

# SOCIOLINGUISTICS

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# Sociolinguistics

- A term used to describe all areas of the study of relationship between language and society.
- Sociolinguistic is a work which is intended to achieve a better understanding of the nature of human language by studying language in its social context or to achieve the better understanding of the nature of the relationship and interaction between language and society.

# Society and Language

- Society is any group of people who are drawn together for a certain purpose or purposes
- A language is what the members of a particular society speak
- A very comprehensive concept of language and society

# Language as a System of Communication

- Language is a system of communication in which people employ a code
- Monolinguals employ one code system
- Bilinguals employ two code systems
- The knowledge about the system of communication is hard to characterize for linguists
- To write grammars is hard because the knowledge that people have about their language is extremely hard to describe

# Linguists & Sociolinguists

- Sociolinguistics is partly empirical and partly theoretical.
- Armchair approach is dangerous because it is very subjective and depends upon personal experience alone
- Linguists differ from sociolinguistics in taking account only of the structure of language, to the exclusion of social contexts in which it is learned and used

# Language

- Language is not only a linguistic, but also cultural, political and historical term.
- Variety is a neutral term used to refer to any kind of language— a dialect, accent, sociolect, style or register.

# Abstand and Ausbau Languages

- (Heinz.Kloss)
- Abstand is a variety which is considered as a language in its own right, rather than a dialect, by virtue of being very different in its linguistic characteristics.
- Ausbau is a variety which derives its status as a language rather than a dialect, not so much from its linguistic characteristics but from its social cultural political characteristics.  
(Norwegian and Swedish)

# Dialect

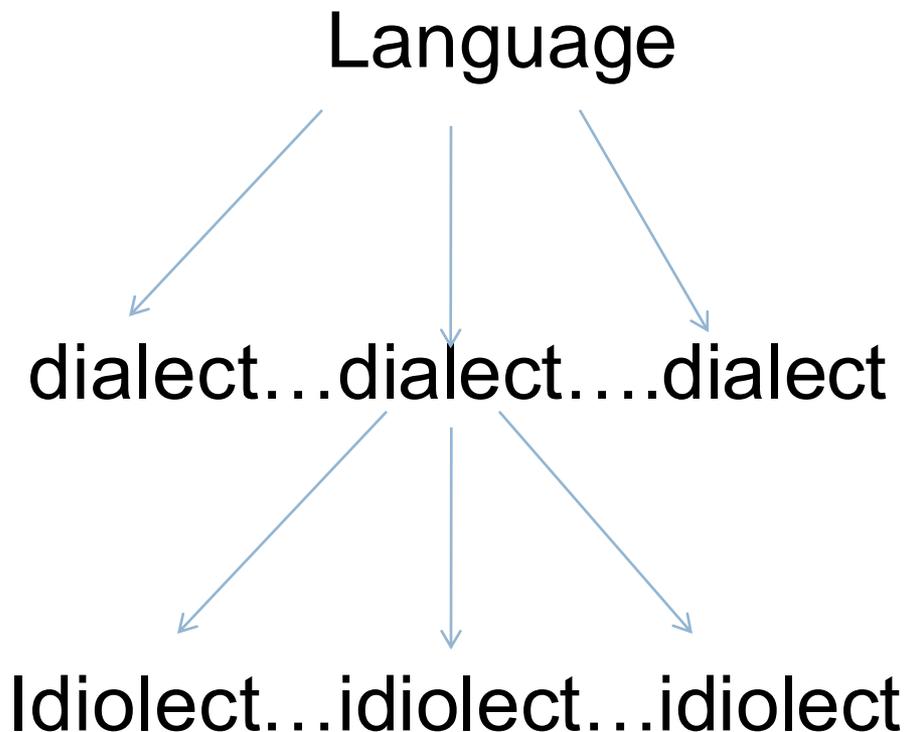
- A language variety, spoken by a speech community, that is characterized by systematic features (e.g., phonological, lexical, grammatical) that distinguish it from other varieties of that same language.
- It is usually associated with a particular geographical area and/or with a particular social class or status group.

## **Idiolect**

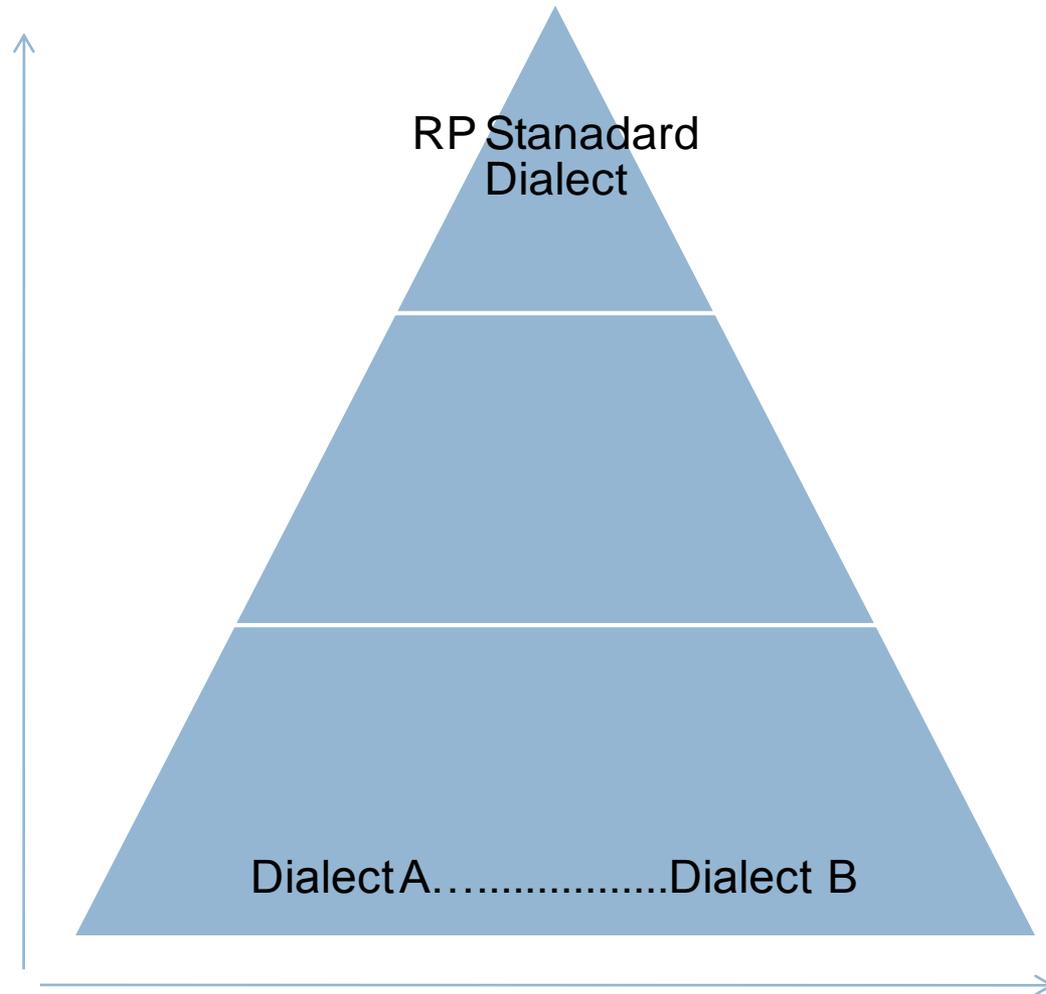
The speech variety of an individual speaker

# Language, Dialect and Ideolect

- Language = a continuum of dialects
- Dialects = a continuum of Idiolects



Vertical Axis: Social Distance/Variation (Sociolect)  
Horizontal Axis: Geographic Distance/Variation (Dialect)



# Sociolect: a Social Class Dialect

- A variety or lect which is thought of as being related to its speaker's social background rather than geographical background is called a sociolect.
- Acrolect is a variety or lect which is the most prestigious in a social dialect continuum other varieties lower down the social dialect continuum in terms of social status are known as mesolects and basilects.

# Ways Dialects Vary

Ways Dialects Vary	Received Pronunciation	American English
Phonological	[k_ɪnt] <i>can't</i>	[kænt] <i>can't</i>
Morphological	I have <i>got</i> ...	I have <i>gotten</i> ...
Lexical	lift flat	elevator apartment
Syntactic	The council <i>are</i> ... I <i>shall</i> go...	The council <i>is</i> ... I <i>will</i> go...

# Factors that Contribute to Variation

- Social situation
- Occupation
- Age
- Geography
- Education
- Gender
- Social status/class
- Ethnicity

# Misconceptions about 'dialect'

Dialect is 'substandard'

Dialect is 'incorrect'

Dialect is 'slang'

## **FACT**

Linguists use the term dialect as a neutral term to refer to the systematic usage of a group of speakers--those in a particular region or social class, for instance--and that the term has within linguistics none of the negative connotations which it sometimes has in everyday usage (for instance, meaning "nonstandard" or "substandard" speech, or the speech of people from other regions besides one's own). Everyone speaks a dialect--at least one.

# Language and Dialect

- One of the most difficult theoretical issues in linguistics is how to make the distinction between language and dialect. On the surface there may appear to be no problem. When two people speak "differently," most people think there are only two possibilities. (1) If they do not understand each other, one assumes that they are speaking different "languages;" and (2) If they do understand each other, one assumes that they are speaking different dialects of the same language. However, while the dialect criterion of "mutual intelligibility" works most of the time, there are other criteria that distinguishes dialect from language.

# Language and Dialect

- Linguistic criterion
- Mutual intelligibility
- YES? = dialects
- NO? = languages
- e.g., British vs. American vs. Irish vs. Australian  
(All are dialects of English)

What is your opinion about Urdu and Hindi ?

# Language and Dialect

- Nonlinguistic criteria (political, historical, geographic etc.) may play a role
- Mandarin, Cantonese = mutually *unintelligible*, but considered *dialects of Chinese*
- Serbian and Croatian = *mutually intelligible*, but considered separate *languages*

# Dialect Continuum

- Mutual intelligibility: Problems
- Degree of mutual intelligibility?
- **Dialect Continuum**

When each dialect is intelligible with its contiguous neighbor but unintelligible with the dialects at the opposite end of the continuum



# Dialect and Accent

- Is it a Dialect or an Accent?

Accent refers ONLY to distinctive pronunciation whereas dialect refers to grammar and vocabulary as well. When a person says "He done it" while another says "He did it" both are using different dialects because grammatical differences are involved. Pronouncing "Bathroom" with a short [a] or with a long [a:] is a matter of accent.

	Common Perceptions about Language and Dialects	Facts
1	Languages are clearly bounded	Languages shade off into one another
2	Dialects are unstandardized and full of regional and social variation	Dialects can exhibit uniformity and may be quite 'standardized'
3	Languages have 'literature;' Dialects don't	Dialects may have strictly coded oral tradition, and even written epics, poetry, etc.
4	Languages are 'older, better' and are best for education and logical thinking	Dialects may have ancient histories and capable of expressing clarity of thought
5	Languages are collections of mutually intelligible, genetically related local or social-dialects	Dialects may closely resemble more than one 'language' in a chain of mutual intelligibility
6	Speech forms with different writing systems are different languages	Writing may have no effect on mutual <i>oral</i> intelligibility, but certainly can affect mutual legibility
7	Religion should have nothing to do with anyone's perception of what is a language	Religion has <i>everything</i> to do with many people's perception of language; e.g. Hindi and Urdu, Serbian and Croatian
8	Languages have existed from time immemorial and represent something unchanging and fixed	Languages are social constructs and change through time
9	Language planners can make changes in both morphology and lexicon	Languages can be quite resistant to the tinkering of cultural critics and language planners
10	Standard languages emerge because they have certain admirable qualities that make them suited to be official and national vehicles	Standard languages emerge because they are the dialects of powerful rulers or important centers of power at crucial moments in history

# Speech Community

- A community of speakers who share the verbal repertoire, and who also share the same norms for linguistic behavior, including both general norms for language use of the type studied in the ethnography of speaking, and more detailed norms of activities such as style shifting of the type studied by secular linguistics

# Speech Communities

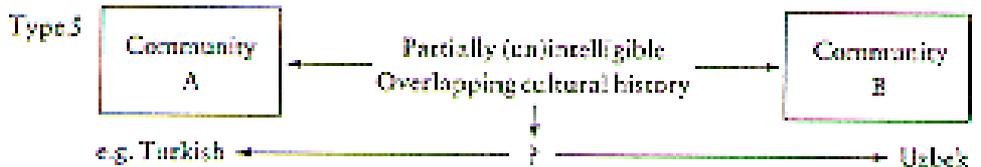
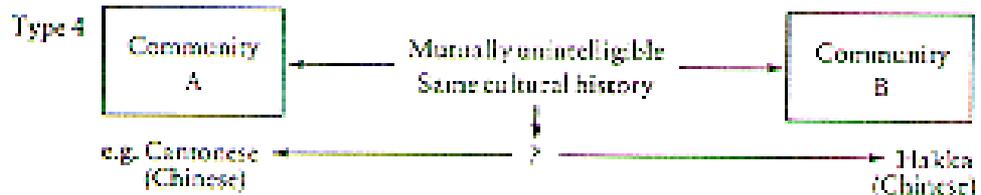
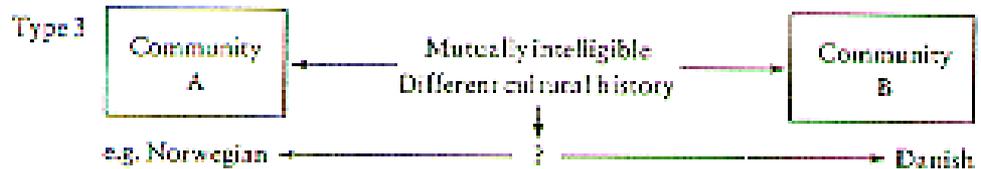
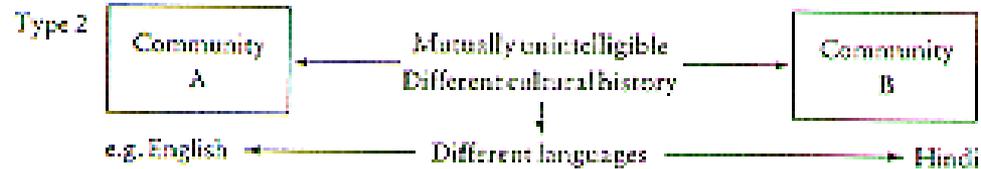
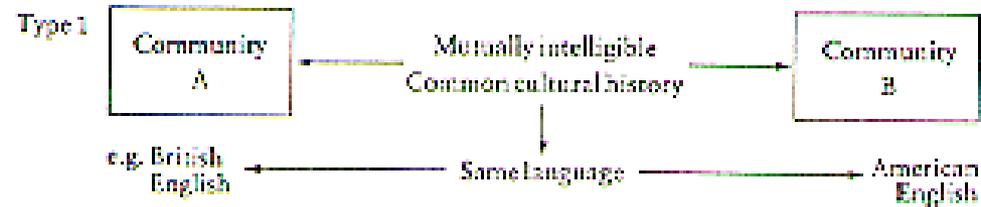
- A set of people with a common language, or who share a repertoire of varieties (accents, styles, even languages in multilingualism); people who live together and interact through language; people with shared social attributes (young people, lawyers, women); people in the same social system. The term is most relevant to small, well-defined, stable communities.

J J Gumperz, 'The Speech Community' (1968), repr. in P P Giglioli, ed., *Language and Social Context* (London, 1972), 219–31

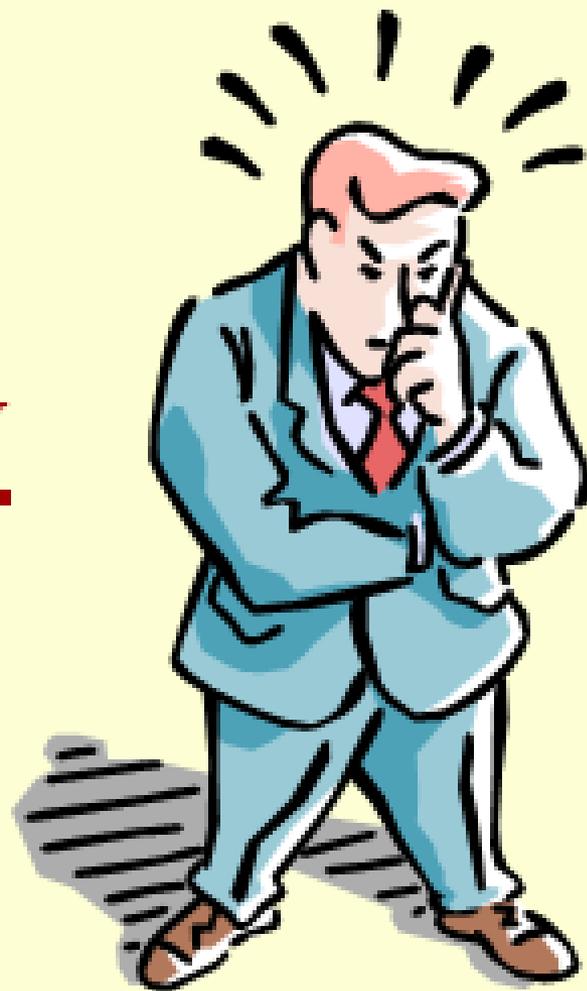
# Speech Communities

- Group of people who share some identifiable aspect of their linguistic communication
- More importantly: there should be some **self identification** as a community ...
- and there may be some degree of deliberate exclusion of outsiders
- Speech communities can be defined by geography, ethnicity, socio-economic class, but also occupation, gender, religion, etc.
- It follows that individuals can identify with multiple speech communities ...
- ... and can adjust their language according to the circumstances, so as to identify in the most appropriate way

## Five types of relationship between dialect and language



What does it  
mean to know  
a language?



# Linguistic Competence

□ “Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its (the speech community’s) language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance.”

(Chomsky, 1965, p. 3)

# Communicative Competence:

- “the socially appropriate use of language.”  
(Paulston, 1992, p. xiv)
- “Communicative competence involves knowing not only the language code but also what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation. It deals with the social and cultural knowledge speakers are presumed to have to enable them to use and interpret linguistic forms...”

# Communicative Competence:

- “...Communicative competence extends to both 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 speak to persons of different statuses and roles, what appropriate nonverbal behaviors 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, how to enforce discipline, and the like - in short, everything involving the use of language and other communication dimensions in particular social settings.”

(Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 21)



THANK YOU