to incorporate entire English and French phrases into everyday parlance, giving rise to combinations such as ‘Bonjour. Kifak? Doing fine?’ Among the educated classes, especially of the Christian community, it is not at all rare to constantly switch codes between Arabic, French, and, to a lesser extent, English – without any obvious pattern or motivation.

### **13. Malaysia**

In Malaysia, the multi-racial community speaks “Manglish”, a mixture of English with Hokkien, Cantonese and Malay, or “Bahasa Rojak”, which is almost similar with Manglish except the base language is Malay.

### **14. Malta**

Code-switching occurs frequently in the bilingual nation of Malta. The mixture of Maltese and English is called Maltenglish.

### **15. New Zealand**

Code switching is common among the Pacific Island community, between native Pasifika languages and English. However, the same is not true for the native Maori language.

### **16. Nigeria**

In Nigeria there are more than 400 languages and over 1000 dialects. English is the official language and Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba are regarded as the acceptable languages for official situations. Code-switching occurs frequently in almost all conversations, even in professional settings. With the multiple languages in the country, there is often the mixing of English and tribal languages. Code-switching, between tribal languages, is rare as most people will only be able to speak one tribal language. So we have such mixing and switching as Igbo (Engligbo), Yoruba (Yorunglish) and Hausa (Hausinglish). Even among the ethnic minorities, we have Ijaw (Ijawinglish), Efik/Ibibio (Efikinglish/Ibibionglish) etc. In most major cities, code switching and code mixing enjoy popular usage, as they have become a welcome trend in the flow of conversations.

### **17. Philippines**

Code-switching occurs frequently in the Philippines. The most well-known form of code-switching is Taglish, which involves switching between Tagalog and English. Taglish is used frequently in the popular

media and by many government officials. Code-switching also occurs with regional languages of the Philippines as well as Min Nan Chinese. It is not uncommon to code-switch between three or even four languages.

## **18. Poland**

In his autobiography, the mathematician Stanisław Ulam, who was a member of the Polish School of Mathematics that flourished in an exceptionally polyglot region of Central Europe, quotes some amusing examples of sentences he remembers hearing colleagues utter without apparently noticing they were using as many as four languages in a single sentence.

## **19. Romania**

Code-switching from Hungarian and Romanian happens to a certain extent among the bilingual members of the Hungarian minority in Romania. Because of this, their way of speaking may sound quaint or be difficult to understand for a native of Hungary. Another minority in Romania is represented by the Saxons. They are a German speaking population which has dwelt in Transylvania for centuries. They also use code-switching when communicating, mostly with Romanian or by using German words which receive Romanian endings.

## **20. Singapore**

In Singapore, the multi-racial community speaks "Singlish" (almost interchangeable with Manglish), a mixture of English with Hokkien, Mandarin Chinese and Malay.

## **21. South Africa**

Code switching is very common in South Africa due to the many languages of the country. Many South Africans are bilingual and code-switching occurs in English, Afrikaans, Zulu, and Xhosa, depending on who the speakers are and where they reside in the country. For example, the Eastern Cape region has equal amounts of Afrikaans and English speakers, resulting in a mixture of the two languages. A peculiar example is the town of Graaff-Reinet where the residents are almost exactly split 50/50 between Afrikaans and English. Thus the town has an English school and an Afrikaans school. The mixed language of the town is often referred to as Graaffrikaans.

## **22. Taiwan**

Code-switching most commonly occurs between Standard Mandarin and Taiwanese, but have been observed to occur with Hokkien, other local languages (e.g. Formosan) and sometimes Japanese as well. The degrees of usage can vary from complete sentences (e.g. a Mandarin conversation occasionally being replied with Taiwanese), or simply one or 2 words used in a similar manner to a loanword.

### **23. Tatars**

Code-switching from Tatar to Russian is very popular among bilingual urban Tatars. This situation is similar to that of other non-Russian urban populations in the former USSR.

### **24. Ukraine**

In contemporary Ukraine both Ukrainian-Russian code-switching and language mixing (called surzhyk) are sometimes used. At the start of conversation if speakers find that they are speaking different languages, one of them may switch to another language. Switching several times in one conversation is not frequently met. It is also unusual to have a talk when one person speaks Ukrainian and another one speaks Russian. Mixing Ukrainian and Russian words is generally considered vulgar and called surzhyk.

### **25. United Kingdom**

Code-switching occurs in the South-Asian heritage communities of Great Britain. This is the most widely distributed minority ethnic population inside and outside of London. Members of this community generally speak one of five languages: Hindi, Tamil, Mirpuri, Punjabi or Urdu. Although described as dialects, these languages are distinct. Intrasentential code switching between these languages and English is extremely common. Code-switching also occurs in Wales. The slang term Wenglish exists but this refers to an English dialect influenced by Welsh. Wales is a part of Great Britain, although Welsh is a Celtic language and is not related to English. Nearly all adult speakers are fluently bilingual with English. It may differ according to the standard of the speaker's Welsh, but an example of usage would be jokes where English is needed for the punch line. Code-switching is also common in users of the Scottish Gaelic, and lowland Scots languages.

### **26. USA**

In the United States, a country with a large number of Spanish speaking communities, a sentence might contain a mixture of Spanish and English words. It is so common that a slang term, spanglish, refers to this. Code-



switching also occurs in the many other immigrant communities in the United States.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Explain the possibility of a non Code Switching or Code Mixing in any country in the world.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Code switching a word or phrase from language-B into language-A can be more convenient than waiting for one's mind to think of an appropriate language-B word. Code-switching can help an ethnic minority community retain a sense of cultural identity, in much the same way that slang is used to give a group of people a sense of identity and belonging, and to differentiate themselves from society at large. Competing sociolinguistic theories examine code-switching as language behaviour, often using discourse analysis, ethnography, or elements of both. Scholars have described the effects that the use of multiple language varieties has on class, ethnicity, gender, or other identity positions. Scholars in interactional linguistics and conversation analysis also study code-switching as a means of structuring talk in interaction.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

Code-switching is distinct from pidgin, in which features of two languages are combined. However, creole languages can exist in a continuum within which speakers may code-switch along many linguistic hierarchies depending on context. Code-switching is also different from (but is often accompanied by) spontaneous borrowing of words from another language, sometimes outfitted with the inflections of the host language, sometimes not. Linguists have made significant efforts to define the differences between borrowing and code-switching. Borrowing is generally said to occur within the lexicon, while code-switching occurs at the level of syntax or utterance construction. Code-switching within a sentence tends to occur more often at points where the syntax of the two languages align; thus it is uncommon to switch from English to French after an adjective and before a noun, because a French noun normally “expects” its adjectives to follow it. It is, however, often the case that even unrelated languages can be “aligned” at the boundary of a relative clause or other sentence sub-structure.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Discuss the factors that lead to code switching and code mixing

2. Using practical examples, explain the meaning of code switching and code mixing
3. Identify the possible code switching or code mixing pattern that could occur in Lagos or Warri
4. Explain the various types of code switching identified by sociolinguists
5. How possible is it to have a country without code switching or code mixing?

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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## **UNIT 5 REGISTER, STYLE AND USAGE**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content

3.1	General Overview
3.2	Register and Usage
3.3	Style and Sociolinguistics
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading
<b>1.0</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>

In this unit, we will study the concepts of register and style as they relate sociolinguistic situations. Style and register have been equated with idiolects, sociolects and even dialects. Some linguists have proposed that style marks out individual application of language just like idiolects while register refers to group variations. However, these concepts have been viewed differently in the field of varietology even though there seem to be some similarities among them. We shall examine these concepts from the sociolinguistic perspective.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- explain the concept of register in sociolinguistics
- state the concept of style in sociolinguistics
- differentiate between style and idiolect
- distinguish register from sociolinguistic *lects*
- identify style and register as sociolinguistic elements.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Overview**

Sociolinguistics studies those types of language variation which result from the correlation between language and social factors, such as social stratification (status), role, age, sex, ethnicity. Depending on the degree and pattern of their actualisation, participants select from a variety of available codes (languages, dialects, varieties); they may switch between them, accommodate or mix them. It should be noted that besides this quantitative paradigm, there has emerged a qualitative approach within sociolinguistics; also known as interpretive or interactional sociolinguistics; the latter represents a variety of streams rooted in anthropology and ethno-methodology.

The social status indicates an individual's social position in a society which is based on power differences, prestige and social class, along with the associated rights and duties. The broadest social class

categories are upper, middle, and lower classes which correlate with accents (e.g., posh, refined, RP vs. low, uneducated, regional, local dialect) and speech varieties (Standard English vs. non-standard varieties). Basic power categories include higher, equal and lower position which correlate with levels of formality (or speech styles: more formal, neutral, more colloquial), with address forms etc.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Explain the social determinants of an individual's language use.

### **3.2 Register and Usage**

The interface between the use of a specific code and a particular configuration of situational variables is represented by the notion of register (M.A.K. Halliday; cf. Montgomery 1995, Montgomery and Reid-Thomas 1994). The three sub areas of register are:

#### **1. Field**

- a) Field as an activity: an utterance is a part of an activity whereby it helps sustain and shape that activity (i.e., extrinsic field, a talk by a chemistry professor while demonstrating an experiment),
- b) Field as a subject matter (i.e., intrinsic field, e.g., political talk, financial services); it is particularly the lexis which is most directly affected by the field (cf. Province and Modality)

#### **2. Tenor**

This refers to the type of social (especially status and power) relationship enacted in or constructed by a text, which is manifested especially in the level of formality (i.e., coding relationships on the cline between distance to familiarity, which is one of the uses of the word style; cf. Trudgill, 1984), strategies of positive and/or negative politeness, terms of address (status). Černý (1992) offers a fine-grained scale of functional styles: frozen, ceremonial, cultivated, formal, official, neutral, conversational, colloquial, familiar, intimate; cf. also Joos' five degrees of formality; the classical rhetoric used the triadic hierarchy of styles (low, middle, high) based on diction and genres,

#### **3. Mode**

This concerns the adopted channel, especially spoken for immediate contact and written for deferred contact. Needless to say, these variables operate alongside and only when working together can they ensure the desired congruity (appropriateness) of text and situation; the opposite

case is incongruity, or register clash, e.g., a business letter which is too chatty, 'Got a cigarette, mate?' used by a lower rank soldier in approaching an army general, etc. Also, a shift in one variable may cause a corresponding shift in another – once we decide to use a phone or write a letter, we tend to be more aware of the type of choices we make (more formal, neutral, explicit, etc.) since the telephone as well as the mail are specific types of public institutions (hence, a possibility of eavesdropping).

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Using real-life situations, explain field, tenor and mode in communication.

### **3.3 Style and Sociolinguistics**

Style is the linguistic idiosyncrasy of an individual. Style is personal. Style in social roles includes expected behaviour associated with a particular status. It is more flexible than status and varies also according to the speech situation (e.g., in dialogical interaction, the roles of speaker and listener shift constantly back and forth). Incompatibility of requirements imposed by roles upon individuals may result in a role strain and role conflict (e.g., a politician, being also a citizen, may have inhibitions as to adopting important decisions; conversely, in his election campaign speech s/he may try to diminish distance and establish closeness/familiarity with the fellow citizens). The patterning of statuses and roles in particular speech events yields expected patterns of language behaviour (style), such as the level of formality (cf. the degrees of formality suggested by Joos (cited in Crystal and Davy, 1969): frozen, formal, consultative, casual, intimate), Tu/Vous (T/V) usage and terms of address (title, first name, last name, nickname, their combination or adopting no-naming strategy).

It is important to note the existence of a general shift towards informal pole of interaction, which is energised, especially, by the trends in popular culture, mass media, and especially advertising (for example, advertisements often simulate casualness and intimacy with which they are trying to sneak into the consumers' consciousness). The ways of signalling social distance (expressions of deference, i.e., respect for people of a higher status) and role relationships are studied within the field of research into politeness. The category of appropriateness (suitability) concerns the adjustment of one's language usage (i.e., grammar, pronunciation and style) to suit the situation in which a communicative event takes place. The ability to recognise different types of speech events and corresponding social roles, to apply the knowledge of code (grammar and vocabulary), to use the rules of

speaking, to recognise and respond to different types of speech acts, to identify typical types of text (genres, functional styles) by means of textual cues, and to use language appropriately (register) is referred to as communicative competence.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Some sociolinguists argue that style is a determinant of social situations. How viable is this postulation?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

A register is a special language code used by different people, professionals to identify and relate with each other, using patterned and acceptable codes unanimously accepted by them. Registers are restrictive and are identifiers of groups. Register is a form of style; group style. It is distinguishable from individual style. An individual style refers to the linguistic idiosyncrasy of that individual; how s/he speaks, writes or communicates as distinguishable from others. Every register or style has a choice of the type of code and there are more possibilities to select from since a particular national language (e.g., the English language) is not a monolithic structure but a sum of all its dialects (Englishes) out of which one functions as the standard variety (Standard British or American English). The standard variety is associated with the highest status in the community because it is based on the speech of and is spoken by the highest social classes and by educated people; it is used in the media and literature, taught in schools and to foreign learners. The two principal types of variation of national language manifested in pronunciation (accent), grammar and vocabulary are the regional variation and the social variation.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

At particular periods of time, societies typically use several varieties with specialised functions (diglossia - high vs. low variety), and their members may master more than one variety (bilingualism). It is not uncommon for bilingual speakers in conversations to perform a code-switching, especially for the purpose of quotation, addressee specification, issuing interjections, message qualification, reiteration, etc. In order to demonstrate alignment and closeness, speakers reciprocally try to match their codes (e.g., user-friendly manuals supplied with modern electronic devices); or, conversely, when signalling independence or distance, a deliberate divergence of codes may take place. Some common examples of code adjustments are baby talk (motherese), foreigner talk occurring in cross-cultural communication, teacher talk, clinician talk, etc.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Linguistic mode is a factor of social situations. Explain.
2. Style is determined by sociolinguistic factors affecting the individual. How true is this assertion?
3. Register and style are same social realisations. Examine this postulation.
4. Sociolinguistics identifies the effect of the individual usage on the social communication of others. What are the effects?
5. Differentiate between language use and register use in sociolinguistics.

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**MODULE 3      LANGUAGE VARIATION IN SOCIETY**

- Unit 1      Pidgins and Pidginisation
- Unit 2      Creoles and Creolisation
- Unit 3      Concept of Standard Usage
- Unit 4      Slangs and Clichés in Sociolinguistics
- Unit 5      Taboos and Profane Usage

**UNIT 1      PIDGINS AND PIDGINISATION**



## CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Concept of Pidgin
  - 3.3 Pidgin Development
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading
- 1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will study the concept of pidgins, and the processes of pidginisation in sociolinguistics. Pidgin language is a variety of many languages because of such varieties as Pidgin English, pidgin French, pidgin Spanish etc. Pidgin has been described by some linguists as the corrupt version of any language even though some have also explained pidgin as the language of the lowly educated or an indication of lower status. We will study all about pidgin and pidginisation in sociolinguistics and conclude by drawing analogy between pidgins and creoles.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the nature of pidgin language
- explain the processes of pidginisation
- distinguish pidgin from standard language
- state the linguistic properties of pidgin
- differentiate pidgins from creoles.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 General Overview

In a contact situation involving two groups speaking different languages, the simplified language used for communication will be based on one of the two. Within the contact language, variations attributable to the native language background of the individual speaker may occur. A contact language may thus be related to any native language ‘as a tree to its roots’. In many cases, the choice of the particular form that the simplification will take rests with the speaker of the model language. It

often happens that, to communicate with each other, two or more people use a language in a variety whose grammar and vocabulary are very much reduced in extent and which is native to neither side. Such a language is a pidgin.

Pidginisation is a complex process of sociolinguistic change, comprising reduction in inner form, with convergence, in the context of restriction in use. A pidgin is a result of such a process that has achieved autonomy as a norm. The context of restricted use in pidginisation need not be external but may be internal to a speech community instead. The result of pidginisation may acquire a name, but not an independent life; that is, it may be a pre-pidgin continuum. The process of pidginisation is usually assumed to begin when a language is used only for very limited communication between groups who speak different native languages. Sharply restricted in domains of use, it undergoes varying degrees of simplification and admixture. If a new stable variety of the language emerges from this process, it might be described as a pidgin.

Pidginisation is second-language learning with restricted input. Pidginisation begins by the speaker using his native tongue and relexifying first only a few key words. Even these will be thoroughly rephonologised to accord with substrate sound system and phonotactics and slotted into syntactic surface structures drawn from the substrate. Moreso, Pidginisation is the initial restructuring of a language by a group of learners; this entails structural reduction and substrate transfer. In discussing Atlantic creoles, we refer to the restructuring of African languages by Africans as pidginisation.

Pidgins are examples of partially-targeted second-language learning and second-language creation, developing from simpler to more complex systems as communicative requirements become more demanding. Pidgin languages, by definition, have no native speakers – they are social rather than individual solutions – and hence are characterised by norms of acceptability. There are qualitatively different stages in the development of a pidgin. A pidgin is a form of language created by members of two or more linguistic groups in contact as a means of intercommunication, the most basic grammatical rules of which are common to all its habitual users regardless of their own primary language, while at least one and perhaps all of the participating groups recognise that this means of intercommunication is not the primary language of any other.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

A pidgin language has no native speakers, yet many native speakers need it to relate with others. Discuss this assertion

### 3.2 Concept of Pidgin

A pidgin is a simplified language that develops as a means of communication between two or more groups that do not have a language in common in situations such as trade. Pidgins are not the native language of any speech community, but are, instead, learned as second languages. Pidgins usually have low prestige with respect to other languages. Not all simplified or “broken” forms of language are pidgins. Pidgins have their own norms of usage which must be learned to speak the pidgin well.

The word pidgin, formerly also spelled *pigion*, derives from a Chinese Pidgin English pronunciation of business. Originally used to describe Chinese Pidgin English, it was later generalised to refer to any pidgin. Pidgin may also be used as the specific name for a local pidgin in places where they are spoken. For example, the name of ‘Tok Pisin’ derives from the English words *talk pidgin*, and its speakers usually refer to it simply as “Pidgin” when speaking English.

The term *jargon* has also been used to describe pidgins, and is found in the names of some pidgins such as Chinook Jargon. In this context, linguists today use jargon to denote a particularly rudimentary type of pidgin; however, this usage is rather rare, and the term jargon most often refers to the words and expressions particular to a given profession. Pidgins may start out as or become trade languages, such as ‘Tok Pisin’; but trade languages are often full blown languages in their own right such as Swahili, Persian, or English. Trade languages tend to be “vehicular languages”, while pidgins can evolve into the vernacular.

There are identifiable common traits among pidgins. Since a Pidgin strives to be a simple and effective form of communication, the grammar, phonology, etc. are as simple as possible, and usually consist of:

- i. A Subject-Verb-Object word order in a sentence
- ii. Uncomplicated clausal structure (i.e., no embedded clauses, etc)
- iii. Reduction or elimination of syllable codas
- iv. Reduction of consonant clusters or breaking them with epenthesis
- v. Basic vowels, like /a/ /e/ /i/ /o/ /u/
- vi. No tones, such as those found in West African and Asian languages
- vii. Use of separate words to indicate tense, usually preceding the verb
- viii. Use of reduplication to represent plurals, superlatives, and other parts of speech that represent the concept being increased

- ix. A lack of morphophonemic variation.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Using a few pidgin sentences as yardstick, describe the structure of Nigerian Pidgin English.

### **3.3 Pidgin Development**

The creation of a pidgin usually requires prolonged, regular contact between the different language communities and a need to communicate between them. It reveals an absence of (or absence of widespread proficiency in) a widespread, accessible inter-language. Also, Keith Whinnom (in Hymes (1971)) suggests that pidgins need three languages to form, with one (the superstrate) being clearly dominant over the others. It is often posited that pidgins become creole languages when a generation whose parents speak pidgin to each other teach it to their children as their first language. Creoles can then replace the existing mix of languages to become the native language of a community (such as Krio in Sierra Leone and Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea). However, not all pidgins become creole languages; a pidgin may die out before this phase could occur.

Pidgins and creoles arise independently under different circumstances. Moreover, a pidgin needs not always precede a creole nor a creole evolve from a pidgin. Pidgins emerge among trade colonies, among users who preserve their native vernaculars for their day-to-day interactions. Creoles, meanwhile, developed in settlement colonies in which speakers of a European language, often indentured servants whose language would be far from the standard in the first place, interacted heavily with non-European slaves, absorbing certain words and features from the slaves' non-European native languages, resulting in a heavily basilectalised version of the original language. These servants and slaves would come to use the creole as an everyday vernacular, rather than merely in situations in which contact with a speaker of the superstrate was necessary.

In certain areas of the world, English has been used as a lexifier, that is, a language which is a source of words, for varieties of languages called pidgins. A pidgin, or a contact language, is a mixture of two other languages created usually because of trading purposes between peoples who do not share a common means of communication. English-based pidgins are used in India, Cameroon, and Nigeria, for example. Such varieties of languages often have limited vocabulary, poorly developed grammar and are used only when other types of communication are impossible.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Pidgins develop out of communicative necessities. Identify these necessities and discuss them.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

When a pidgin begins to be used by a large number of people, its vocabulary and grammar expand, and it starts to be used in a wider context. As it is developed as a contact language, pidgin does not have any native speakers, yet if it is used on a wider scale, children of people using it might acquire it as their mother tongue. When such a language starts to be used by a second generation of speakers, it is called a creole. It is the next stage of development of pidgin and it is characterised by different grammatical features such as avoidance of passive voice, lack of case distinction in pronouns, different word order. Pidgin is a language of necessity because it evolves out of the need to enhance communication among a vast populace with different sociolinguistic backgrounds.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

Pidgins grow with time and transform into other language forms. The process of the development of a pidgin into a creole is called *creolisation*, there is also a process of decreolisation, which stimulates further change of a language. When people using a creole have some contact with the standard language they tend to shift from one form to the other thus often changing the structures of creole to make it resemble the standard version, perceived as having higher social prestige. Pidgins have helped in making communication possible in a complex linguistic set up like multilingual settings.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Discuss the process of pidginisation
2. Describe the linguistic structure of pidgin languages
3. What factors resulted in the rise of Pidgin English in Nigeria?
4. Distinguish pidgin language from creole language
5. What is the possibility of a standard pidgin language in the world?

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## **UNIT 2      CREOLES AND CREOLIZATION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
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- 3.0 Main Content
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  - 3.2 History of Creoles
  - 3.3 Theories of Creoles
  - 3.4 Levels of Creoles

- 4.0 Conclusion
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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will study about the concept of creoles and creolisation. In many societies where languages of various kinds are used, there have been the conscious realisations of unique linguistic models which manifest in the form of languages. Creoles are languages of circumstance. They exist as forms that have become acceptable because it seemed the best possible way of carrying the people along in the communication process. We will examine the concept, nature and processes of creolisation in sociolinguistics.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state what creoles mean
- discuss the ways that creoles are formed
- explain the processes of creolisation in sociolinguistics
- identify creoles as sociolinguistic forms for communication
- distinguish between creoles and pidgins.

## **5.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Overview**

A creole language, or simply a creole, is a stable language that originates seemingly as a nativised pidgin. This understanding of creole's genesis culminated in notions of the pidgin-creole life cycle. While it is arguable that creoles share more grammatical similarities with each other than with the languages they phylo-genetically derive from, no theory for explaining creole phenomena has been universally accepted. The relationship between pidgins and creoles and their similarities means that the distinction is not clear-cut and the variety of phenomena that arise to create pidgins and creoles are not understood very well. Likewise, efforts to articulate grammatical features (or sets of features) that are exclusive to creoles have been unsuccessful thus far.

The concept of creolisation first came into prominence after the European discovery of the Americas to describe the process by which Old World life forms became indigenous in the New World. Today, 'creolisation' appears in writings on globalisation and post-modernity as

a synonym of 'hybridity' and 'syncretism' to portray the mixtures occurring amongst societies in an age of migration and telecommunications. The historical record reminds us that creolisation did not refer centrally to mixture, but just to the adaptive effects of living in a new environment.

A study of creoles brings together scholars from the fields of history (including historians of science/medicine), linguistics, anthropology, and literary/cultural studies to discuss the meanings of creole and creolisation. The questions that have often arisen include: Is society in the homeland a yardstick for measuring the divergent creole? Does the fact of ongoing creolisation (abroad) threaten the homeland? At what point do creoles renounce the homeland, claim independence, or become so utterly different as to be unrelated to it? Can creoles return 'home'? Can people de-creolise?

However, some sociolinguists have proposed the following list of features to indicate a Creole Prototype:

- i. no inflectional morphology (or no more than two or three inflectional affixes)
- ii. no tone on monosyllabics
- iii. no semantically opaque word formation

The hypothesis is that every language with these three features is a creole, and every creole must have these three features. The creole prototype hypothesis has been attacked from two different perspectives:

- a. Many linguists argue that languages such as Manding, Sooninke, Magoua French and Riau Indonesian have all these three features, but are natural languages like any other. These languages show none of the socio-historic traits of creole languages.
- b. Many other linguists have adduced one or the other creole language which responds positively to one of the three features (for example, inflectional morphology in Berbice Dutch Creole, tone in Papiamentu).

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Explain the possibility of a standard creole language in the world.

### **3.2 History of Creoles**

The term *creole* comes from French *créole*, from Spanish *criollo*, and from Portuguese *crioulo*, stemming from the verb *criar* ('to breed')



from the Portuguese, or *creare* from Latin ('to produce, create'). The term was coined in the sixteenth century during the great expansion in European maritime power and trade and the establishment of European colonies in the Americas, Africa, and along the coast of South and Southeast Asia, up to the Philippines, China, India, and in Oceania. The term "Creole" was originally applied to people born in the colonies to distinguish them from the upper-class European-born immigrants. Originally, therefore, "Creole language" meant the speech of those Creole peoples.

As a consequence of colonial European trade patterns, many creole languages are found in the equatorial belt around the world and in areas with access to the oceans, including the Caribbean as well as the north and east coasts of South America, western Africa and in the Indian Ocean. Atlantic Creole languages are based on European languages with substrate elements from Africa, Indian Ocean Creoles languages are based on European languages with substrate elements from Malagasy, whereas creoles such as Sango are African-based with African substrate elements from other African languages. There is a heated debate over the extent to which substrate features are significant in the genesis or the description of creole languages.

According to their external history, four types of creoles have been distinguished: *plantation creoles*, *fort creoles*, *maroon creoles*, and *creolised pidgins*. As to their internal history, there are two preconceived assumptions: Creoles exhibit more internal variability than other languages; Creoles are simpler than other languages. Because of the generally low status of the Creole peoples in the eyes of European colonial powers, creole languages have generally been regarded as degenerate or at best as rudimentary dialects of one of their parent languages. This is the reason why "creole" has come to be used in opposition to "language" rather than a qualifier for it. Another factor that may have contributed to the relative neglect of creole languages in linguistics is that they comfort critics of the 19th century neo-grammarians "tree model" for the evolution of languages and their law of the regularity of sound change. This controversy of the late 19th century profoundly shaped modern approaches to the comparative method in historical linguistics and in *creolistics*. Since then, linguists have promulgated the idea that creole languages are in no way inferior to other languages and use the term "creole" or "creole language" for any language suspected to have undergone creolisation, without geographic restrictions or ethnic prejudice.

As a consequence of these social, political, and academic changes, creole languages have experienced a revival in recent decades. They are increasingly and more openly being used in literature and in media, and

their community prestige has improved. They are studied by linguists as languages on their own. Many have already been standardised, and are now taught in local schools and universities abroad.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

From the discussion of the global history of creoles above, give the history of the creolisation in West Africa.

### **3.3 Theories of Creoles**

There are a variety of theories on the origin of creole languages, all of which attempt to explain the similarities among them. Arends, Muysken and Smith (1995) outline a fourfold classification of explanations regarding creole genesis: (1) Theories focusing on European input (2) Theories focusing on non-European input (3) Gradualist and developmental hypotheses (4) Universalist approaches. We shall examine these theories below:

#### **A Theories Focusing on European Input**

##### **1. The Monogenetic Theory of Pidgins and Creoles**

This theory hypothesises a single origin for these languages, deriving them through re-lexification from a West African Pidgin Portuguese of the 17th century and ultimately from the lingua franca of the Mediterranean. This theory was originally formulated in the late 19th century and popularised in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

##### **2. The Domestic Origin Hypothesis**

Proposed by Hancock (1985) for the development of a local form of English in West Africa, the Domestic Origin Hypothesis argues that, towards the end of the 16th century, English-speaking traders began to settle in the Gambia and Sierra Leone rivers as well as in neighbouring areas such as the Bullom and Sherbro Coasts. These settlers intermarried with the local population, leading to mixed populations; and, as a result of this intermarriage, an English pidgin was created, which in turn was learned by slaves in slave depots, who later on took it to the West Indies and formed one component of the emerging English creoles.

##### **3. European Dialect Origin Hypotheses**

The French creoles are the foremost candidates to being the outcome of “normal” linguistic change and their creoleness to be socio-historic in nature and relative to their colonial origin. Within this theoretical

framework, a French creole is a language phylo-genetically based on the French language, more specifically on a 17th century koiné French in Paris, the French Atlantic harbors, and the nascent French colonies. Descendants of the non-creole colonial koiné are still spoken in Canada (mostly in Québec), the Prairies, Louisiana, Saint-Barthélemy in the United States of America and as isolates in other parts of the Americas.

#### **4. Foreigner Talk or Baby Talk**

The foreigner talk hypothesis (FT) argues that a pidgin or creole language forms when native speakers attempt to simplify their language in order to address speakers who do not know their language at all. Because of the similarities found in this type of speech and the speech which is usually directed at children, it is also sometimes called baby talk.

#### **B Theories Focusing on Non-European Input**

Theories focusing on the substrate, or non-European, languages attribute similarities amongst creoles to the similarities of African substrate languages. These features are often assumed to be transferred from the substrate language to the creole or to be preserved invariant from the substrate language, in the creole through a process of relexification: the substrate language replaces the native lexical items with lexical material from the superstrate language, while retaining the native grammatical categories. The problem with this explanation is that the postulated substrate languages differ amongst themselves and from creoles in meaningful ways. Bickerton (1981) argues that the number and diversity of African languages and the paucity of a historical record on creole genesis makes determining lexical correspondences a matter of chance. Dillard (1970) coined the term “cafeteria principle” to refer to the practice of arbitrarily attributing features of creoles to the influence of substrate African languages or assorted substandard dialects of European languages.

#### **C Gradualist and Developmental Hypotheses**

One class of creoles might start as pidgins, rudimentary second languages improvised for use between speakers of two or more non-intelligible native languages. Keith Whinnom (in Hymes (1971)) suggests that pidgins need three languages to form, with one (the superstrate) being clearly dominant over the others. The lexicon of a creole is usually small and drawn from the vocabularies of its speakers, in varying proportions. Morphological details like word inflections, which usually take years to learn, are omitted; the syntax is kept very simple, usually based on strict word order. In this initial stage, all

aspects of the speech – syntax, lexicon, and pronunciation – tend to be quite variable, especially with regard to the speaker's background.

If a pidgin manages to be learned by the children of a community as a native language, it may become fixed and acquire a more complex grammar, with fixed phonology, syntax, morphology, and syntactic embedding. Pidgins can become full languages in only a single generation. “Creolisation” is this second stage where the pidgin language develops into a fully developed native language. The vocabulary, too, will contain more and more words according to a rational and stable system.

## D Universalist Approaches

Universalist models stress the intervention of specific general processes during the transmission of language from generation to generation and from speaker to speaker. The process invoked varies: a general tendency towards semantic transparency, first language learning driven by universal process, or general process of discourse organisation. The main source for the universalist approach is still Bickerton's work. His language bioprogram theory claims that creoles are inventions of the children growing up on newly founded plantations. Around them, they only heard pidgins spoken, without enough structure to function as natural languages; and the children used their own innate linguistic capacities to transform the pidgin input into a full-fledged language.

The last decade has seen the emergence of some new approaches to creole studies, namely the question of complexity of creoles and the question of whether creoles are “exceptional” languages.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain the theoretical approach which captures West African creolisation

## 3.4 Levels of Creoles

The terms **substratum** and **superstratum** are often used to label the source and the target languages of a creole or in the context of second language acquisition. However, the meaning of these terms is reasonably well-defined only in language replacement events, when the native speakers of a certain language (the substrate) are somehow compelled to abandon that language for another language (the superstrate). The outcome of such an event will be that erstwhile speakers of the substrate will be speaking a version of the superstrate, at least in more formal contexts. The substrate may survive as a second language for informal conversation (as in the case of Venetian and many

other European non-official languages). Its influence on the official speech, if detectable at all, is usually limited to pronunciation and a modest number of loanwords. The substrate might even disappear altogether without leaving any trace.

However, these terms are not very meaningful where the emerging language is distilled from multiple substrata and a homogeneous superstratum. The substratum-superstratum continuum becomes awkward when multiple superstrata must be assumed, when the substratum cannot be identified, or when the presence or the survival of substratal evidence is inferred from mere typological analogies. However, facts surrounding the substratum-superstratum opposition cannot be set aside where the substratum as the receding or already replaced source language and the superstratum as the replacing dominant target language can be clearly identified, and where the respective contributions to the resulting compromise language can be weighed in a scientifically meaningful way; and this is so whether the replacement leads to creole genesis or not.

With Atlantic Creoles, “superstrate” usually means European and “substrate” non-European or African. A post-creole continuum is said to come about in a context of decreolisation where a creole is subject to pressure from its superstrate language. Speakers of the creole feel compelled to conform to their language to superstrate usage introducing large scale variation and hypercorrection.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Discuss the substrata and superstrata in creoles. Use adequate examples.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

By the very nature of the subject, the creoleness of a particular creole usually is a matter of dispute. The parent tongues may themselves be creoles or pidgins that have disappeared before they could be documented. For these reasons, the issue of which language is the parent of a creole – that is, whether a language should be classified as a “Portuguese creole” or “English creole”, etc. – often has no definitive answer, and can become the topic of long-lasting controversies, where social prejudices and political considerations may interfere with scientific discussion. If creole languages form a group which is different from other languages, they should have a set of features which clearly distinguishes them from “other” languages. Some features have been proposed, but no uncontested unique creole features have been put forth so far. Features that are said to be true of all (or most) creole languages are in fact true of all isolating languages in the studies. Such

features are then necessary but not sufficient to single out creole languages from non-creole languages.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Many linguists believe that the world's simplest grammars are Creole grammars, not that Creoles are the simplest languages. The lack of progress made in defining creoles morpho-syntactically has led some scholars to question the value of Creole as a typological class. Some sociolinguists have argued that Creole languages are structurally no different from any other language, and that Creole is in fact a socio-historic concept (and not a linguistic one *per se*), encompassing displaced population and slavery and that the idea of creole exceptionalism is an instance of non-genetic language change due to the language shift without normal transmission. Gradualists question the abnormal transmission of languages in a creole setting and argue that the processes which lead to today's creole languages are in no way different from the universal patterns of language change. Given that the concept of creoleness is disputed on both morpho-syntactic and evolutionary grounds, the idea of creoles being exceptional in any meaningful way is increasingly questioned, giving rise to publications entitled against creoles, which argue that it is only history that turns languages into potential creoles.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Trace the history of creoles in Africa.
2. Explain the characteristics of creoles.
3. What are the indices of creolisation in Nigerian Pidgin English?
4. Discuss any of the theories of creolisation with examples.
5. Identify the relationship between creoles and pidgins.

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### **UNIT 3      CONCEPT OF STANDARD USAGE**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Pronunciation and Standard Language
  - 3.3 National Standard English: Variants of Standard English
  - 3.4 The Nigerian English as a National Standard Variant
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will examine the concept of standardisation in languages, using English language as reference point. We will study the concept of Standard English, the evolution of standard language, and the use of phonology in the identification of standard forms. Every language has a standard form from which other forms emerge. Noam Chomsky (1965) identified the concept of competence, which guides one in the identification of standard forms. Competence is the idealised form of every language while performance relates to individual and group application of the forms.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- elucidate on the existence of standard language
- distinguish a standard language from other varieties of the language
- explain that other varieties imitate the standard form
- identify Standard English with its phonology
- identify standard language as a sociolinguistic tool of measurement.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 General Overview

According to Quirk *et al.* (1979), the degree of acceptance of a single standard of English throughout the world, across a multiplicity of political and social systems, is a truly remarkable phenomenon: the more so since the extent of the uniformity involved has, if anything, increased in the present century. Uniformity is greatest in what is, from most viewpoints, the least important type of linguistic organisation – the purely secondary one of orthography. In fact, in all English-speaking countries, people tend to retain a tiny element of individual decision as in spellings (realise, -ise; judg(e)ment; etc), there is basically a single, graphological spelling and punctuation system throughout: with two minor subsystems. The one is the subsystem with British orientation (used in all English-speaking countries except the United States) with distinctive forms in only a small class of words, *colour, centre, levelled,*



etc. The other is the American subsystem: *color*, *center*, *leveled*, etc. In Canada, the British subsystem is used for the most part, but some publishers (especially of popular material) follow the American subsystem and some a mixture (*color* but *centre*). In the United States of America, some newspaper publishers (not book publishers) use a few additional separate spellings such as *thru* for *through*. One minor orthographic point is oddly capable of Anglo-American misunderstanding: the numerical form of dates. In British (and European) practice '7/11/72' would mean '7 November 1972', but in American practice it would mean 'July 11 1972'.

In grammar and vocabulary, Standard English presents somewhat less of a monolithic character, but even so the world-wide agreement is extraordinary and seems actually to be increasing under the impact of closer world communication and the spread of identical material and non-material culture. The uniformity is especially close in neutral or formal styles of written English on subject matter not of obviously localised interest: in such circumstances one can frequently go on for page after page without encountering a feature which would identify the English as belonging to one of the national standards.

Thus, Standard English is comparable to Noam Chomsky's Competence, which is an idealised pattern of usage assumed to be the 'standard format' for measuring perfection in English language usage. No matter the dialect or variety of English in use the measuring standard remains these idealised forms which must be complied with as it operates within stated linguistic rules. Standard English is a guide towards avoiding those elements of imperfection resulting from social, environmental, cultural and political idealisms affecting the correct use of English.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

A standard language is a rule for checkmating errors in a language by the second language users. Is this true in the emergence of Standard English usage?

### **3.2 Pronunciation and Standard English**

One of the basic criteria for identifying Standard English proper is through pronunciation. This does not exhaust the regional or national variants that approximate to the status of a standard, but the important point to stress is that all of them are remarkable primarily in the tiny extent to which even the most firmly established, British English (BrE) and American English (AmE), differ from each other in vocabulary, grammar and orthography. Pronunciation is a special case for several

reasons. In the first place, it is the type of linguistic organisation which distinguishes one national standard from another almost immediately and completely and which links, in a most obvious way, the national standards to the regional varieties. Secondly, it is the least institutionalised aspect of Standard English, in the sense that, provided our grammar and lexical items conform to the appropriate national standard, it matters less that our pronunciation follows closely our individual regional pattern. Quirk *et al.* (1979) emphasised that ‘this is doubtless because pronunciation is essentially gradient, a matter of ‘more or less’ rather than the discrete ‘this or that’ features of grammar and lexicon. Thirdly, norms of pronunciation are subject less to educational and national constraints than to social ones: this means, in effect, that some regional accents are less acceptable for ‘network use’ than others.

In BrE, one type of pronunciation comes close to enjoying the status of ‘standard’: it is the accent associated with the English public schools, ‘Received Pronunciation’ or ‘RP’. Because this has traditionally been transmitted through a private education system based upon boarding schools, insulated from the locality in which they happen to be situated, it is importantly non-regional, and this – together with the obvious prestige that the social importance of its speakers has conferred on it – has been one of its strengths as a lingua franca. But RP no longer has the unique authority it had in the first half of the twentieth century. It is now only one of the accents commonly used on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and takes its place along with others which carry the unmistakable mark of regional origin – not least, an Australian or North American or African origin. Thus, the rule that a specific type of pronunciation is relatively unimportant seems to be in the process of losing the notable exception that RP has constituted.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

A pronunciation pattern like the RP is not the only indication for Standard English usage. State the other criteria.

### **3.3 National Standard English: A Variant of Standard English**

English language varieties in most countries have assumed a national standard of English usage. These standards rather than the British Standard English are aspired to in the educational institutions. Scots, with ancient national and educational institutions, is perhaps nearest to the self-confident independence of BrE and AmE, though the differences in grammar and vocabulary are rather few. There is the preposition *outwith* ‘except’ and some other grammatical features, and

such lexical items as *advocate* in the sense ‘practising lawyer’ or *bailie* ‘municipal magistrate’ and several others which, like this, refer to Scottish affairs. Orthography is identical with BrE though *burgh* corresponds closely to ‘borough’ in meaning and might almost be regarded as a spelling variant. But this refers only to official Scots usage.

Irish English should also be regarded as a national standard for, though we lack descriptions of this long-standing variety of English, it is consciously and explicitly regarded as independent of BrE by educational and broadcasting services. The proximity of Britain, the easy movement of population, and like factors mean however that there is little room for the assertion and development of separate grammar and vocabulary. In fact, it is probable that the influence of BrE (and even AmE) is so great on both Scots and Irish English that independent features will diminish rather than increase with time.

Canadian English is in a similar position in relation to AmE. Close economic, social and intellectual links along a 4000-mile frontier have naturally caused the larger community to have an enormous influence on the smaller, not least in language. Though in many respects (zed instead of zee, for example, as the name of the letter ‘z’), Canadian English follows British rather than United States practice, and has a modest area of independent lexical use (*pogey* ‘welfare payment’, *riding* ‘parliamentary constituency’, *muskeg* ‘kind of bog’), in many other respects, it has approximated to AmE, and in the absence of strong institutionalising forces, it seems likely to continue in this direction.

South Africa, Australia and New Zealand are in a very different position, remote from the direct day-to-day impact of either BrE or AmE. While in orthography and grammar the South African English in educated use is virtually identical with BrE, rather considerable differences in vocabulary have developed, largely under the influence of the other official language of the country, Afrikaans. For example, *veld* ‘open country’, *koppie* ‘hillock’, *dorp* ‘village’, *konfyt* ‘candied peel’. Because of the remoteness from Britain or America, few of these words have spread: an exception is *trek* ‘journey’.

New Zealand English is more like BrE than any other non-European variety, though it has adopted quite a number of words from the indigenous *Maoris* (for example, *whare* ‘hut’ and of course *kiwi* and other names for fauna and flora), and over the past half century has come under the powerful influence of Australia and to a considerable extent of the United States.

Like it happened with many other national varieties of English in Africa, Nigerian English has grown and extended through the processes of borrowing, semantic shift and extension, syntactic innovations, etc. Much of what is distinctive in Nigerian English is confined to familiar use. There are many lexical items that are to be regarded as fully of standard use in Nigerian English even though they were originally borrowed from the indigenous languages: *agidi*, *amala*, *agbada*, *okporoko*, etc. According to Olaoye (2007), this is just one of the processes through which the African English has grown in many of the African countries.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What factors are responsible for the option of a national standard of English in many countries instead of British Standard English?

#### 3.4 Nigerian English as a National Standard Variant

The reality of a Nigerian English has however continued to carry a question mark (Olaoye, 2007). This is because some scholars view it with suspicion while others regard it as a necessity in order to distinctly carve out a Nigerian identity in the English language world. But much more controversial is the issue of standard. As far as we know for now, there is yet to be a standard form of the Nigerian English. Jowitt (1991) suggests that the distinction between Nigerian English and Standard Nigerian English has not been clearly maintained by scholars in the literature and has therefore help to contribute to the lingering controversy. What is obvious is that there remains a consistent and continuing call for the codification and standardisation of the Nigerian variety of English in order to realise it as a distinct national variety (cf. Jowitt, 1991; Olaoye, 2007). Jowitt however holds the view that Popular Nigerian English is a more reasonable or less controversial appellation.

Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that Nigerian English is a dominant form of English in Nigeria. And by reason of Nigeria's increased wealth, population and influence in African affairs, this national English is exerting some influence on the continent, particularly in West Africa. This may be accounted for by the sheer volume of English-based home videos Nigeria sends into the African and other international markets. This accessibility of the African countries to Nigerian films thus creates an avenue of cultural influence for Nigerian English on the continent.

It should, however, be mentioned that Nigerian English has sub-varieties like Hausa English, Igbo English, Yoruba English, Northern English, Southern English, and Educated Nigerian English, etc. classified based on ethnic/regional affiliations of the speakers. This also has consequence

for the phonological and lexical elements in the Nigerian English. The most integrated of the sub-variety is the educated Nigerian English which has the potential of being adopted as the national standard form; if and when the English language eventually gets standardised in Nigeria.

Olaoye (2007) and Jowitt (1991) give some examples of elements of Nigerian English in current use. These elements are the things that mark the English as being distinctly Nigerian. Jowitt (1991) calls such elements Nigerianisms in English and identifies such popular usages of English as Popular Nigerian English. The examples below thus appear to support the view of scholars like Adetugbo (1984), Bamgbose (1971), Banjo (1970), Jibril (1982), Odumuh (1980, 1982) [all cited in Olaoye (2007)], Banjo (1991), Jowitt (1991) that hold that Nigerian English exists. These subsequent examples occurred at various linguistic levels.

**Phonological**

- /t/ is sometimes used instead of /θ/
- /d/ ..... /ð/
- /□/ ..... /□/
- /f/ ..... /v/
- /s/ ..... /□/
- /dʒ/ ..... /ʒ/

These phonological substitutions sometimes occur even in the spoken English of the educated Nigerians, especially when such people are not conscious in their language usage.

**Lexical**

Go slow	traffic jam
Invitees	guests
Machine	motor cycle
Too much	very much
Omoge/sisi	young lady
Bobo	young man
Call	phone call
Trek	walk

**Syntactic**

[Omission of function words e. g. determiners]  
 He won by overwhelming majority  
 He gave me tough time

[Wrong form of response to negative questions]

Didn't you eat the mango? Yes, I didn't eat it.  
You didn't take the bag from him yesterday, did you? Yes, I didn't.

### ***Semantic***

Semantic extension (extending the original English meaning)  
You're a big somebody (i.e. an important person).  
The lady saw one person (i.e. someone).  
He called me (i. e. rang me up).  
Thanks for yesterday (translation from indigenous language).  
Let me land (Let me finish what I'm saying, Don't interrupt me).

Semantic shift (redefinition of the characteristic meaning of the word within the semantic field) e.g.

Machine	sewing machine/motorcycle
Minerals	soft drinks
Brother/sister	any relative or even a friend

You may find other examples in your interaction with others.  
Obviously, Nigerian English does not only exist but it is very creative in nature.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Give some examples of Nigerian English phonological and lexical usages you have observed in your interactions with your friends and colleagues.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The important point to stress is English acquired by speakers of other languages, whether as a foreign or as a second language, varies not merely with the degree of proficiency attained but with the specific native language background. The Frenchman who says, '*I am here since Thursday*' is imposing a French grammatical usage on English; the Russian who says '*There are four assistants in our chair of mathematics*' is imposing a Russian lexico-semantic usage on the English word '*chair*'. Most obviously, we always tend to impose our native phonological pattern on any foreign language we learn. At the opposite extreme are interference varieties that are so widespread in a community and of such long standing that they may be thought stable and adequate enough to be institutionalised and regarded as varieties of English in their own right rather than stages on the way to a more native-like English or Standard English. There is active debate on these issues in India, Pakistan, Nigeria, and several African countries, where

efficient and fairly stable varieties of English are prominent in educated use at the highest political and professional levels.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Apart from the interferences from the local languages towards proper standardisation of English, there is also the influence of pidgins and creoles of English in most countries. At the extremes of Creole and Pidgin there is especial interdependence between the form of language and the occasion and purposes of use: indeed, the very name *Pidgin* (from ‘business’) reminds us that its nature is inclined to be restricted to a few practical subjects. Creole is usually more varied, but again it tends to be used for limited subject matter (local, practical and family affairs). As for English taught at an advanced intellectual level as a second or foreign language, our constant concern must be that enough proficiency will be achieved to allow the user the flexibility he needs in handling public administration, a learned discipline such as medicine with its supporting scientific literature, and informal social intercourse. To create a standard means to obey rules for its existence. Every learner of English aims at the attainment of almost an error-free standard but it must be borne in mind that the native speakers of English are not conscious of errors in the language the way the second and foreign learners are conscious.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Describe clearly the factors inhibiting the attainment of Standard English teaching outside Britain
2. ‘Received Pronunciation’ seemed a pronunciation standard for recognising Standard English. What are the other linguistic criteria for attaining this standard?
3. Differentiate properly between ‘Standard English’ and ‘National English Standard’
4. Pidgins and Creoles are real problems in the standardisation of English worldwide. Explain the concepts properly with examples.
5. Many English linguists like Quirk, Chomsky and Halliday believe that English language responds to changes. Is it possible to have changes and still retain standards?

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## **UNIT 4      SLANGS AND CLICHÉS IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Slangs as Sociolinguistic Forms
  - 3.3 Jargons and Clichés in Sociolinguistics
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will study the concept of slang in sociolinguistics. There are various ways by which people express themselves. This could be determined by the environment or the immediacy of such communication within a given time-frame. However, there are acceptable informal linguistic priorities available to speakers of a language within a given geographical entity in order to pass information at informal levels and relationships. We will assess slang within the sociolinguistics of English language, using clichés and jargons as slang types.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- see slangs as sociolinguistic forms
- differentiate slangs from formal language use
- identify slangs in communication
- discuss the sociolinguistic implications of slangs.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 General Overview

Slangs tend to originate in subcultures within a society. Occupational groups (for example, loggers, police, medical professionals, and computer specialists) are prominent originators of both jargon and slang. A jargon is the vocabulary (lexical items of expression) of a restricted code like a register while slang is a type of restricted language like the secret language of a cult, whose vocabulary component is necessarily a jargon. Other groups creating slang include the armed forces, teenagers, racial minorities, ghetto residents, labour unions, citizens-band radio broadcasters, sports groups, drug addicts, criminals, and even religious denominations (Episcopalians, for example, produced *spike*, a High Church Anglican). Slang expressions often embody attitudes and values of group members. They may thus contribute to a sense of group identity and may convey to the listener information about the speaker's background. Slang refers to short-lived coinages that do not belong to a language's standard vocabulary. Before an apt expression becomes slang, however, it must be widely adopted by members of the subculture. At this point, slang and jargon overlap greatly. If the subculture has enough contact with the mainstream culture, its figures of speech become slang expressions known to the whole society. For example, *cat* (a sport), *cool* (aloof, stylish), *Mr. Charley* (a white man), *The Man* (the law), and *Uncle Tom* (a meek black) all originated in the

predominantly black Harlem district of New York City and have travelled far since their inception. Slang is thus generally not tied to any geographic region within a country.

A slang expression may suddenly become widely used and as quickly dated (*23-skiddoo*). It may become accepted as standard speech, either in its original slang meaning (*bus*, from *omnibus*) or with an altered, possibly tamed meaning (*jazz*, which originally had sexual connotations). Some expressions have persisted for centuries as slang (*booze* for alcoholic beverage). In the 20th century, mass media and rapid travel have speeded up both the circulation and the demise of slang terms. Television and novels have turned criminal cant into slang (*five grand* for ₦5,000). Changing social circumstances may stimulate the spread of slang. Drug-related expressions (such as *pot* for marijuana) were virtually a secret jargon in the 1940s; in the 1960s they were adopted by rebellious youth; and in the 1970s and '80s they were widely known.

In some cases, slang may provide a needed name for an object or action (*walkie-talkie*, a portable two-way radio; *tailgating*, driving too close behind another vehicle), or it may offer an emotional outlet (*buzz off!* for go away!) or a satirical or patronising reference (*smokey*, state highway trooper). It may provide euphemisms (*john*, *head*, *can*, and in Britain, *loo*, all for toilet, itself originally a euphemism), and it may allow its user to create a shock effect by using a pungent slang expression in an unexpected context. Slang has provided myriad synonyms for parts of the body (*bean*, head; *schnozzle*, nose), for money (*moola*, *bread*, *scratch*), for food (*grub*, *slop*, *garbage*), and for drunkenness (*soused*, *stewed*, *plastered*).

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Identify the basic sociolinguistic characteristics of slang.

## 3.2 Slangs as Sociolinguistic Forms

Slang, informal, non-standard words and phrases, generally shorter lived than the expressions of non-standard, ordinary colloquial speech, and typically formed by creative, often witty, juxtapositions of words or images. Slang can be contrasted with jargon (technical language of occupational or other groups) and with argot or cant (secret vocabulary of underworld groups), but the borderlines separating these categories from slang are greatly blurred, and some writers use the terms *cant*, *argot*, and *jargon* in a general way to include all the foregoing meanings. Slang is traditionally considered as a vulgar, offensive, and profane form of language with a strong colour of irreverence and yet vitality in a society. It is generally labelled as a linguistic taboo which

should not be appearing in most formal social occasions. Since it is “customarily reported as the idiosyncratic and deviant vocabulary of quirky or suspicious groups” (Eble, 1998: 42), slang has always been neglected, if not ignored, in sociolinguistics. Therefore, formal and theoretical discussions of slang in sociolinguistic perspectives are largely absent.

Very often, lexicographical documentation, semantic classification, and etymological description of slang items are the primary, if not the only, focus in traditional studies of slang. In most countries, there is much less official tolerance of bad language [slang] in the territory than is the case, for example, in Britain. Sociological analysis of slang has revealed that the use of slang has sociolinguistic implications. Dealing with the notion that every speaker handles a variety of registers and tends to choose among them in accordance with the particular social situation in which he finds himself, this study of slang reveals some of the particular lexical varieties which are particularly deliberate and intended to reveal a special kind of usage which has sociolinguistic leaning in its application in human utterance. It is apparent that every community harbours its own unique set of lexical vocabulary which is fully intelligible only to the initiates; this unique and elaborate lexicon thus serves to achieve group identity and has many other social implications.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Discuss slangs as sociolinguistic forms.

### **3.3 Jargons and Clichés in Sociolinguistics**

#### **A Clichés [Sociolinguistic Implications]**

Ordinarily, a cliché is an overused expression; that is, a phrase or word that has lost its original effectiveness or power from overuse. It can also be seen as an overused idea, an overused activity or notion. Clichés are phrases or expressions that have lost their impact through overuse. Every cliché once seemed clever and pithy. Like a joke, however, the more a cliché is repeated, the duller it comes to sound. Too often, weary writers lean on clichés when they are unable to come up with an original turn of phrase. They may also slip a cliché into uninteresting prose in a desperate (and misguided) attempt to give it some liveliness. Using a cliché for this purpose is almost always a mistake. Any drama generated by the cliché will seem artificial, and its presence will only emphasise the blandness of the surrounding words. Instead of trying to mask boring

writing with a cliché, try revising your work to make it more compelling.

Although an occasional cliché is acceptable, before using one, always ask yourself whether it is the best way to say what you want to say. If there is any possibility that you can create a fresher phrase on your own, forget the cliché and try again. Also stop to consider who will be reading your document, and whether they will be as familiar with the cliché's meaning as you are. If, for instance, your audience is Japanese, promising that "we will leave no stone unturned until the problem is solved" will likely inspire more head-scratching than confidence. The list below includes common clichés that are commonly used in English language informal usage, and which are used with discretion in formal writing:

add insult to injury		
agree to disagree	busy as a bee	hook, line, and sinker
all in a day's work	calm before the storm	in the same boat
as luck would have it	cut down in one's prime	last but not least
at a loss for words	dead as a doornail	leave no stone
beginning of the end	diamond in the rough	untuned
benefit of the doubt	dig in one's heels	lock, stock, and barrel
better late than never	easier said than done	make a long story
better left unsaid	equal to the occasion	short
burning the midnight oil	exception that proves the	make a mountain out

## **B Jargon and Argot [sociolinguistic implications]**

Jargon is the vocabulary used exclusively by a particular group, such as the members of a profession or a subculture. *Argot* refers to a nonstandard vocabulary used by secret groups, particularly criminal organisations, usually intended to render communications incomprehensible to outsiders. A jargon comprises the specialised vocabulary of a particular trade or profession, especially when it is incomprehensible to outsiders, as with legal jargon.

Although a jargon sometimes communicates new ideas, it also serves to separate people inside the group from people outside of it. By its very definition, jargon is only understood by a select few and is therefore usually not the most effective tool available to you for communicating your ideas. Medicine, law, education, the military, the entertainment world, and most academic disciplines have their own jargons. The

jargons of bureaucracy and business, however, are probably the most widespread and are thus the jargons many people know best and are most tempted to use.

In many business settings, using jargon is almost required, but you should try to avoid it as much as possible. While some of your colleagues may see jargon as the badge of a true insider, many others will regard it as pretentious, smug, and evidence of a lazy mind. The list below includes examples of business jargon that have been resoundingly derided in recent years:

*bottom line*: The *bottom line* is that he should be fired.  
*communication*: You should send a *communication* to his firm.  
*credentialed*: The applicant is properly *credentialed*.  
*dialogue* (as a verb): We need to *dialogue* about the problem.  
*expedite*: What can we do to *expedite* the process?  
*facilitate*: A manager should *facilitate* her staff's efforts.  
*feedback*: Let me know your *feedback*.  
*impact* (as a verb): How will this *impact* our deadline?  
*implement*: *Implement* this plan as soon as possible.  
*in the affirmative*: The supervisor replied *in the affirmative*.  
*input*: I would like to have your *input*.  
*interface*: We need to *interface* with other departments.  
*leverage*: To get approval on the plan, we need more *leverage*.  
*liaise*: You should *liaise* between the two departments.  
*optimize*: What should we do to *optimize* morale?  
*parameters*: We need to set precise *parameters*.  
*prioritize*: I need to *prioritize* my goals.  
*proactive*: A *proactive* approach will allow us to continue to dominate the market.  
*process*: We should all participate in the decision-making *process*.  
*same*: If you took my stapler, please return *same*.  
*scenario*: If the market shifts, what *scenario* will follow?  
*time frame*: I will finish the report within an acceptable *time frame*.  
*utilize*: How should we best *utilize* this information?  
*viable*: Let me know if this plan is *viable*.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

There are cultural implications in cliché and jargon usage. How true is this with regard to English language?

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Slang expressions are created by the same processes that affect ordinary speech. Expressions may take form as metaphors, similes, and other

figures of speech. Words may acquire new meanings (*cool, cat*). A narrow meaning may become generalised (*fink*, originally a strike-breaker, later a betrayer or disappointer) or vice-versa (*heap*, a run-down car). Words may be clipped, or abbreviated (*mike*, microphone, *IV*, invitation card), and acronyms may gain currency (*VIP, AWOL, snafu*). A foreign suffix may be added (the Yiddish and Russian *-nik* in *beatnik*) and foreign words adopted (*baloney*, from Bologna, *waka-well*, by students from Nigerian pidgin). A change in meaning may make a vulgar word acceptable (*jazz*) or an acceptable word vulgar (*raspberry*, a sound imitating flatus; from *raspberry tart* in the rhyming slang of Australia). It is a sociolinguistic tool that captures newer linguistic forms that are generated within the confines of linguistic requirements of the people.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Slang, *argot*, and jargon are more specialised terms for certain social language varieties usually defined by their specialised vocabularies. Most times words are newly coined in a language. Slang is one of the vehicles through which languages change and become renewed, and its vigour and colour enrich daily speech. Although it has gained respectability in the 20th century, in the past it was often loudly condemned as vulgar. Nevertheless, Shakespeare brought into acceptable usage such slang terms as *hubbub, to bump, and to dwindle*, and 20th-century writers have used slang brilliantly to convey character and ambience. Slang appears at all times and in all languages. A person's head was *kapala* (dish) in Sanskrit, *testa* (pot) in Latin; *testa* later became the standard Latin word for head. Among Western languages, English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Yiddish, Romanian, and Romani (Gypsy) are particularly rich in slang. Nigerian derived many slangs from the indigenous languages and the Nigerian pidgin: *mumu, akpuruka, omoge, sisi, bobo, over-sabi*, etc.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss slang as a sociolinguistic identifier
2. What factors give rise to slang in a society?
3. Explain the use of slang in English sociolinguistic situations
4. Slang could mean class and regional forms. Discuss
5. Differentiate clichés from jargons in sociolinguistic sense.

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## **UNIT 5     TABOOS AND PROFANE USAGE**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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  - 3.2 Profanity in Language Use
  - 3.3 Profanity in Languages
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading
- 1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will study the concept of profanity or taboo language in sociolinguistics. Since language is a social tool, there are certain rules which apply in the application of language. In many societies of the world, there are certain words or expressions which are considered odd, bad or profane when used because they constitute insult, assault or desecration of social mores. In many African societies, for example, there are stated cultural laws pertaining to the use of language in social situations, which, if violated, results in severe cultural punishment, total condemnation or reprimand. We will examine the concept of taboo or profanity, profanity in language use and profanity in world languages.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- trace the origin of profanity
- see profanity as a social linguistic abhorrence
- differentiate the use of words in profane situation from the other use
- identify profane language in world societies/cultures
- avoid the use of profanity in English language.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 General Overview

Terms of profanity have historically been taboo words. Some words that were originally considered profane have become much less offensive with the increasing secularity of society. Others, primarily racial or ethnic epithets, can be considered part of hate speech and are now considered more profane than they once were.

William Shakespeare hinted at the word *cunt* in *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night* and *Henry V*: Hamlet makes reference to “country matters” when he tries to lay his head in Ophelia’s lap; Malvolio has the salacious line (although the term *cunt* was an accepted euphemism for vagina in the early sixteenth century) “These be her very c’s, her u’s, and her t’s, and thus she makes her great p’s”; and the French Princess Katherine is amused by the word gown for its similarity to the French con. Interestingly, the word *cunt*, while retaining its original meaning in



America, has changed in meaning somewhat in Great Britain in the past thirty years. Where American usage of the word mostly refers to either female anatomy or (in extreme cases) an ill-tempered woman, *cunt* in the UK has attained the status of a gender-neutral insult.

In the U.S. today, racial slurs are uniquely profane words in that they are considered highly offensive and hurtful. This is most clearly shown in the attention given to use of the word *nigger*, now effectively banned in American public discourse, although many African-Americans use the word *nigga* but context is very important; thus, Americans of African descent might use ‘nigger’ in informal situations among themselves, without being considered offensive. Blacks are now becoming more sensitive to the word being used even amongst themselves and may thus still offend. The word in mention, in certain social groups, as a casual reference to black people is still in frequent use. Some mistakenly associate the unrelated word *niggardly* (meaning “stingy”) with ‘nigger.’ Words such as *faggot* and *fag*, though incidentally sexual in nature, are considered highly offensive and derogatory toward gay people, yet have undergone similar changes to *nigga* when being used by the gay community.

Many of the words now considered most ‘profane’ are held to be so because they were created to insult and disparage a particular group. Some of the targets of these words have however attempted to reclaim them and reduce their power as insults. Other ethnic slurs like *coon*, *porch monkey*, *Alabama porch monkey*, *afrodite*, *sausage lips*, *tar baby*, *darkie* (African-American), *dottie* (Indian/Pakistani), *chink*, *gook* (Asian), *beaner*, *wetback*, *spic* (Hispanic-American), *guinea*, *wop*, *dago* (Italian), *honky*, *gringo*, *cracker* (whites), *heeb* (Jewish), *kraut* (German – used especially during World War II), *sand nigger*, *raghead*, *towelhead*, “rug merchant” (Sikh, or Arab in the US); and pejoratives like *fattie*, *retard*, and *redneck* or *hillbilly* aren't entirely profane at all times, but can be considered very offensive when used in the company of certain people, and not socially acceptable in polite settings or social situations.

The offensiveness or perceived intensity or vulgarity of the various profanities can change over time, with certain words becoming more or less offensive as time goes on. For example, in modern times the word *piss* is usually considered mildly vulgar and somewhat impolite, whereas the King James Bible unblushingly employs it where modern translators would prefer the word *urine* (2 Kings 18:27; Isa 36:12) or *urinate* (1Sam 25:22, 25:34; 1Kings 14:10, 16:11, 21:21; 2Kings 9:8). The word *cunt* has seen a similar evolution; its ancestor – *queynte* – was not considered vulgar at all, but the word is now considered among the most offensive in the English language.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

With reference to the Nigerian society, identify some profane words and explain why they are regarded as such.

### **3.2 Profanity in Language Usage**

A profanity will have an original meaning (which may change across time and language) which in itself may give some cause for offense. Additionally, many profanities will have applied meanings of their own, usually associated to their context and which therefore may vary significantly depending upon the intended purpose of the word in the sentence. For example, “fuck”, a common (often considered strong) profanity in English, is a verb for the act of sexual intercourse and may be used literally in this sense. It is also used in the context of an exclamation (“Fucking hell!”) or to refer to acts of violence (“He really fucked that guy up.”), or to an error (“You fucked up again, you’re fired.”). It can also be used to add emphasis to a sentence.

The degree to which a profanity is offensive relies upon how the use of the word affects an individual. Some will consider the original meaning of a word (for example, the sexual act) to be offensive or a subject not fit for polite conversation (cf Ephesians 5:3 “...it is not right that any matters of sexual immorality or indecency or greed should even be mentioned among you. Nor is it fitting for you to use language which is obscene, profane or vulgar” while others will have no objection to these subject matters. Some will feel that certain words, having an established social taboo are simply offensive, regardless of any context; others will find profanities offensive mainly when used in a way deliberately intended to offend.

Furthermore, some may be in the habit of using profanity in order to seem cool. Thus, insults can even be used as terms of endearment. A 2007 peer reviewed study by the University of East Anglia found that banning profanity in the workplace and reprimanding staff for using it could have a negative effect on morale and motivation. According to the study, while swearing in front of senior staff or customers should be seriously discouraged or banned, in other circumstances it helped foster solidarity among employees and relieve frustration, stress or other feelings.

Finally, profanities may cause offense, regardless of context, if they have some religious meaning which may cause their use to offend those who follow a particular religion. The original meaning of the term was restricted to blasphemy, sacrilege or saying the Abrahamic God’s name

(or an identifier such as Lord or God) in vain. Such religious profanity is referred to as blasphemy.

As the concept of profanity has been extended to include expressions with scatological, derogatory, racist, or sexual interpretations, the broader concept of “politically incorrect” language has emerged, with religious meaning playing a varying role, and the more vague and inclusive interpretation blurring the distinction between categories of offensiveness. This modern concept of profanity has evolved differently in different cultures and languages. For example, many profanities in Canadian French are a corruption of religious terminology (the *sacres*), while many English obscenities tend to refer to sexuality or scatology. A term that functions as a profanity in one language may often lack any profane quality when translated into another language.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

The degree to which a profanity is offensive relies upon how the use of the word affects an individual. Discuss.

### 3.3 Profanity in Languages

#### A International Languages

International auxiliary languages are often assumed to have little or no profanity, but this varies from one language to another. The basic criterion for inclusion is widespread international use, and this can be as true of a profanity as any other word or phrase. Thus, expressions such as *cunno* (cunt), *mierda* (shit), and *pipi* (pee-pee) may be used in Interlingua. *Culo* (ass or butt) and its derivative *incular* (to butt-fuck) are also Interlingua expressions. *Fottar* (to fuck) is used much as in English, e.g., “*Fotta te!*” (“Fuck you!”) or “*Mi auto es fottate!*” (“My car is fucked!”).

#### B Profanity in Different Languages and Religions

For reasons of differing cultural, linguistic and historical backgrounds, the profanities of different languages place emphasis on different subject matters. Here is a list showing the main emphases for some languages:

- i) **Arabic:** sacrilege/blasphemy, excrement, sex, homosexuality, gender identity, insulting female family members, animals, and reproductive organs.
- ii) **Chinese:** sex, insults to family members, cursing (e.g., the Cantonese phrase “*hum gah chan*” literally means death to one's entire family).

- iii) **Czech:** equating people with animals (ox, cow), reproductive organs, sex, prostitution, blasphemy, political party member (communist)
- iv) **Dravidian Languages:** Cursing (saavugiraaki implies that the recipient is about to die), questioning one's parentage.
- v) **Dutch:** reproductive organs, excrement, homosexuality, equating people with animals (most notably pig, dog and cow), diseases, racial and ethnic hatred, prostitution, mental illness and blasphemy supplemented with English swearwords.
- vi) **English:** sex, excrement, homosexuality, religion, incest, bigotry, racial and ethnic hatred, prostitution, reproductive organs, and questioning one's parentage.
- vii) **French:** prostitution, homosexuality, excrement, racial and ethnic hatred.
- viii) **French (Canada):** religion, sex, prostitution, racial and ethnic hatred.
- ix) **German:** Equating people with animals, (eg., Schweinehund), sex, excrement, Nazi terms.
- x) **Hebrew:** Yiddish and Arabic loanwords having sexual meaning, sex, prostitution.
- xi) **Indo-Aryan Languages:** insults to family members (especially incest).
- xii) **Indonesian:** sex, reproductive organs, excrement, equating people with animals (most notably dog and monkey), racial and ethnic hatred.
- xiii) **Irish:** religion (damnation, blasphemy), some sexual terms, some excrement.
- xiv) **Italian:** blasphemy, some sexual terms, personal insults (e.g. "your mother").
- xv) **Japanese:** sex, violations of politeness protocols, discriminatory language, mocking status, insulting intelligence, suggesting death of another.
- xvi) **Korean:** Impolite responses to people (especially family and authority), references to animals, sexual terms.
- xvii) **Norwegian:** Predominantly religion and blasphemy in the south, reproductive organs and sexual acts with animals in the north.
- xviii) **Nigerian:** religion, nature, insult, greetings, sexual terms, excrement, prostitution, stealing, hatred. All these have ethnic bias in Nigeria.
- xix) **Polish:** sex, prostitution, homosexuality, diseases, excrement, comparing people to animals (particularly pigs and dogs).
- xx) **Portuguese:** sex, homosexuality, prostitution, reproductive organs, excrement.
- xxi) **Russian:** sex, excrement, mental illness, equating people with animals, ethnic hatred.
- xxii) **Scots Gaelic:** sex, excrement, religion, English-Scottish tensions.

- xxiii) Spanish:** religion, incest, homosexuality, excrement, prostitution.
- xxiv) Swedish:** religion, excrement, sex, homosexuality, blasphemy, prostitution
- xxv) Tagalog:** sex, homosexuality, incest, bigotry, excrement, defamatory political statements, religious hatred.
- xxvi) Welsh:** sex, excrement, English-Welsh tensions.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Identify the areas of emphasis on profanity in your culture.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Profanity (also called *bad words*, *cursing* or *strong language*) has traditionally been used to refer to items not belonging to the church. E.g. “The fort is the oldest profane building in the town, but the local monastery is older, and is the oldest sacred building.” or “besides designing churches, he also designed many profane buildings”. Profane and vulgar are similar, as vulgar is from Latin *vulgus* or people. Any speech or writing other than Latin was described as vulgar, as it was ‘of the people’ as opposed to ‘of the church’. Martin Luther translated the Latin Bible into a vulgar language. The original meaning of the term was restricted to blasphemy, sacrilege or saying God’s name (or an identifier such as “Lord” or “God”) in vain. Profanity represented secular indifference to religion or religious figures, while blasphemy was a more offensive attack on religion and religious figures, and it is sinful. Profanities in the original meaning of blasphemous profanity are part of the ancient tradition of the comic cults, which laughed and scoffed at the deity.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Profanity has always been used to describe a word, expression, gesture, or other social behaviour which is socially constructed or interpreted as insulting, rude and vulgar, or desecrating or showing disrespect as measured by the religious elite. Other words commonly used to describe profane language or its use include: cuss, curse, derogatory language, swearing, expletive, oath, bad word, dirty word, strong language, irreverent language, obscene language, and blasphemous language. In many cultures, it is less profane for an adult to curse than it is for a child, who may be reprimanded for cursing.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain why some expressions are regarded as profane.
2. Identify some profanities in English expressions.
3. Differentiate between ‘swearing’ and ‘profanity’.

4. What social situations constitute profanity in Nigeria?
5. Discuss the proposition that profanity is a matter culture.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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## **MODULE 4 LANGUAGE FORMS IN SOCIETY**

Unit 1	Language and Class
Unit 2	Monolingualism and Bilingualism
Unit 3	Language Contact and Multilingualism
Unit 4	Diglossia and Polyglottism
Unit 5	Language Use in Interaction

### **UNIT 1 LANGUAGE AND CLASS**

#### **CONTENTS**

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3.2	Social Class Language Codes
3.3	Language and Prestige
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading
<b>1.0</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>

In this unit, we will study language as an offshoot of class situations in a given society. In most countries of the world, language use in society is distinguishable, based on certain sociological parameters; the chief among which is the issue of class and/or status. Most varieties of any language are an offshoot of certain social situations, which resulted in language types. This makes a given class to use language to create linguistic boundaries that isolate them from the general linguistic forms in use by the society. We will examine language codes in social class and language prestige, in order to reveal language use in relation to societal class.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- define language and class in sociolinguistics
- state the reasons for language in relation to class
- describe social class codes in language use
- distinguish the prestige varieties in language use
- see language use as a determinant the structure of a given society.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Overview**

Sociolinguistics was pioneered through the study of language variation in urban areas. Whereas dialectology strictly studies the geographic distribution of language variation, sociolinguistics focuses on general sources of variation, among them class. Class and occupation are among the most important linguistic markers found in society. One of the fundamental findings of sociolinguistics, which has been hard to disprove, is that class and language variety are related. Members of the working class tend to speak less standard language, while the lower, middle, and upper middle class will in turn speak closer to the standard. However, the upper class, even members of the upper middle class, may often speak 'less' standard than the middle class. This is because not only class, but class aspirations are important.

Studies, such as those by William Labov in the 1960s, have shown that social aspirations influence speech patterns. This is also true of class aspirations. In the process of wishing to be associated with a certain class (usually the upper class and upper middle class) people who are moving in that direction socio-economically will adjust their speech patterns to sound like them. However, not being native upper class speakers, they are often hypercorrect, which involves overcorrecting their speech to the point of introducing new errors. The same is true for individuals moving down in socio-economic status.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Discuss how language determines class in most societies.

## **3.2 Social Language Codes**

Basil Bernstein, a well-known British sociolinguist, devised in his book, *Elaborated and Restricted Codes: Their Social Origins and Some Consequences*, a social code system which he used to classify the various speech patterns for different social classes. He claimed that members of the middle class have ways of organising their speech which are fundamentally very different from the ways adopted by the working class.

### **A Restricted Code**

In Basil Bernstein's theory, the restricted code was an example of the speech patterns used by the working-class. He stated that this type of code allows strong bonds between group members, who tend to behave largely on the basis of distinctions such as 'male', 'female', 'older', and 'younger'. This social group also uses language in a way which brings unity between people, and members often do not need to be explicit about meaning, as their shared knowledge and common understanding often bring them together in a way which other social language groups do not experience. The difference with the restricted code is the emphasis on 'we' as a social group, which fosters greater solidarity than an emphasis on 'I'.

### **B Elaborated Code**

Bernstein also studied what he named the 'elaborated code', explaining that in this type of speech pattern the middle and upper classes use this language style to gain access to education and career advancement. Bonds within this social group are not as well defined and people achieve their social identity largely on the basis of individual disposition and temperament. There is no obvious division of tasks according to sex



or age and generally, within this social formation members negotiate and achieve their roles, rather than have them there ready-made in advance. Due to the lack of solidarity the elaborated social language code requires individual intentions and viewpoints to be made explicit as the 'I' has a greater emphasis with this social group than the working class.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Carefully distinguish 'restricted' and 'elaborated' codes in English use.

### **3.3 Language and Prestige**

#### **A High Prestige and Low Prestige Varieties**

Crucial to sociolinguistic analysis is the concept of prestige. Certain speech habits are assigned a positive or a negative value, which is then applied to the speaker. This can operate on many levels. It can be realised on the level of the individual sound/phoneme, as Labov discovered in investigating pronunciation of the post-vocalic /r/ in the North-Eastern USA, or on the macro scale of language choice, as realised in the various diglossia that exist throughout the world, where Swiss-German/High German is perhaps most well known. An important implication of sociolinguistic theory is that speakers 'choose' a variety when making a speech act, whether consciously or subconsciously. In Nigeria, a resident of Lagos can distinguish between those that live in Ikoyi, Victoria Island or Victoria Garden City from those living in Ajegunle, Mushin or Ikorodu. There are marked linguistic aberrations conversant with those living in Ajegunle, Mushin or Ikorodu because Pidgin English is frequently in use.

#### **B Covert Prestige**

It is generally assumed that non-standard language is low-prestige language. However, in certain groups, such as traditional working class neighbourhoods, standard language may be considered undesirable in many contexts. This is because the working class dialect is a powerful in-group marker, and especially for non-mobile individuals; the use of non-standard varieties (even exaggeratedly so) expresses neighbourhood pride and group and class solidarity. There will thus be a considerable difference in the use of non-standard varieties when going to a *joint* or having a neighbourhood *suya* (high) as in Nigerian English usage.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Explain 'Covert Prestige' in relation to the Nigerian society.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The higher the social class, the less the linguistic variations. The existence of differences in language between social classes is common in English and other languages of the world. Any native speaker of English would immediately be able to guess the class of a speaker merely by the use of language. The differences in grammar between two speakers are referred to as differences between social class dialects or sociolects. It is also notable that, at least in England and Australia, the closer to Standard English a dialect gets, the less the lexicon varies by region, and vice-versa.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Language use applies to language need in social contexts, that is, behavioural habits shared by a community. Every language operates on the assumption that all native speakers of a language are quite homogeneous in how they process and perceive language. However, in the study of language, such as sociolinguistics, attempts to explain why class affects language is revealed through analytical assessment of data. In this view, grammar is first and foremost an interactional (social) phenomenon which is applied in various social strata in order to create linguistic boundaries among different classes in a given society.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the link between language and class
2. Assess the various social language codes according to Bernstein
3. Account for the influence of prestige on language use
4. Discuss 'Covert Prestige' in Nigerian English use
5. Defend the statement that 'language is a manipulative tool of every society'.

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## **UNIT 2      MONOLINGUALISM AND BILINGUALISM**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
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- 3.0 Main Content
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  - 3.2 Concept of Monolingualism
  - 3.3 Concept of Bilingualism
  - 3.4 Receptive Bilingualism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will study monolingualism and bilingualism. Everybody has a language he acquired from his immediate environment after birth. The language could be his mother tongue or the language he was immediately exposed to because his immediate family speaks such a language. However, there are speculations by sociolinguists that no one speaks just a language. We will study about the concept of monolingualism and bilingualism in order to unveil the differences in sociolinguistic settings.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define the concepts of monolingualism and bilingualism
- describe the scopes of monolingualism and bilingualism
- recognise that monolingualism is possible
- see that monolinguals and bilinguals exist in our societies
- discuss the characteristics of monolinguals and bilinguals.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Overview**

Languages are the most complex products of the human mind, each differing enormously in its sounds, structure, and pattern of thought. Each language is indissolubly tied up with a unique culture, literature (whether written or not), and worldview, all of which also represent the end point of thousands of years of human inventiveness. Lose the language and you lose much of that as well. Communication does not absolutely require us all to have a single language. Still, though, bilingualism is a pain in the neck that you yourself would rather be spared.

Bilingualism is practised, especially, by minority language speakers who are those whose languages are not spoken by many people, who learn majority languages (majority languages are spoken by the majority of the population in a country, like Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba in Nigeria). If they choose to do that extra work, that is their business; monolingual speakers of majority languages have no right or need to prevent them. Minorities struggling to preserve their languages ask only for the freedom to decide for themselves – without being excluded, humiliated, punished, or killed for exercising that freedom.

Given that people do differ in language, religion, and ethnicity, the only alternative to tyranny or genocide is for people to learn to live together in mutual respect and tolerance. Many countries that practise linguistic tolerance find that they can accommodate people of different languages in harmony. There is nothing inevitably harmful about minority languages, except the nuisance of bilingualism for the minority speakers. What are the positive advantages of linguistic diversity, to justify that minor nuisance? Young people in search of economic opportunity abandon their native-speaking villages and move to mixed urban centres, where again they have no option except to speak the majority language. Even their parents remaining in the village learn the majority language for its access to prestige, trade, and power. This invariably leads to language death or language endangerment.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Carefully identify the clear-cut reason why people tend to speak more than one language.

### **3.2 Concept of Monolingualism**

Monoglottism (Greek *monos*, “alone, solitary”, + *glotta*, “tongue, language”) or, more commonly, monolingualism or unilingualism is the condition of being able to speak only a single language. In a different context “unilingualism” may refer to language policy which enforces an official or national language over others. Native-born persons living in many of the Anglosphere nations such as the United States, Australia, United Kingdom, and New Zealand are frequently typecast as monoglots, owing to a worldwide perception that English speakers see little relevance in learning a second language due to the widespread distribution of English and its competent use even in many non-English speaking countries in Europe, Africa, and South Asia. Many Spanish language countries in Latin America are also considered to have substantial proportions of the population who are monoglots.

Monolingual or unilingual is also said of a text, dictionary, or conversation written or conducted in only one language, and of an entity in or at which a single language is either used or officially recognised (in particular when being compared with bilingual or multilingual entities or in the presence of individuals speaking different languages). Note that monoglottism can only refer to not having the ability to speak several languages. A recent Canadian study has shown that Monoglots are at a disadvantage with the onset of senility compared to bilingual people.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Explain the possibility of monolinguals existing in any country of the world.

### 3.3 Concept of Bilingualism

Bilingualism is the ability to master the use of two languages. Although bilingualism is relatively rare among native speakers of English, in many parts of the world, it is the standard rather than the exception. For example, more than half the population of Papua New Guinea is functionally competent in both an indigenous language and *Tok Pisin*. People in many parts of the country have mastered two or more indigenous languages. Bilingualism often involves different degrees of competence in the languages involved. A person may control one language better than another, or a person might have mastered the different languages better for different purposes, using one language for speaking, for example, and another for writing.

Even if someone is highly proficient in two languages, his so-called communicative competence or ability may not be as balanced. Linguists have distinguished various types of multilingual competence, which can roughly be put into two categories:

#### 1. Compound Bilinguals

Words and phrases in different languages are not the same concepts. That means a 'chien' and a 'dog' are two words for the same concept for a French-English speaker of this type. These speakers are usually fluent in both languages. The same applies to an Igbo-English speaker who must distinguish between 'ewu' and 'goat' in using both languages.

#### 2. Coordinate Bilinguals

Words and phrases in the speaker's mind are all related to their own unique concepts. That means a bilingual speaker of this type has different associations for 'chien' and for 'dog'. In these individuals, one language, usually the first language is more dominant than the other, and the first language may be used to think through the second language. These speakers are known to use very different intonation and pronunciation features, and sometimes assert the feeling of having different personalities attached to each of their languages. A sub-group of the latter is *subordinate bilingual* which is typical of beginning second language learners.

The distinction between compound and coordinate bilingualism has come under scrutiny. When studies are done of multilinguals, most are

found to show behaviour intermediate between compound and coordinate bilingualism. The distinction should only be made at the level of grammar rather than vocabulary. “Coordinate bilingual” as a synonym has also been used for someone who has learned two languages from birth. Many theorists view bilingualism as a “spectrum or continuum of bilingualism” that runs from relative monolingual language learner to highly proficient bilingual speakers that function at high levels in both languages.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Using the Nigerian sociolinguistic setting, distinguish between coordinate and compound bilinguals.

### **3.4 Receptive Bilingualism**

Receptive bilinguals are those who have the ability to understand a language, but do not speak it. Receptive bilingualism may occur when a child realises that the community language is more prestigious than the language spoken within the household, and chooses to speak to his/her parents in the community language only. Families who adopt this mode of communication can be highly functional, although they may not be seen as bilingual. Receptive bilinguals may rapidly achieve oral fluency when placed in situations where they are required to speak the heritage language. Receptive bilingualism is not the same as mutual intelligibility, which is the case of a native Spanish speaker who is able to understand Portuguese and vice-versa due to the high lexical and grammatical similarities between Spanish and Portuguese.

Bilingual interaction can even take place without the speakers switching. In certain areas, it is not uncommon for speakers to consistently each use a different language. In Nigeria, we have this case commonly among the Yoruba and Igbo people resident in cities like Lagos and Ibadan. This phenomenon is found, amongst others, in Scandinavia. Speakers of Swedish and Norwegian can easily communicate with each other speaking their respective language. It is usually called *non-convergent discourse*, a term introduced by the Dutch linguist Reitze Jonkman. This phenomenon is also found in Argentina, where Spanish and Italian are both widely spoken, even leading to cases where a child with a Spanish and an Italian parent grows up fully bilingual, with both parents speaking only their own language, yet understanding the other. Another example is the former state of Czechoslovakia, where two languages (Czech and Slovak) were in common use. Most Czechs and Slovaks understand both languages, although they would use only one of them (their respective mother tongue) when speaking. For example, in Czechoslovakia it was common to hear two people talking on television,

each speaking a different language without any difficulty understanding each other. Another example would be a Slovak having read a book in Czech and afterwards being unsure whether he was reading it in Czech or Slovak. This bilingualism still exists nowadays, although it has started to deteriorate after Czechoslovakia split up.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

In Nigeria there are many receptive bilinguals, identify and discuss them.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Those bilinguals that are highly proficient in two or more languages, such as compound and coordinate bilinguals, are reported to have a higher cognitive proficiency, and are found to be better second language learners at a later age, than monolinguals. The early discovery that concepts of the world can be labelled in more than one fashion puts those bilinguals in the lead. There is, however, also a phenomenon known as *distractive bilingualism* or *semilingualism*. When acquisition of the first language is interrupted and insufficient, or unstructured language input follows from the second language, as sometimes happens with immigrant children; the speaker can end up with two languages, both mastered below the monolingual standards. The vast majority of immigrant children, however, acquire both languages normally.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

Each language is the vehicle for a unique way of thinking, a unique literature, and a unique view of the world. Only now are linguists starting seriously to estimate the world's rate of language loss and to debate what to do about it. Communication does not absolutely require us all to have a single language. Bilingualism is practised, especially by minority language speakers, who learn majority languages. If they choose to do that extra work, that is their business; monolingual speakers of majority languages have no right or need to prevent them.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Is it possible to have monolinguals in Nigeria?
2. Explain why people choose to speak two languages
3. Distinguish between coordinate and receptive bilingualism
4. Discuss the common features of bilinguals
5. Compare monolingualism and bilingualism.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**



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## **UNIT 3      LANGUAGE CONTACT AND MULTILINGUALISM**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Language Contact and Multilingualism
  - 3.3 Characteristics of Multilinguals
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will be studying the concepts of language contact and multilingualism. It is only when languages are in contact that the individual develops the ability to use them fluently or sparingly. It has been postulated by many linguists like Hymes, Labov etc. that it is impossible for an individual to have a complete mastery of more than one language even though he speaks them. We will carefully study language contact, multilingualism, characteristics and types of multilinguals in order to understand these phenomena in sociolinguistics

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- explain what language contact means
- identify who a multilingual is
- discuss the characteristics of multilinguals
- account for the possibility of multilinguals in Nigeria
- describe the essence of multilingualism in sociolinguistics.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Overview**

Multilingualism is mastery of multiple languages. A person is multilingual if he or she knows several languages; a document or message is multilingual if it is presented in multiple languages. Nigeria is one of the most multilingual countries in the world with over 400 languages and more than 1000 dialects spoken by a population of over 140 million people. Nigeria's multilingual nature is very complex with many minor and less major languages. Some of the languages and dialects till date are not written and only a few have standard orthographical forms.

Bilingual education is teaching multilingual students in both the primary language of the culture and at least one of their native languages. A broadly held, yet nearly as broadly criticised, view is that of the American linguist Noam Chomsky in what he calls the human language acquisition device (Language Acquisition Device, LAD) – a mechanism which enables an individual to correctly recreate the rules (grammar) that speakers around the learner use. This device, according to Chomsky, wears out over time, and is not normally available by puberty, which explains the relatively poor results adolescents and adults have in learning aspects of a second language (L<sub>2</sub>). If language learning is a

cognitive process, rather than a language acquisition device, there would only be relative, not categorical, differences between the two types of language learning.

However, problems may arise with this definition, as it does not answer the question regarding how much knowledge of a language is required to be classified as bilingual. As a result, since most speakers do not achieve the maximal ideal, language learners may come to be seen as deficient; and, by extension, language teaching may come to be seen as a failure. One does not expect children to “speak chemistry” like Nobel prize winners or to have become a professional athlete by the time they have left school, yet anything less than fluency in a second language by graduating school children is somehow inadequate.

On the other hand, arguing that someone who can say “hello” in more than one language is multilingual trivialises the language learning process. Some linguists have argued that most multilingual speakers are somewhere between minimal and maximal views. They call these people multi-competent speakers of languages.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Explain Noam Chomsky’s LAD in relation to multilingualism.

### **3.2 Language Contact and Multilingualism**

The term *multilingualism* can refer to an occurrence regarding an individual speaker who uses two or more languages, a community of speakers where two or more languages are used, or between speakers of different languages. Multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers in the world's population. A multilingual person, in the broadest definition, is anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading). More specifically, the terms *bilingual* and *trilingual* are used to describe comparable situations in which two or three languages are involved. A generic term for multilingual persons is *polyglot*. Multilingualism could be rigidly defined as being native-like in two or more languages. It could also be loosely defined as being less than native-like but still able to communicate in two or more languages.

Multilingual speakers have acquired and maintained at least one language during childhood, the so-called first language ( $L_1$ ). First languages (sometimes also referred to as *mother tongue*) are acquired without formal education, by mechanisms heavily disputed. Children acquiring two first languages since birth are called *simultaneous bilinguals*. Even in the case of simultaneous bilinguals, one language

usually dominates over the other. This kind of bilingualism is most likely to occur when a child is raised by bilingual parents in a predominantly monolingual environment. It can also occur when the parents are monolingual but have raised their child or children in two different countries.

In multilingual societies, not all speakers need to be multilingual. When all speakers are multilingual, linguists classify the community according to the functional distribution of the languages involved:

1. **Ambilingualism:** a region is called ambilingual if this functional distribution is not observed. In a typical ambilingual area it is nearly impossible to tell which language is used when in a given setting. True ambilingualism is rare. Ambilingual tendencies can be found in Luxembourg, Singapore, Catalonia, some places in Canada or in border regions with many cross-border contacts. In Nigeria, we have this case in Delta State, Kogi State and Enugu State, where people living in boundary areas tend to have mixed language use.
2. **Bipart-lingualism:** if more than one language can be heard in a small area, but if the large majority of speakers are monolinguals, who have little contact with speakers from neighbouring ethnic groups, an area is called 'bipart-lingual'. The typical example is the Igbos, especially those sharing common boundary with Rivers State and Delta States.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain how language contacts lead to multilingualism.

### 3.3 Characteristics of Multilinguals

There have been consistently identified characteristics of multilinguals in sociolinguistic studies. Multilingualism seems to be a choice of some people but to some others it is a result of migrations. Potential multilingual speakers are:

- i. People with a strong interest in a foreign language.
- ii. People who find it necessary to acquire a second language for practical purposes such as business, information gathering (Internet, mainly English) or entertainment (foreign language films, books or computer games).
- iii. Language immersion of children.

- iv. It occurs among Immigrants and their descendants although the heritage language may be lost after one or two generations, particularly if the replacing language has greater prestige.
- v. Children of expatriates are often multilinguals. However, language loss of the L<sub>1</sub> or L<sub>2</sub> in younger children may be rapid when the children are removed from a language community.
- vi. Residents in border areas between two countries of mixed languages where each language is seen of equal prestige. Efforts may be made by both language communities to acquire an L<sub>2</sub>. Yet, in areas where one language is more prestigious than the other, speakers of the less prestigious language may acquire the dominant language as an L<sub>2</sub>. In time, however, the different language communities may likely become one, as one language becomes extinct in that area.
- vii. Children whose parents each speak a different language, in multilingual communities. In unilingual communities, when parents maintain a different-parent/different-language household, younger children may appear to be multilingual; however, entering school will overwhelm the child with pressure to conform to the dominant community language. Younger siblings in these households will almost always be unilingual. On the other hand, in unilingual communities, where parents have different L<sub>1</sub>s, multilingualism in the child may be achieved when both parents maintain a one-language (not the community language) household.
- viii. Children in language-rich communities where neither language is seen as more prestigious than the other and where interaction between people occurs in different languages on a frequent basis.
- ix. Children who have one or more parents who have learned a second language, either formally (in classes) or by living in the country. The parent chooses to speak only this second language to the child. One study suggests that during the teaching process, the parent also boosts his or her own language skills, learning to use the second language in new contexts as the child grows and develops linguistically.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Discuss the characteristics of multilinguals in the society.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Multilingualism was more common in the past than is usually supposed; in early times, when most people were members of small language communities, it was necessary to know two or more languages for trade or any other dealings outside one's own town or village; and this holds true today in places of high linguistic diversity such as Sub-Saharan Africa and India. Some linguists like Labov and Bernstein estimate that 50% of the population of Africa is multilingual. Whenever two people meet, negotiations take place. If they want to express solidarity and sympathy, they tend to seek common features in their linguistic behaviour. If speakers wish to express distance towards or even dislike of the person they are speaking to, the reverse is true, and differences are sought. This mechanism also extends to language and society.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Various, but not nearly all, multilinguals tend to use code-switching, a term that describes the process of 'swapping' between languages. In many cases, code-switching is motivated by the wish to express loyalty to more than one cultural group in the world. Multilingualism may function as a strategy where proficiency is lacking in any language. Such strategies are common, if the vocabulary of one of the languages is not very elaborated for certain fields, or if the speakers have not developed proficiency in certain lexical domains, as in the case of immigrant languages. If a speaker has a positive attitude towards the languages, he may use all in the same circumstance. We also see where a speaker is reluctant to learn some languages, as in the case of a lack of proficiency, he might knowingly or unknowingly try to camouflage his attempt by converting elements of one language into elements of the other language. In this case, multilingualism could result in aberrant versions of languages as the speakers experience the switching of linguistic codes of the multi-languages at his disposal.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain how language contact results in multilingualism
2. Identify and discuss the potential features of multilinguals
3. Differentiate ambilingualism from bipart-lingualism
4. Most sociolinguists believe that every human being is multilingual. Defend this postulation
5. Looking at the characteristics of multilinguals, discuss Nigeria as a multilingual country.

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## **UNIT 4     DIGLOSSIA AND POLYGLOTTISM**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Concept of Diglossia
  - 3.3 Concept of Polyglottism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will examine the concepts of Diglossia and Polyglottism as different from bilingualism and multilingualism. If there is a structural and functional distribution of the languages involved, the society is termed *diglossic* or *polyglot*. Typical diglossic areas are those areas where a regional language is used in informal, usually oral, contexts, while the state language is used in more formal situations. Some linguists like Labov, Halliday and Chomsky limit diglossia to situations where the languages are closely related, and could be considered dialects of each other. We will carefully examine these concepts and the theories that led to their emergence in sociolinguistics.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- state what diglossia and Polyglottism mean
- distinguish diglossia from polyglottism
- discuss the theories of diglossia and polyglottism
- identify diglossia and polyglottism in the Nigerian linguistic situation
- explain the reasons for diglossia and polyglottism.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 General Overview

According to *Encarta Encyclopaedia* (2008), diglossia is the existence of a formal literary form of a language, considered more prestigious, along with a colloquial form used by most speakers and considered of lower status. It is a language with high and low forms. The term diglossia has tended to be defined in a number of ways. Fishman (1967), for example, distinguishes it from bilingualism, which refers to an individual's ability to use more than one language. He sees diglossia as the distribution of more than one language variety to serve different communicative functions in the society. This implies that he differentiates the two concepts on the basis that bilingualism relates to an individual's linguistic ability to control or command two different language varieties, and diglossia, the functional distribution of more than one language variety.



In the various studies on polyglottism, it is concluded that the development of competence in the native language serves as a foundation of proficiency that can be transposed to the second language – the common underlying proficiency hypothesis. They sought to overcome the perception propagated that learning two languages has two competing aims. The belief was that the two languages were mutually exclusive and that learning a second required unlearning elements and dynamics of the first in order to accommodate the second. The evidence for this perspective relied on the fact that errors in acquiring the second language were related to the rules of the first language.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Explain the possibility of acquiring different languages in the learning process.

### **3.2 Concept of Diglossia**

The term *diglossia* has been restricted to cases in the middle range of relatedness. Diglossia exists not only in a multilingual society which officially recognises several languages, but also in societies that employ several dialects, registers, and functionally differentiated varieties of whatever kind. It includes the study of language diversity, which refers to any degree of diversity right from the most subtle stylistic differences from or within the same simple language to the most complex form of diversity like two totally unrelated languages. So, we can talk about multilingual and bilingual diversities. Fishman (1980) further claims that the criterion for identifying diglossia is the degree of individual bilingualism found in a society in such a way that the linguistic differences are functionally distinguished within the society.

Based on the foregoing, diglossia could be used to refer to the functional distribution of *High* and *Low* varieties of a language within the society. It is on the basis of this definition that Ferguson (1959) observes that there are four types of diglossic relationships:

1. A situation of diglossia and bilingualism
2. A situation of diglossia without bilingualism.
3. A situation of bilingualism without diglossia.
4. A situation of no diglossia and no bilingualism

Fishman (1980) discloses that it is difficult to find the kind of community described in (4) because in this situation, there is only one

linguistic variety that exists, and no differentiation of any form – functional, stylistic or dialectal.

Ferguson goes ahead to show a distinction between diglossia and the relationship that exists between standard language and regional dialects. Fishman, however, is silent on the issue of regional dialects. He bases his own concept of diglossia on the totality of existing languages. However, both of them (Fishman and Ferguson) recognise the functional distribution of varieties of two languages on the bases of H and L varieties. Fasold (1984) raises the question of the functional issue by trying to verify and identify the exact nature of the social function which H and L varieties are associated with. Fishman and Ferguson both note that the H-V is used for formal purposes while the L-V is reserved for less formal purposes. Fasold, however, still raises other questions. These include:

- i. What happens in a multilingual setting where more than two languages exist?
- ii. What is the extent of relatedness of the languages?
- iii. What is the relationship between a standard language and dialects?

It is commonly assumed that language often develops varieties used to carry out different functions language is meant to perform; it is also an assumption that a bilingual in a speech community usually shares the same pairs of language which often results in the evolution or development of a new system of communication by means of hybridisation of the hybridised or the newly evolved mode of communication. On the other hand, Beardsmore (1982) refers to diglossia as an inter-language which Yoruba-English bilinguals usually use in spontaneous speech and in conversation for intra-group interactions.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Clearly discuss high and low varieties as the essential two in the study of diglossia.

### **3.3 Concept of Polyglottism**

A person who speaks several languages is called a polyglot. However, there is no clear definition of what it means to “speak a language.” A tourist who can handle a simple conversation with a waiter may be completely lost when it comes to discussing current affairs, or even using multiple tenses. A diplomat or businessman who can handle complicated negotiations in a foreign language may not be able to write

a simple letter correctly. A four-year-old French child usually must be said to “speak French fluently”, but it is possible that he cannot handle the grammar as well as even some mediocre foreign students of the language do, and will surely have a very limited vocabulary despite having a perfect pronunciation.

In addition, there is no clear definition of what “one language” means. The Scandinavian languages are so similar that a large part of the native speakers understand all of them without much trouble. This means that a speaker of Danish, Norwegian or Swedish can easily get his count up to 3 languages. On the other hand, the differences between variants of Chinese, like Cantonese and Mandarin, are so big that intensive studies are needed for a speaker of one of them to learn even to understand a different one correctly. A person who has learned to speak five Chinese dialects perfectly is quite accomplished, but his “count” would still be only one language.

Another example could be that a person who learnt five different languages like French, Spanish, Romanian, Italian and Portuguese, all belonging to the closely related Romance languages, has accomplished something less difficult than a person who learnt Hebrew, Standard Mandarin, Finnish, Navajo and Welsh, out of which none is remotely related to another.

Furthermore, what is considered a language can change, often for purely political purposes, such as when Serbo-Croatian was assembled from Serbian and Croatian and later split after Yugoslavia broke up, or when Ukrainian was dismissed as a Russian dialect by the Russian tsars to discourage national feelings. Another such example is Romanian and Moldovan, which are almost the same, barring a few spelling differences.

### **Characteristics/Theories of Polyglottism**

Reasons for native language literacy include sociopolitical as well as socio-cultural identity arguments. While these two camps may occupy much of the debate behind which languages children will learn to read, a greater emphasis on the linguistic aspects of the argument are necessary. In spite of the political turmoil precipitated by this debate, researches continue to espouse a linguistic basis for this logic. This rationale is based upon the work of Jim Cummins (1983).

#### **1. Sequential Model**

In this model, learners receive literacy instruction in their native language until they acquire “threshold” literacy proficiency. Some

researchers use age three as the age when a child has basic communicative competence in L1. Children may go through a process of sequential acquisition if they immigrate at a young age to a country where a different language is spoken, or if the child exclusively speaks his or her heritage language at home until he/she is immersed in a school setting where instruction is offered in a different language. The phases children go through during sequential acquisition are less linear than for simultaneous acquisition and can vary greatly among children. Sequential acquisition is a more complex and lengthier process, although there is no indication that non language-delayed children end up less proficient than simultaneous bilinguals, so long as they receive adequate input in both languages.

## **2. Bilingual Model**

In this model, native language and the community language are simultaneously taught. The advantage is literacy in two languages as the outcome. However, teacher training must be high in both languages and in techniques for teaching a second language.

## **3. Coordinate Model**

This model posits that equal time be spent separately in both instruction of the native language and the community language. The native language class however focuses on basic literacy while the community language class focuses on listening and speaking skills. Being a bilingual does not necessarily mean that you can speak, for example, English and French.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Using the Nigerian linguistic environment as reference, discuss the three models of polyglottism.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The coexistence of two varieties of the same language throughout a speech community is diglossia while polyglottism entails the coexistence of three or more languages. Such situations exist in many speech communities throughout the world. Sociolinguists may also use the term diglossia to denote bilingualism and polyglottism to denote multilingualism, the speaking of two or more languages by the members of the same community. For example, in Lagos, many members of the Yoruba and Igbo communities speak both English and other languages, switching from one to the other, according to the social situation or the

needs of the moment. It is the environment that determines the varieties of language in use for proper interaction.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

An interesting outcome in the study of diglossia and polyglottism, however confirms that students who do successfully complete bilingual instructions perform better academically. These students exhibit more cognitive elasticity, including higher analytic performance of abstract visual patterns. Those who receive bidirectional bilingual instruction, where equal proficiency in both languages is required, perform at an even higher level. Examples of such programmes include international schools and multi-national education schools such as French-American, Korean-American, Nigerian-British and Swiss-American schools.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the cases of diglossia in the Nigerian linguistic situation.
2. Identify the key differences between bilingualism and diglossia.
3. Explain the relationship between multilingualism and polyglottism.
4. Polyglots are not necessarily good users of every language. Discuss, with cogent references.
5. Discuss the various characteristics of polyglots and diglossics.

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## **UNIT 5      LANGUAGE USE IN INTERACTION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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  - 3.2 Language and Social Interaction
  - 3.3 Language and Action
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading
- 1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will be studying the sociolinguistic implications of language use in interaction. Since language is a way by which man expresses his worldview, there are various forms of expressions that are applied in interactional situations. Every man applies language to suit himself at various times and situations. Sociolinguists believe that language used in interaction reveals unique language forms. We will examine language and social interaction and language and action in order to understand the perception of language use in interaction.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- explain language use in interaction
- differentiate language of interaction from other forms
- identify when expressions are from interaction
- recognise the language of social interaction
- see that interactional language is socially based.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 General Overview

Language is a form of social artefact. Most sociolinguists have been urging the examination of language *practice* – how people employ words and sentences in concrete situations. Wittgenstein (1958) argues that language, rather than being a vehicle for naming things, conveying information, or even enacting intentions according to rules, is an *activity* in its own right. For example, to analyse a single word in the language, and propose that there is a single definable class of phenomena to which it refers. A variety of philosophers and social scientists regard the view of language as primarily communicative in function as the “conduit metaphor” (Reddy, 1979). This metaphor is rooted in the commonsensical notion that, through speech, one person conveys information by inserting it into words and sending them along a communicative channel. People receive the words at the other end and extract the encoded thoughts and feelings from them. The conduit metaphor reinforces an idea that problems of meaning in human society are essentially *referential* or concerned with how concepts correspond to or represent reality, and that language operates to make propositions about the world (Pitkin, 1972: 3). Instead of using the conduit metaphor and referential approach to meaning, scholars recently have approached language as a medium of organized social activity, in which words are “performatives” (Austin, 1962) or “deeds” (Wittgenstein, 1958). It is partly through language that humans “do” the social world, even as the

world is confronted as the unquestioned background or condition for activity.

The title of John Austin's famous book, *How to Do Things with Words*, conveys the essence of speech acts theory. Austin (1962: 12) questions "an old assumption in philosophy" that to say something is to state something in a propositional sense. Sentences that convey referential information, in Austin's words, form *locutionary* acts, but many utterances do not describe, state, or report anything. That is, they do not state anything and cannot be evaluated for their truth, but rather are *illocutionary* performances. Such utterances do not report or describe what a person is doing; they achieve a designated activity, such as promising, naming, giving, or betting. The lesson for the "communicational" view of language is that the locutions through which persons provide information about their thoughts, feelings, and ideas occur as part of some context of acting and are, like promising, naming, giving, and so on, illocutionary.

Austin (1962) also discusses *perlocutionary* acts, or utterances that are consequential in particular ways for the behaviour of persons to whom they are directed. The distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts is clear. One of Austin's successors, Searle (1969), more forcefully states that the unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word, or sentence. It is rather the production of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of a speech act, and that a theory of language, therefore, needs a theory of action. For Searle, this theory is one in which a set of underlying, constitutive rules specifies how speech acts can be accomplished. In this case, both Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) attempt to come to grips with the well-known problem, that in every language, a sentence with a given reference and predication can have an assortment of meanings.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Explain locution and illocution in the social use of language.

### **3.2 Language and Action**

The theory of 'conduit metaphor' implies that language is largely a vehicle whereby interactants make propositions about the world. From this perspective, which is explicit or implicit in traditional social psychological research on language, problems of meaning involve how well linguistic concepts refer to, correspond with, or represent reality, including internal thoughts and feelings. A different idea – that language is a site of social activity – stems from developments in what is called ordinary language philosophy. A variety of scholars, including Austin,



Ryle, Searle, and Wittgenstein, take the position that problems of meaning and reference in traditional philosophy – and, by extension, issues concerning how and under what conditions interactants communicate effectively with one another – can be fruitfully recast through investigation of ordinary language. This means avoiding the abstracting and generalising process whereby words serve to reference or point to objects and situating words in orderly contexts to appreciate how words achieve actions.

Consider the word “hello,” which we might define as a *greeting*. However, its status as a greeting depends on *where*, in a developing conversation, the item occurs. When a party uses the word after picking up a ringing telephone, the activity it performs is *answering* a summons rather than greeting the caller. Subsequently, there may be an exchange or sequence of salutations, and in *that* context, “hello” does perform greeting. To discover the meaning of a word, then, it is not possible to rely on ostensive or demonstrative or any other fixed definitions; one must examine the *contexts of use*. When contexts of use are similar, then words may be said to share what Wittgenstein (1958:67) called “family resemblances.” It is in the actual practice of placing words in particular contexts that such resemblances can be traced and the lexical and other components of language appreciated as a social form.

The word *hello* might be used in a variety of language forms, so might the word *promise*, but rather than deriving its meaning from some underlying constitutive rules, the illocutionary force of the utterance in which it appears derives from its pragmatics, including both vocal and non-vocal signalling as it occurs within the patterning or “grammar” of diverse language forms. Linguistic competence, in other words, consists not in following rules to realise intent but in systematically relating given lexical items to other pieces of vocal and bodily conduct that signal how such items are produced and understood.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Critically relate language use and action in social contexts.

### **3.3 Language, Action and Social Structure**

The study of language use in *interaction* suggests how people use language in an immediate sense to perform joint endeavours of all sorts. People talk and gesture to one another, and this means that questions regarding “social structure” come to the fore. Studies of the relationship between language and social stratification are related to numerous comparisons of speech practice – based on cross-cultural, gender, and

ethnic differences. Perhaps most prominent are investigations of linguistic divergences between women and men.

The social structure involves the outcome of spoken interaction; language is the site of the production and reproduction of cultural, institutional, and organisational forms characteristic of the overall society. It is therefore important to know both the local and broad context in which utterances occur. A reflexive analysis of language, action, and social structure sees the interaction order and the institutional order having complex interrelationships. The interaction order is comprised of mechanisms of turn taking and other sequential organisations, which provide the resources for producing and understanding what is being said and done in concert. Interaction is primordial to speech.

The language that humans use can help constitute an infinite variety of social actions. Austin (1962: 150) suggests that there could be more than a thousand or so actions, while Wittgenstein (1958: 23) proposes that there are “innumerable” activities in which language plays a part, including but by no means limited to “ordering, describing, reporting, speculating, presenting results, telling a story, being ironic, requesting, asking, criticising, apologising, censoring, approving, welcoming, objecting, guessing, joking, greeting.” This list can be indefinitely extended and shows that the communicative function of language, wherein people refer to objects and report their thoughts or feelings about them in a verifiable way, is only one among many modes of linguistic usage.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Discuss the link existing among action, language and society.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Language is a primary medium of social behaviour and, as such, deserves centre stage in the panoply of sociolinguistics. Indeed, social situations involve interactive speech processes, which make language use perhaps the most basic of sociological phenomena. This is because language is a vehicle of communication; and a resource for activities. One activity humans sometimes perform is “communicating” information of various kinds, but this is one among many other activities, such as arguing, promising, requesting, apologizing, joking, and greeting within the social milieu.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Influenced by ordinary language philosophy, recognizing that words do not have stable “meanings” and that the “same” utterance has different interpretations according to its context of use, language-oriented researchers therefore wrestle with the basic question of how utterances perform specifiable actions. Sociolinguists and discourse analysts answer this question in one way by suggesting that some combination of linguistic and social rules link words and activities together. This answer comes close to the theoretical model provided by the speech acts theory of Austin and Searle. Linguists also presume some normative connection between utterances and actions, while giving freer rein to actors’ strategic calculations and decision making in regard to rule adherence.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain why language use is necessary in social situations
2. Reflect on the relationship between language and action
3. List and explain Wittgenstein (1958) “innumerable” activities of language in social situations
4. Identify the basic reasons for the study of language and interaction
5. Clearly explain how language use in social settings reflects identity.

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## **MODULE 5      LANGUAGE AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC DETERMINANTS**

Unit 1	Language Ideology
Unit 2	Language and Geography
Unit 3	Language and Gender
Unit 4	Language and Identity
Unit 5	Language and Culture

### **UNIT 1      LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY**

#### **CONTENTS**

1.0    Introduction

- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Implications of Language Ideology
  - 3.3 Language Ideology in Nigeria
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Reading
- 1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will be studying about language ideologies. In many nations of the world, there are factors which result in the language ideologies of the nations. Some of these countries are multilingual and are seeking ways of making communication easier among the populace and for official purposes. In sociolinguistics, language ideologies shape the way the society reacts to the language they use. We will examine this concept well here.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- see the importance of language ideology in sociolinguistics
- appreciate why language ideologies exist in many nations
- discuss language ideologies as a sociolinguistic paradigm
- relate language ideologies to language policies of nations
- recognise the need for language ideologies.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Overview**

In sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, a language or linguistic ideology is a systematic construct about how languages carry or are invested with certain moral, social, and political values, giving rise to implicit assumptions that people have about a language or about language in general. A common type of language ideology is *Standard Language Ideologies*, the belief that language homogeneity is beneficial to society, such as that expressed by the English-only movement in the United States or Kiswahili-only movement in Africa.

Language ideologies encompass all the explicit and implicit attitudes about language that define what is perceived as “proper” speech. Like other forms of ideology, language ideologies are often politically significant and deeply shape how speakers understand social life, as the

assumptions that they involve imply a result without any necessary examination of the facts. While research in sociolinguistics generally holds that all languages are equal in their communicative and expressive abilities, language ideologies may privilege a given lect, language or even linguistic family above all others, claiming it to be intrinsically better for some or all purposes.

Language ideology refers specifically to the perceptions held by people about language and, more importantly, how those perceptions are projected by speakers. Irvine (2006) defines a language ideology as the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) see language ideology as ingrained, unquestioned beliefs about the way the world is, the way it should be, and the way it has to be with respect to language. This includes assumptions about the merits of homogenous language within a society, the perceived beauty of certain languages, whether certain languages or dialects are seen as intelligent or unintelligent, and other notions about the value of certain ways of speaking. These aspects are all studied in the field of sociolinguistics, but the idea of language ideology is a relatively recent area of inquiry, which is primarily explored in linguistic anthropology.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Discuss the basis for language ideologies in sociolinguistics.

### **3.2 Implications of Language Ideology**

Language ideology has wide implications for society, including moral and political assumptions about how to best deal with language in society, and thus for a country's language policy. Standard Language Ideologies often negatively affect the ability of minority language speakers to succeed in education because the teacher's perception of what constitutes proper language, and therefore intelligence, could be biased against the language or dialect spoken by the student. One of the examples of the effect that standard language ideology has on everyday life is 'linguistic profiling' (Rice, 2006). John Baugh, the inventor of the term 'linguistic profiling' has determined that many people can recognize the caller's ethnic dialect on the phone, and if the voice is identified as African-American or Mexican-American, the caller might be a subject of racial discrimination (Rice, 2006).

Standard Language Ideology is a bias toward an abstract, idealised homogeneous language, which is imposed and maintained by dominant institutions and which has as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class (Lippi-Green, 1997). This represents a belief in a standard, uniform way of speaking, which is thought to be a better way of communicating, and also that this is the normal way that language exists. Tollefson (1999: 45) notes, however, that “linguists agree that variation is normal and intrinsic to all spoken language, even to standard varieties”. Thus, the idea that a standard language, such as Standard American English, has homogenous phonology is an idealisation, based not on the reality of the language, but instead on the ideas about what language should be.

A current example of language ideology in action would be the debate in the United States over Spanish-speaking immigrants. The political justifications for an official language in Nigeria are based on the embedded principles described by both language ideology and nationalistic ideology. The Hausa-speaking people of Nigeria use heritage language while Yoruba and Igbo-speaking people encourage same, while some others currently see it as a problem in Nigeria. At the same time the educated class who use English are encouraged to learn a foreign language like French. According to Pomerantz (2002: 275), language ideologies “function to construct expertise as a resource for the professional advancement of middle and upper-middle class, while simultaneously casting it as a detriment to the social mobility of heritage language users”. These assumptions are reinforced by the way that language is taught, through the use of textbooks, dictionaries and grammar lessons (Tollefson, 1999).

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Assess the implications of language ideologies in Nigeria.

### **3.3 Language Ideology in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, there have been several attempts at formulating an all-encompassing language ideology that will serve the country and cover the linguistic gap in the country caused by the multilingual complexities of the country. The formulation of a WAZOBIA language (*WA* for Yoruba, *ZO* for Hausa and *BIA* for Igbo) was proposed but was never realised because such language ideology presupposes great financial expenses and the introduction of a new language that might degenerate to Esperanto or creoles. Besides, many Nigerians resisted the idea as each group wanted to protect their language and culture to avoid their language going into extinction. Hence, the three major languages: Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo languages were adopted as official languages

alongside English language. The other minority languages, totalling over 400, have been crying for recognition in the mainstream official circles in Nigeria, especially the big minorities like Ijaw, Edo, Urhobo, Ibibio/Efik, Itsekiri, Igala, and Tiv languages etc.

For English language teaching and learning in Nigeria, the Standard English adopted was and still is the British Received Pronunciation (RP) standard. However, the influence of American English is very pronounced because of the domination of American linguistic forms in the mass media. In most Nigerian schools, the Standard English forms are compromised. Recently, the two examination bodies WAEC and NECO adopted the ‘criteria of consistency’ in testing the students’ knowledge of English. Hence, the students are advised to maintain consistency in either British or American spellings in order to pass their examinations.

Language ideology is important to Nigeria. It has been the guiding linguistic principle for national development. Very many languages are spoken in Nigeria, and a theory of language that regards human societies as monolingual would be of limited use to the country. In Nigeria, speakers of different languages or dialects may share certain beliefs, practices, or conflicts involving a language, set of languages, or language in general. That is to say, speech communities may be regarded as “organisations of diversity” (Irvine 2006) with language ideologies providing that organisation. This is actually the move in Nigeria.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Explain Nigeria’s experiences in promulgating a language ideology.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

One cannot help but notice that although language ideologies are seen as constituting the social reality of language, the idea has revolved around the need for linguistic homogeneity in a given country. The notion of language ideology is problematic, at least in two respects. To start with, there is a difficulty that comes with the emphasis on whether a group of people can only be recognised as using a single language ideology. If language ideologies are the basis on which language as a social phenomenon is constituted, should not ideologies be the hub of sociolinguistic research? Questions regarding the existence, adoption, development and change of language ideologies remain mostly unanswered. In the framework of social networks, Milroy and Gordon



(2003) have, nevertheless, explained that language ideologies are susceptible to change, stating that increased political changes break language ideologies.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Social life, including language use, is governed by ideologies – socially shared concepts of appropriate and expected linguistic behaviour in a given polity. The most basic of these concepts are acquired in early childhood through socialisation. In the case of language ideologies, this means that the languages adopted are the ones of everyday spoken language. Compared to the prescriptive ideologies of the standardised language ideologies, there are other conflicting language ideologies, which affect the implementation of the acceptable forms. Language ideologies historically precede the norms of the standard language, and in communities without a written language they are the only norms available. It encourages a formative standard for official and social interactions. Language ideologies are inherently social and are understood better in sociolinguistic descriptions.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss language ideologies as topics for sociolinguistic study
2. Compare language ideologies with language competence
3. What are the effects of political changes on language ideologies?
4. Explain the implications of multilingualism to language ideologies
5. Assess the state of language ideologies in Nigeria.

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## **UNIT 2      LANGUAGE AND GEOGRAPHY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Language Geography/Language and Geography
  - 3.3 Language and Geography in Nigeria
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will be examining ‘language geography’ and ‘language and geography’ as sociolinguistic forms. Many countries of the world have various linguistic forms. The linguistic structure of each country has certain historical influences. As far as Australia, there are Aborigines from Africa who still retain their Africanness till date. In Nigeria, it is complex because of the many languages, dialects and sociolects. We will study all these issues here.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- see the world geography as a vast sociolinguistic field
- distinguish between language geography and language and geography
- appreciate the reason for many languages in many countries
- identify the reason for Nigeria’s geo-linguistic complexity
- discuss the influence of sociolinguistics in cross cultural language use.

## 7.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 General Overview

Linguists generally agree that the world’s 6 billion people currently use more than 6,000 languages. The distribution of these languages around the world is surprisingly uneven. About half of the total world population speaks one of ten languages: Mandarin Chinese has 836 million speakers; Hindi, 333 million; Spanish, 332 million; English, 322 million; Bengali, 189 million; Arabic, 186 million; Russian, 170 million; Portuguese, 170 million; Japanese, 125 million; and German, 98 million. The people who speak these languages occupy a great deal of the Earth’s liveable surface. Most languages, however, are spoken by 10,000 or fewer people.

The greatest linguistic diversity is found in regions that sustain large populations, but where geographic features help keep groups of people apart. In the area of greatest linguistic variation, the island of Papua New Guinea, towering mountains and dense jungles create isolated pockets of various tribes, with about 1,000 distinct languages spoken by 4.6 million people. The islands of Vanuatu in the Pacific Ocean are home to about 200,000 people, and the Vanuatuans speak 109 different languages. In the northeast African country of Chad, which stretches into the Sahara, 127 languages are spoken by the nation’s 7.4 million

inhabitants. Much of Chad's desert population is divided into small nomadic and semi-nomadic groups scattered across a vast, remote area. Experts believe that many of these groups have retained their linguistic and cultural diversity because of their relative isolation: They have remained largely untouched by the nation's political system, state-sponsored education, and mass communications. In the West African country of Nigeria, there are over 400 languages spoken by a population of about 140 million people. There are also 1000 different dialects in many parts of the country. Most African countries have multilingual populace.

Linguists divide languages into three categories by status: healthy, endangered, and extinct. A healthy language is one that is currently being learned by children as a first language. Healthy languages are generally used in all walks of life – at home, in school, at work, and in other private and public settings.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Assess the place of English in the geography of world languages.

### **3.2 Language Geography/Language and Geography**

Language geography studies the geographic distribution of language or its constituent elements. There are two principal fields of study within the geography of language: the “geography of languages”, which deals with the distribution through history and space of languages, and “linguistic geography”, which deals with regional linguistic variations within languages. Various other terms and sub-disciplines have been suggested, including; a division within the examination of linguistic geography separating the studies of change over time and space; ‘geolinguistics’, a study within the geography of language concerned with the analysis of the distribution patterns and spatial structures of languages in contact, but none have gained much currency.

Many studies have researched the effect of ‘language contact’, as the languages or dialects of peoples have interacted. This territorial expansion of language groups has usually resulted in the overlaying of languages upon existing speech areas, rather than the replacement of one language by another. An example could be sought in the Norman Conquest of England, where Old French became the language of the aristocracy, and Middle English remained the language of the majority of the population.

Linguistic geography, as a field, is dominated by linguists rather than geographers. The difference results from a focus on “elements of

language, and their geographical or social variation”, as opposed to investigation of the processes making for change in the extent of language areas. In Trudgill’s view, linguistic geography has been geographical only in the sense that it has been concerned with the spatial distribution of linguistic phenomena. In recent times, greater emphasis has been laid upon explanation rather than description of the patterns of linguistic change. The move has paralleled similar concerns in geography and language studies. These studies have paid attention to the social use of language and to variations in dialect within languages in regard to social class or occupation. Regarding such variations, lexicographer Robert Burchfield notes that their nature is a matter of perpetual discussion and disagreement. As an example, he observes that most professional linguistic scholars regard it as axiomatic that all varieties of English have a sufficiently large vocabulary for the expression of all the distinctions that are important in the society using it. In England, for example, linguistic geography has traditionally focused upon rural English, rather than urban English. A common production of linguistic investigators of dialects is the shaded and dotted map showing where one linguistic feature ends and another begins or overlaps. Various compilations of these maps for England have been issued over the years, including Joseph Wright's *The Linguistic Atlas of England* (1978).

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Distinguish between ‘language geography’ and ‘geography of language’.

### 3.3 Language and Geography in Nigeria

Nigeria has a complex linguistic geography. There are three main regions and 36 states in Nigeria. There are only a few states with one language but among the populace, there are many dialects. However, the geographic nature of each state has linguistic interference from neighbouring states. For instance, the influence of Anambra State over Delta state is enormous. From Asaba to Agbor, the Deltans speak different dialects of Igbo language: Aniocha, Oshimili, Ika, Kwale etc. The only surrounding language influence is Anambra Igbo. Agbor people have relics of Edo language in their Ika (Igbo) language which resulted from the influence of Benin Kingdom. Due to migration and other historical complexities, the Ebu people of Delta State speak both Igbo and Igala languages. In Kogi State, some neighbouring towns to Enugu State speak Igbo and vice versa. We see a lot of linguistic interferences between Edo and Delta States and Edo and Ondo State

indigenes. In parts of Edo sharing boundaries with Ondo like Akoko Edo and Usen, the people speak dialects of Yoruba while the parts sharing boundaries with Delta speak Igbo (Igbanke). We also have influences of Igbo language on states sharing common boundaries with Imo and Abia States. Imo and Abia have much of the influence in Rivers State (Ikwerre, Ndoni, Elele, Eleme etc.). Others include Abia and Akwa Ibom States, Akwa Ibom and Cross River, Kogi and Benue, Kogi and Edo (Agenebode); Ekiti and Ondo; Nassarawa and the Federal Capital Territory; Kwara and Ondo, Plateau and Nasarawa, etc.

One of the major influences in this complex geographic nature of Nigeria is the migration effects that are traceable to the history of the people. Surprisingly, there have been cases of Igbo communities in Hausa and Yoruba enclaves and these could be traced through historical linguistic research. According to Williamson (1977), Nigeria's linguistic framework results from vast historical, mythical and sociolinguistic paradigms that have been a part of the people's lives. Thus, before the partitioning of Africa, each part of Nigeria share close linguistic ties which have often permeated peace and prosperity among the people. However, due to certain historical reasons, many parts of Nigeria refuse to have any form of linguistic association with their neighbours. For instance, the Ikwerre people of Rivers State denounced any form of *Igboness* in their language and culture immediately after the Nigerian-Biafran war. In Port Harcourt, most Ikwerre villages changed their Igbo names through the insertion of /r/ sound, so we now have *Rumuokurushi* instead of *Umuokurushi*, *Rumuola* instead of *Umuola* etc. In Igbo phonology, the sound /r/ hardly begin words and most communities of Igbo land begin with 'umu' as we have *Umuofia* in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Umuaro* in Achebe's *Arrow of God*.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Explain the sociolinguistic affiliation of your state with the neighbouring states.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

One of the major influences of geolinguistics is choice. Just as linguistic choices create and maintain power and solidarity dimensions of role relationships, speakers can also use language to indicate social allegiances: that is, which groups they are and which groups they are not members of. When people want to be considered part of a particular social group, they express their alignment with that group in different ways, one of which is "talking like" other members of that group. This is because "to talk one way is to be something that people who talk differently are not." Within a society or a culture, speech patterns

become tools that speakers manipulate to group themselves and categorise others with whom they are interacting. In the events leading to the Nigerian-Biafran War of 1968-1970, the Nigerian classified a person as a Biafran by the criterion of “speaking Igbo or speaking like an Igbo man.” Thus, if one were a Nigerian, then he would speak as Hausa and Yoruba speak. It was not enough for an Igbo trader to claim citizenship in Nigeria. If he spoke like an Hausa, then he was an Hausa man. The rules of language choice fluctuate according to the many variables: situation, relationship between speakers, time, place, etc. This case, among others, accounts for many geo-linguistic experiences in the world.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

If linguistic forms are chosen in compliance with the norms of society, then it follows that social knowledge about the speaker is transmitted by the use of those linguistic forms. Brown and Gilman (1960) argue that so long as [linguistic] choice is recognised as normal for a group, its interpretation is simply the membership of the speaker in that group. However, the implications of group membership are often very important; social class, for instance, suggests a kind of family life, a level of education, a set of political views and much besides. These facts about a person belong to his character. Speakers construct their identities by careful choice of the appropriate linguistic features that will convey the specific social information that identifies them as part of a particular speech community. We see this in the present Ikwerre-Igbo dichotomy as seen in the forceful application of the /r/ sound in their toponyms. It is important to note that each speaker in a community has several groups with which s/he might want to identify at any given time. The Ikwerre prefers to be associated with Ijaw (not Igbo) and with Nigeria (not Biafra). There are certain linguistic forms that will convey each identity. This means that a person participates in many different speech communities, which sometimes overlap and will vary according to time, place, situation, and interlocutors.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Explain the relationship between linguistics and geography
2. Discuss the complex linguistic forms in the world.
3. Assess how geographical boundaries influence linguistic choices in Nigeria
4. Account for some changes in linguistic choices among Nigerians due to historical experiences
5. What are the factors responsible for linguistic choices among the various tribes in Nigeria?

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## UNIT 3 LANGUAGE AND GENDER

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will be studying the sociological perception of language use as categorised by sex. In many cultures of the world, the language both males and females use has often been categorised. Certain things when spoken by women are regarded as outrageous and unacceptable by the society. Even in the classification of taboos, language use is termed abusive if used by any of the sexes. We will look at language and gender and compare the language use by both male and female in order to understand the sociological import of this study.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the variation in speech between male and female sex
- differentiate male and female language dichotomy
- assess the sociolinguistic differences in language use
- give the reasons for language differences between male and female sex
- identify male/female markers in language use.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 General Overview

At the prescriptive era of language studies, some grammarians ruled that the *man* should precede the *woman* in pairs such as male/female; husband/wife; brother/sister; son/daughter. Even in the Tudor period, comments about the kind of language that was suitable for young women to aim at is revealed. This was both more “natural”, and more “proper” as men were the “worthier” sex. Others ruled that the male sex was “more comprehensive” than the female, which it therefore included. Nineteenth century grammarians reinforced the resulting idea of male superiority by condemning the use of the neutral pronoun *they* and *their* in such statements as, *Anyone can come if they want*. Their argument was an insistence on agreement of number – that *anyone* and *everyone*, being singular, could not properly correspond to plural pronouns. They

also allow the male or plural form for an indefinite pronoun: *Where sex is unknown, he or they may be used of an adult, he or it of children.*

In 1922, Otto Jespersen published a book containing a chapter on “women's language”. He describes differences in women's compared to men's speech and voice pitch. He describes women's vocabulary as less extensive than men's and claims that the periphery of language and the development of new words is only for men's speech. Jespersen explains these differences by the early division of labour between the sexes. In his conclusion, he claims that the social changes taking place at the time may eventually modify even the linguistic relations of the two sexes.

During this period, the use of female pronouns to refer to countries and boats was emphasized. (The use of *she* to refer to motorcars and ships may seem typically male.) The first specific piece of writing on gender differences in language came out in 1944. This was P. H. Furfey's article “Men's and Women's Language” in *The Catholic Sociological Review*. The suggested dichotomy includes:

- A: Women - talk more than men, talk too much, are more polite, are indecisive/hesitant, complain and nag, ask more questions, support each other, are more co-operative,
- B: Men - swear more, don't talk about emotions, talk about sport more, talk about women and machines in the same way, insult each other frequently, are competitive in conversation, dominate conversation, speak with more authority, give more commands, interrupt more.

Note that some of these are objective descriptions, which can be verified (ask questions, give commands) while others express unscientific popular ideas about language and introduce non-linguistic value judgements (nag, speak with more authority).

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Assess the assumption that women talk more than men.

## **3.2 Language and Gender**

When you start to study language and gender, you may find it hard to discover what this subject, as a distinct area in the study of language, is about. You will particularly want to know the kinds of questions you might face in examinations, where to find information, and how to prepare for different kinds of assessment tasks. Very broadly speaking, the study of language and gender includes two very different things: (1) how language reveals, embodies and sustains attitudes to gender; (2)

how language users speak or write in (different and distinctive) ways that reflect their sex.

The first of these is partly historic and bound up with the study of the position of men and women in society. It includes such things as the claim that language is used to control, dominate or patronise. This may be an objective study insofar as it measures or records what happens. But it may also be subjective in that such things as patronising are determined by the feelings of the supposed victim of such behaviour. The second area of study recalls many discussions of the relative influence of nature and nurture, or of heredity and environment. Of these, we can note two things immediately: education or social conditioning can influence gender attitudes in speaking and writing (for example, to make speech more or less politically correct), but there are objective differences between the language of men and that of women (considered in the mass), and no education or social conditioning can wholly erase these differences.

On the other hand, any attempt to divide the world into two utterly heterogeneous sexes, with no common ground at all is equally to be resisted. As with many things, the world is not so simple – there are lots of grey areas in the study of language and gender. One example is sexuality – how far the speech and writing of gay men and women approximates to that of the same or the opposite sex, or how far it has its own distinctness. Remember that the title of John Gray's book, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* is a metaphor or conceit – we don't really come from different planets. And the differences that linguists have noted can only appear because men and women share a common social space or environment.

Among linguists working in this area, many more seem to be women than men. This does not, of course, in any way, lower the value of their work. But it may be interesting to ask – why do women want to study language and gender? Or, why do men who study language have less interest in this area of sociolinguistic theory? Professor David Crystal, in his *Encyclopaedia of the English Language*, gives less than two full pages to it (out of almost 500 pages).

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Carefully explain the relationship between language and gender.

### **3.3 Tannen's Contrasts of Male/ Female Language Use**

Professor Deborah Tannen has summarised her book *You Just Don't Understand* in an article in which she represents male and female

language use in a series of six contrasts. In each case, the male characteristic (that is, the one that is judged to be more typically male) comes first. What are these distinctions? They include:

### **1. Status versus Support**

Men grow up in a world in which conversation is competitive – they seek to achieve the upper hand or to prevent others from dominating them. For women, however, talking is often a way to gain confirmation and support for their ideas. Men see the world as a place where people try to gain status and keep it. Women see the world as a network of connections seeking support and consensus.

### **2. Independence versus Intimacy**

Women often think in terms of closeness and support, and struggle to preserve intimacy. Men, concerned with status, tend to focus more on independence. These traits can lead women and men to starkly different views of the same situation. Professor Tannen gives the example of a woman who would check with her husband before inviting a guest to stay – because she likes telling friends that she has to check with him. The man, meanwhile, invites a friend without asking his wife first, because to tell the friend he must check amounts to a loss of status. (Often, of course, the relationship is such that an annoyed wife will rebuke him later.)

### **3. Advice versus Understanding**

Deborah Tannen claims that, to many men a complaint is a challenge to find a solution: When my mother tells my father she doesn't feel well, he invariably offers to take her to the doctor. Invariably, she is disappointed with his reaction. Like many men, he is focused on what he can do, whereas she wants sympathy.

### **4. Information versus Feelings**

A young man makes a brief phone call. His mother overhears it as a series of grunts. Later she asks him about it – it emerges that he has arranged to go to a specific place, where he will play football with various people and he has to take the ball. A young woman makes a phone call – it lasts half an hour or more. The mother asks about it – it emerges that she has been talking “you know”, “about stuff”. The conversation has been mostly grooming-talk and comment on feelings.

Historically, men's concerns were seen as more important than those of women, but today, this situation may be reversed so that the giving of

information and brevity of speech are considered of less value than sharing of emotions and elaboration. From the viewpoint of the language student neither is better (or worse) in any absolute sense.

### **5. Orders versus Proposals**

Women often suggest that people do things in indirect ways – “let's”, “why don't we?” or “wouldn't it be good, if we...?” Men may use, and prefer to hear, a direct imperative.

### **6. Conflict versus Compromise**

In trying to prevent fights, notes Professor Tannen, some women refuse to oppose the will of others openly. But sometimes, it's far more effective for a woman to assert herself, even at the risk of conflict.

This situation is easily observed in work-situations where a management decision seems unattractive – men will often resist it vocally, while women may appear to accede, but complain subsequently. Of course, this is a broad generalisation – and for every one of Deborah Tannen's oppositions, we will know of men and women who are exceptions to the norm.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Using your immediate Nigerian society, assess the validity of Deborah Tannen's theory of gender contrast.

### **3.4 Gender, Language and Society**

There have been marked indices of gender language in every society. There have also been identical markers of gender in all educated societies, educated in the sense of formal education. Some of the identifiable markers of gender in a typical enlightened society include:

#### **A Names and Titles**

What are the conventions of naming in marriage? What are the titles for married and unmarried people of either sex? In some European countries, women are known by their father's name rather than that of their husband. Is this better than the convention in the UK, or Nigeria? In Iceland, the names of women do not change in marriage. A recent law allows any Icelander to use his or her mother's first name as the root of the last name. In Russia and Iceland men, are known by their father's

name. In Nigeria, a woman's maiden name changes immediately after her marriage. This is acceptable in almost all the tribes in Nigeria. The only aberration to this form is the recent use of compound names by some married women who want to retain their maiden name (although this must be with the consent of the husband) as in Siene Allwell-Brown, Hauwa Baba-Ahmed, etc.

## **B Occupational Lexis**

When we look at nouns that denote workers in a given occupation, there are gender neutralities. In some cases (teacher, social-worker) they may seem gender-neutral. Others may have gender-neutral denotation (doctor, lawyer, nurse) but not gender-neutral connotation for all speakers and listeners. Speakers will show this in forms such as "woman doctor" or "male nurse". Listeners may not show it but you can test their expectations by statements or short narratives that allow for contradiction of assumptions (such as a story about a doctor or nurse depicted as the spouse of a man or woman, as appropriate).

## **C: Semantic Non-Equivalences**

These are pairs of terms that are historically differentiated by sex alone, but which, over time, have gained different connotations (e.g. of status or value) and in some cases different denotations. Examples include: Mrs, Ms/Mr; Miss/Master, Mr; Mistress/master; governess/governor; spinster/bachelor; tomboy/sissy; Lady/Lord; Lady/gentleman; Dame/knight; Bride/(bride)groom; Madam/sir; queen/king; matron/patron; husband/wife; author/authoress; dog/bitch. You can easily explain these distinctions (and others that you can find for yourself).

## **D Patronizing, Controlling and Insulting**

This is not just a gender issue – these are functions (or abuses) of language which may appear in any social situation. But they take particular forms when the speaker (usually) or writer is male and the addressee is female. In some cases the patronising, controlling or insulting only works because both parties share awareness of these connotations. It is possible for the addressee not to perceive – or the speaker not to intend – the patronising, controlling or insulting. Patronising terms include *dear*, *love*, *pet* or addressing a group of adult women as *girls*. Note that calling men *boys* or *lads* is not seen as demeaning. There is a problem in studies that claim that examples demeaning to women outnumber those that demean men.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Studies of the relationship between language and social stratification are related to numerous comparisons of speech practice – based on cross-cultural, gender, and ethnic differences. Perhaps most prominent are investigations of linguistic divergences between women and men. Early research suggested that women are more expressive in intonation; that they use more adjectives and intensifiers, including *so*, *such*, *quite*, *vastly*, and *more*; that they make more precise determinations of colour; that they employ more fillers, such as *umh* and *you know*; and that they more often use affectionate address terms, such as *dear honey*, and *sweetie*. Still, differences between men's and women's speech appear to be enough for Tannen (1990) to propose that males and females speak different "genderlects". Consistent with this is evidence that females are more likely to interpret remarks *indirectly* rather than *directly*, and that men may initiate more "unilateral" (as compared to "collaborative") topic changes in interaction. Research on linguistic differences based on gender and other social categories has proliferated, and no doubt will continue to do so.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In studies where language is a prominent variable, it remains as a relatively static repository of meanings that either conditions or is conditioned by those social factors of interest. Language has been important to sociology because it represents a vital medium whereby actors can communicate with one another and thereby set up joint projects according to pre-existing social arrangements. A different view of language sees it as co-constitutive of social activity. That is, language and action are facets of a single process that participants collaboratively organise through their practices of speech and gesture. Language is a primary medium of social behaviour. Language is a vehicle of communication and a resource for activity. One activity humans sometimes perform is "communicating" information of various kinds, but this is one among many other activities, such as arguing, promising, requesting, apologising, joking, and greeting which are sometimes defined by gender paradigms.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the social values of gender language.
2. Discuss Tannen's theory in line with your people's social behaviours.
3. How possible is it for language use to be genderless?
4. Assess language use in Nigerian social environment.
5. Most genderlects are culturally based. How true is this statement?

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## **UNIT 4     LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Overview
  - 3.2 Identity, Power and Solidarity in Language
  - 3.3 Language Identity and Speech Community
  - 3.4 Language and Identity in Nigeria
- 4.0 Conclusion
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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will study language as a form of social and cultural identities in the world. It is the language you speak that shows your tribe, your status, your education, your affiliations, your speech communities, etc. language shows where a man is coming from. It reveals solidarity, power and unity. In business settings, language use could bring favour or discontentment. We will thoroughly look at language and identity here.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- see language as a form of sociolinguistic identity
- describe language as a form of social affiliation
- identify language as a form of power and solidarity
- assess language as identity in Nigeria
- state the implications of language as identity in Nigeria.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 General Overview

When school began in September 1999 in Louisiana, USA, students faced a new state law. Now they must address their teachers with “sir” and “ma’am” or with titles such as “Ms.” or “Mr.” The War of 1812 began in part because the United States was angry over the impressments of U.S. sailors into service in the British navy. When the British defended their actions, they insisted that they had only forced Englishmen into service because they only took those who spoke like Englishmen. Since the United States was colonised largely by the British, naturally many U.S. citizens at that time would have spoken like Englishmen. To the British though, claiming U.S. citizenship was not important if one *spoke like an Englishman*. In 1955, Emmett Till, an African-American teenager from Chicago, was visiting Mississippi. Two white men murdered him because of his failure to address them as “sir”, Till had unknowingly broken the social code that required African-Americans to defer to Anglo-Americans. In 1968, Chidi Ukwu was killed at the Niger-bridge in Onitsha by a Biafran soldier for speaking English with a Yoruba accent, even though he was an Igbo man returning from Lagos at the outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafran war. In 2001, some Igbos who spoke Hausa to the rioting *Almajiris*, who were killing Igbos [and southerners generally] in Kano, were spared.

These five events share a common thread: they centre on language. They show that the way one speaks is often more important than what one says. How can this be when language is made up of words, which are arbitrary signs that have no inherent relationship with what they signify? The answer is that language expresses much more than what is signified by its words. It expresses the way individuals situate themselves in relationship to others, the way they group themselves, the powers they claim for themselves and the powers they stipulate to others. People use language to indicate social allegiances, that is, which groups they are members of and which groups they are not. In addition, they use language to create and maintain role relationships between individuals and between groups in such a manner that the linguistic varieties used by a community form a system that corresponds to the structure of the society.

Language is used to express role relationships between individuals. Speakers position themselves in relation to others by using specific linguistic forms that convey social information. A single utterance can reveal much about a speaker: his/her background, place of birth or nation of origin, social class, or even social intent; that is, whether s/he wants to appear friendly or distant, familiar or deferential, superior or inferior etc.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Examine the statement which says that people use language to indicate social allegiances.

## **3.2 Identity, Power and Solidarity in Language**

A speaker uses language not only to express but to create a representation of himself/herself in relation to others with whom s/he is interacting. The issue of respect is an aspect of the broader relationship between power and language. *Power is the degree to which one interlocutor is able to control the behaviour of the other.* There are many personal attributes that are potential bases of power in interpersonal relationships: physical strength, age, wealth, sex, profession, or institutionalised role in the church, government, or family. These attributes of power index non-reciprocal, asymmetrical relationships. They are non-reciprocal in that both interlocutors cannot have power over the same type of behaviour, and they are asymmetrical because they represent relations such as older than, parent of, employer of, richer than, stronger than, or nobler than.

Another important relationship in sociolinguistic interaction is solidarity. In contrast to power, reciprocal linguistic forms are used to express and create the relationship of solidarity. Non-solidary forms express distance and formality, while solidary forms express intimacy and familiarity. Solidarity can be achieved in interactions where interlocutors share some common attribute – for instance, attendance at the same school, work in the same profession, membership in the same family, etc. Two people who have the same colour of eyes or same shoe size will not automatically have an intimate relationship but should they share political membership, religion, birthplace or other common attributes that make for like-mindedness or similar behaviour dispositions, the likelihood of a solidary relationship increases.

Just as linguistic choices create and maintain power and solidarity dimensions of role relationships, speakers can also use language to indicate social allegiances, that is, which groups they are members of and which groups they are not. When people want to be considered part of a particular social group, they express their alignment with that group in different ways, one of which is “talking like” other members of that group. This is because to talk one way is to be something that people who talk differently are not. Within a society or a culture, speech patterns become tools that speakers manipulate to group themselves and categorize others with whom they are interacting.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Assess language and solidarity in your social milieu.

### **3.3 Language Identity and Speech Community**

Gumperz (1968: 57) defines the speech community as “any human aggregate characterised by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs.” In this definition, ‘the human aggregate’ can be defined as any group of people that shares some common attribute such as language, region, race, ethnicity, age, occupation, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Gumperz defines interaction as a social process in which utterances are selected in accordance with socially recognised norms and expectations. The “shared body of verbal signs” is the set of rules for one or more linguistic codes and for the ways of speaking that develop as a consequence of regular participation in overlapping networks.

Speakers construct their identities by careful choice of the appropriate linguistic features that will convey the specific social information that

identifies them as part of a particular speech community. It is important to note that each speaker in a community has several groups with which s/he might want to identify at any given time. Saville-Troike (1989: 106) refers to this as a person's "repertoire of social identities." Each identity that a person takes on is "associated with a number of approximate verbal and nonverbal forms of expression". There are certain linguistic forms that will convey each identity.

Just as an individual has a range of social identities, so a speech community, as a whole, has a range of roles and identities for all of the different subgroups within the community. The range of linguistic varieties used to express these relationships is the community's communicative repertoire. This repertoire can include different languages, different regional or social dialects, different registers, and/or different channels of communication (oral, written, manual). In theory, an individual community member should be able to employ all varieties and styles in the communicative repertoire, but in reality, it is not likely that s/he can produce the complete range. Because of the relationship between language use and group membership, language can inspire deep group loyalties. It can serve as a symbol of unification on several levels. On the national level, language loyalty can serve an important political function.

Differences between speech communities result from differences in socialisation. Socialisation teaches the child how to initiate, structure, and maintain social interaction and how to gain acceptance, status, and identity within the group. Over time, socialisation limits possibilities for the child, creating a sense of inevitability of a given social arrangement. By his exposure to a culture through language, a child learns to be male, or female, or English, or Japanese, or Nigerian, or Muslim, or Jewish, or to align himself/herself with any of the other social roles and statuses available to him/her in the culture. In this way, language learning becomes a means of sorting out one's identity in varying social environments.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Discuss the varying sociolinguistic environments in Nigeria.

#### **3.4 Language and Identity in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, when a southerner appropriates a northern accent to make a joke or a point, he or she is drawing on a strategy of condescension and trivialisation that cues into those stereotypes so carefully nurtured: southerners who do not assimilate to northern norms are backward but friendly, racist but polite, obsessed with the past and unarmed with the

finer points of higher education. Focusing on language difference allows us to package the north this way, and to escape criticism for what would otherwise be seen as narrow-mindedness. If Igbo southerners are not distinguishable by other ethnic markers, by characteristic physical features, or religion, language is one simple effective way of distinguishing them from others. The differences are historical and cultural, the language and the cultures are attached to it.

Linguistic stereotypes subordinate the language (and thereby culture) of whole groups, races, or regions of people. When the northern accent is characterised as “obviously ignorant” and “generally inept,” what is really being said is that Northern English is not worth listening to. By extension, Northerners are not worth listening to either because this type of discrimination based on language is actually discrimination against the messenger. Furthermore, there is no doubt that in the delineation of the nation, we use accent as cultural shorthand to talk about bundles of properties which we would rather not mention directly.

The norms of a speech community reflect the social structure of the community, and therefore, the socially powerful members become linguistically powerful. This creates a social hierarchy of linguistic varieties, which in turn creates the ideology of standardisation which empowers certain individuals and institutions to make decisions about language variation. This is also evident among the Muslims in Nigeria who believe so much in their religion as the religion of power and solidarity. Thus, the southern Christians seem distanced because, linguistically, they lack the codes that are used in making the intrusion into power.

In Nigeria, the most reliable identity markers are accents and religion. It is easy to identify a Yoruba man, Igbo man, Hausa, Efik/Ibibio by their accents. In terms of religion, a Muslim is known for swearing to affirm his truthful disposition, he is known for being violent due to the endless riots in the North. A Nigerian Muslim is known for his aggressive attachment to his religion. The Christians are known for their usual peaceful dispositions, simple lifestyle and attachment to their belief. They hardly swear an oath like their Muslim counterparts.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Discuss any other language identity in Nigeria not mentioned here.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Despite the fact that variation is an important characteristic of language, and a necessary tool in the communication of identity, we believe that if

we want to, if we try hard enough, we can acquire a perfect language, one which is clean, pure and free of variation. Accent, when it is a marker of race, becomes an especially powerful “litmus test for exclusion”. Speakers must decide if the benefits of assimilation will outweigh the disadvantages of losing solidarity (i.e. “fitting in”) with their cultural group. Because of the relationship between one’s language and one’s identity, asking someone to change his language is asking him to change some aspect of himself. In demanding that minority groups lose their accents, the majority group is essentially making a negative statement about the social identities that subordinated language groups construct for themselves.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Linguistic variation is a tool for us to construct ourselves as social beings, to signal who we are and who we are not and cannot be. We use this tool to create and maintain role relationships by expressing power and solidarity. Linguistic choices signal our group membership, and communicative competence within speech communities is acquired through socialisation. Furthermore, linguistic hierarchies reflect social structure; so, the language of socially subordinate groups is stigmatised. This creates the ideology of a standard language, which allows the belief that one variety of language is superior to others. Once this variety is held up as an ideal, then those groups whose language represents cultural differences found to be less than good enough are expected to assimilate to the dominant, mainstream norms. In these ways, something as seemingly simple as the way one speaks can have very important implications for one’s daily life.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain what language identities entail.
2. Discuss the effect of language identity in Nigeria.
3. What factors are responsible for language identities?
4. Account for the effects of language identity in Nigeria.
5. Identify the ways in which language identities are important.

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## **UNIT 5      LANGUAGE AND CULTURE**

### **CONTENTS**

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  - 3.3 Culture, Society and Communicative Competence
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- 7.0 References/Further Reading
- 1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we will be studying language in relation to culture. Language is a property of cultures. It is used to communicate every thought process and worldview of a given culture. It is a sacred property that marks identity and ancestral link. The ability to speak same language with another person could result in favour and other positive experiences. Every language communicates experiences, attitudes and behaviours. We will examine language, culture and social behaviour and culture, society and communicative competence, as these will help us understand language and culture from the perspective of sociolinguistics.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- see language as the property of every given culture
- appreciate the cultural values of every language
- interpret language use from cultural dimensions
- discuss the cultural values of Nigerian Languages
- describe the relationship between language and culture in societies.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 General Overview**

Language is more than just a means of communication. It influences our culture, and even our thought processes. During the first four decades of the 20th century, language was viewed by sociolinguists and anthropologists as being more important than it actually is in shaping our perception of reality. This was mostly due to Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Whorf who said that language pre-determines what we see in the world around us. In other words, language acts like a polarising lens on a camera in filtering reality – we see the real world only in the categories of our language.

Cross-cultural comparisons of such things as colour terms were used by Sapir and Whorf as evidence of this hypothesis. When we perceive colour with our eyes, we are sensing that portion of electromagnetic radiation, that is, visible light. In fact, the spectrum of visible light is a



continuum of light waves with frequencies that increase at a continuous rate from one end to the other. In other words, there are no distinct colours like red and green in nature. Our culture, through language, guides us in seeing the spectrum in terms of the arbitrarily established categories that we call colours. Different cultures may divide up the spectrum in different ways. This can be seen in the comparison of some English language colours with their counterparts in the Tiv language of Nigeria.

Sapir and Whorf interpreted these data as indicating that colours are not objective, naturally determined segments of reality. In other words, the colours we see are predetermined by what our culture prepares us to see. This example used to support the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was objectively tested in the 1960's. That research indicated that Sapir and Whorf went too far. All normal humans share similar sense perceptions of colour despite differences in colour terminology from one language to another. The physiology of our eyes is essentially the same. People all over the world can see subtle gradations of colour and can comprehend other ways of dividing up the spectrum of visible light. However, as a society's economy and technology increase in complexity, the number of colour terms usually also increases. That is to say, the spectrum of visible light gets subdivided into more categories. As the environment changes, culture and language typically respond by creating new terminology to describe it.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Examine the relationship between language and culture as propounded in Sapir and Whorf Hypothesis.

### **3.2 Language, Culture and Social Behaviour**

The terminology used by a culture primarily reflects that culture's interests and concerns. For instance, Indians in Canada's Northwest Territories typically have at least 13 terms for different types and conditions of snow, while most non-skiing native Southern Californians use only 2 terms - *ice* and *snow*. That does not mean that the English language only has 2 terms. Quite the contrary, there are many more English words that refer to different states of frozen water, such as *blizzard*, *dusting*, *flurry*, *frost*, *hail*, *hard-pack*, *powder*, *sleet*, *slush*, and *snowflake*. The point is that these terms are rarely, if ever, used by people living in tropical or subtropical regions because they rarely

encounter frozen water in any form other than ice cubes. The distinctions between different snow conditions are not relevant to everyday life and children may not even have the words explained to them. However, people in these warmer regions make fine distinctions about other phenomena that are important to them.

In Nigeria, there are many terms used for identifying the food items produced from cassava. Each ethnic setting has its linguistic identity for such cassava meals. We have *akpu*, *iba*, *abacha*, *amala lafun*, *uka*, *garri*, *kpokpo garri*, etc as variants of food types from cassava in Nigeria. This may also affect each ethnic group in describing the cassava meals they eat. The number of terms related to a particular topic also may be greater or smaller depending on social and linguistic factors.

The cultural environment that people grow up in can have surprising effects on how they interpret the world around them. This became apparent during a Washington D.C. murder trial in 2002. A deaf man was convicted of stabbing to death two of his classmates at Gallaudet University. At his trial, the defendant said that he was told to do it by mysterious black-gloved hands. His delusions did not come in the form of spoken language. He was told to commit these brutal murders through sign language – his mode of communication.

Language and social behaviour are part of the cultural environment that people grow up in, which can have surprising effects on how they interpret the world around them. This starts from the childhood state. If the children do not learn English during early childhood, they have difficulty in orienting themselves relatively, and absolute orientation makes much more sense to them.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

How is social behaviour affected by language in a given culture?

### **3.3 Culture, Society and Communicative Competence**

Anthropologists have found that learning about how people categorise things in their environment provides important insights into the interests, concerns, and values of their culture. Field workers involved in this type of research refer to it as *ethno-science*. These ethno-scientists have made a useful distinction in regard to ways of describing categories of reality. Visitors to another society can bring their own culture's categories and interpret everything in those terms. However, there will be little understanding of the minds of the people in the society being visited. In contrast, the visitors can suspend their own culture's perspective and

learn the categories of reality in the new society. By doing this, they gain a much more profound understanding of the other culture. Ethnoscience defines these two different approaches as being *etic* and *emic*. *Etic* categories involve a classification according to some external system of analysis brought in by the visitor. It assumes that ultimately, there is an objective reality and that is more important than cultural perceptions of it. In contrast, *emic* categories involve a classification according to the way in which members of a society classify their own world. It may tell us little about the objective reality but it is very insightful in understanding how other people perceive that reality through the filter of their language and culture.

For the community as a whole, socialisation through language learning creates conformity to social norms and transmits the culture of the community. As s/he learns language, a child learns the social structure of the culture, learning the appropriate linguistic form for each kind of person. This is part of communicative competence. Communicative competence is not only knowing how to speak the specific language(s) used in the community but also knowing how to use language appropriately in any given social situation in the community. This means that speakers have knowledge of all the possible linguistic forms and the rules for choosing the appropriate form.

Communicative competence involves knowledge of every aspect of communication in social contexts, including: knowledge and expectation of who may or may not speak in certain settings, when to speak and when to remain silent, whom one may speak to, how one may talk to persons of different statuses and roles, what appropriate nonverbal behaviours are in various contexts, what the routines for turn-taking are in conversation, how to ask for and give information, how to request, how to offer or decline assistance or cooperation, how to give commands, [and even] how to enforce discipline, all of which are culturally defined.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Assess the language use in your community in relation to your cultural needs.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

If linguistic choices must be made in accordance with the orderings of society, then every choice carries social information about the speaker. Consequently, some linguists reason that the communication of social information presupposes the existence of regular relationships between language usage and social structure. Because of this regular relationship

between language and society, the linguistic varieties utilised by the community form a system that corresponds to the structure of society. Even though ways of speaking do not inherently have any social significance, communities assign social values to specific linguistic forms and codes in correlation with which groups use those forms or codes.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Part of claiming membership in a given culture is the ability to know when a speaker is a member of the same culture and when he is not. The reverse of this is also true: when a speaker violates a linguistic norm for a cultural group, its usual interpretation is the speaker is not one of 'us,' but one of 'them'. Sometimes, this interpretation is made below the level of consciousness: the listener knows that there is something about the speaker's language that marks him as 'other', but the listener cannot pinpoint the exact linguistic cues that communicate this. Other times, the listener knows which specific features mark a group's speech. These types of features that distinguish linguistic communities are called *code markers* and they are culturally based and analysed.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the place of language in every culture
2. Discuss the social values of language in your culture
3. Define the relationship between culture and language
4. Assess the interpretation of language and culture in sociolinguistics
5. Analyse the unique language use in your culture.

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