**Lesson 03:Topics of Sociolinguistics -part 01-**

**1-Topics of Sociolinguistics:**

**1-1-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. [[1]](#footnote-2)

**1-2-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.[[2]](#footnote-3)

**1-3-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*.

**1-4-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.[[3]](#footnote-4)

**1-5-Language Variation :**

Languages vary in many ways. One way of characterizing certain variations is to say that speakers of a particular language sometimes speak different dialects of that language.

Sociolinguists today are generally more concerned with social variation in language than with regional variation. However, if we are to gain a sound understanding of the various procedures used in studies of social variation, we should look at least briefly at previous work in regional dialectology. That work points the way to understanding how recent investigations have proceeded as they have. Studies of social variation in language grew out of studies of regional variation. It was largely in order to widen the limits and repair the flaws that were perceived to exist in the latter that investigators turned their attention to social-class variation in language, there may still be certain limitations in investigating such variation but they are of a different kind. It is also important to note that even if there are limitations to this kind of work, many sociolinguists regard it as being essentially what sociolinguistics is – or should be – all about . In this view the study of language variation tells us important things about languages and how they change.[[4]](#footnote-5)

The term linguistic variation (or simply variation*)* refers to regional, social, or contextual differences in the ways that a particular language is used. Variation between languages, dialects, and speakers is known as interspeaker variation. Variation within the language of a single speaker is called intraspeaker variation*.* Since the rise of sociolinguistics in the 1960s, interest in linguistic variation (also called linguistic variability) has developed rapidly. R.L. Trask notes that "variation, far from being peripheral and inconsequential, is a vital part of ordinary linguistic behavior" . The formal study of variation is known as variationist (socio) linguistics. All aspects of language (including phonemes, morphemes, syntactic structures, and meanings) are subject to variation.[[5]](#footnote-6)

**1-6-Dialect variation:**

The case to be discussed (Regina vs Mullan, tried in Belfast in 1980) depended on voice identification by witnesses. Positive identification was taken to suggest guilt, and the jury's decision (by a majority verdict) that the accused was guilty was based mainly on the fact that several witnesses had sworn under oath that the voice (or voices) heard on several tape-recordings was/were one and the same voice, and that the voice was that of the accused. Ladefoged writes (1975: 189), on the basis of his forensic experience: it is completely irresponsible to say, as I have heard witnesses testify in court, "The voice on the recording is that of the accused and could be that of no other speaker".

We cannot know how many other speakers in the population may have voices so similar to that of an accused person that they sound virtually identical on rather poor tape-recordings.

For the linguist, however, the Mullan case does not involve only the identification of voices by differentiating voice-qualities: it raises quite clearly the question of dialect and accent differences between speakers.

Expert dialect evidence has been in the news in recent years, especially in the notorious "Yorkshire Ripper" case. At one stage, the voice on a tape sent to the police was identified by the dialectologist, Stanley Ellis, as being from the Sunderland area. The fact that this tape turned out to be a hoax should not blind the police and public to the potential value of expert evidence in such cases.[[6]](#footnote-7)

It is common knowledge that there is considerable dialectal diversity within the British Isles, a much greater diversity than within the United States. There can often be some clear differences between the speech of two places that are only a few miles apart, and of course gross and obvious differences over a distance of forty miles or so (compare Liverpool with Manchester, Leeds with Teesside). It is obvious that in a legal case where two accents are grossly different (say, a suspect's London accent and a Manchester accent on a tape-recording), the police would not normally pursue the case, as they would know that no one could be persuaded to believe that the two accents were those of the same speaker. However, when two accents sound broadly similar to the layman (but showing consistent differences that can be specified by the expert), it may be that some people do not notice the differences. On the other hand, they may be aware of differences in a vague way. In the Mullan case we are dealing with two different accents, and the case raises the rather interesting issue that people may be aware of an accent different (defence counsel seems to have been well aware of it), but may be prepared in court to dismiss this possibly subliminal awareness for various reasons.[[7]](#footnote-8)

1. Anthony C. Oha et all, :**COURSE TITLE:INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLINGUISTICS**  , NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA , 2010, P03 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Anthony C. Oha et all, :**COURSE TITLE:INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLINGUISTICS**  , NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA , 2010, P03 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Anthony C. Oha et all, :**COURSE TITLE:INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLINGUISTICS**  , NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA , 2010, P04 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Ronald Wardhaugh :**An Introduction to** Sociolinguistics, BLACKWELL PUBLISHING, FIFTH EDITION, 2006 ,135 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. R.L. Trask: ***Key Concepts in Language and Linguistics*.** Routledge ,2007, [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. JAMES MILROY : **Sociolinguistic methodology and the identification of speakers' voices in legal proceedings,** ACADEMIC PRESS, INC., 1984, P53 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. JAMES MILROY : **Sociolinguistic methodology and the identification of speakers' voices in legal proceedings,** ACADEMIC PRESS, INC., 1984,P54 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)