An Introduction to Sociolinguistics

Second Edition

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Acknowledgments

1   Introduction

Any discussion of the relationship between language and society, or of the various functions of language in society, should begin with some attempt to define each of these terms. Let us say that a *society* is any group of people who are drawn together for a certain purpose or purposes. By such a definition 'society' becomes a very comprehensive concept, but we will soon see how useful such a comprehensive view is because of the very different kinds of societies we must consider in the course of the discussions that follow. We may attempt an equally comprehensive definition of language: a *language* is what the members of a particular society speak. However, as we will see, speech in almost any society can take many very different forms, and just what forms we should choose to discuss when we attempt to describe the language of a society may prove to be a contentious matter. Sometimes too a society may be plurilingual; that is, many speakers may use more than one language, however we define language. We should also note that our definitions of language and society are not independent: the definition of language includes in it a reference to society. I will return to this matter from time to time.

Our Knowledge of Language

When two or more people communicate with each other in speech, we can call the system of communication that they employ a code. In most cases that code will be something we may also want to call a language. We should also note that two speakers who are bilingual, that is, who have access to two codes, and who for one reason or another shift back and forth between the two languages as they converse, either by code-switching or code-mixing (see chapter 4), are actually using a third code, one which draws on those two languages. The system (or the *grammar*, to use a well-known technical term) is something that each speaker 'knows', but two very important questions for linguists are just what that 'knowledge' is knowledge of and how it may best be characterized.

In practice, linguists do not find it at all easy to write grammars because the knowledge that people have of the languages that they speak is extremely hard to describe. It is certainly something different from, and is much more considerable than, the kinds of knowledge that we see described in most of the grammars we find on library shelves, no matter how good those grammars may be. Anyone who knows a language knows much more about that language than is contained in any grammar book that attempts to describe the language. What is also interesting is that the knowledge is both something that every individual who speaks the language possesses (since we must assume that each individual knows the grammar of his or her language by the simple reason that he or she readily uses that language) and also some kind of shared knowledge, that is, knowledge possessed by all those who speak the language. It is also possible to talk about 'dead' languages, e.g., Latin or Sanskrit. However, in such cases we should note that it is the speakers who are dead, not the languages themselves, for these may still exist, at least in part. We may even be tempted to claim an existence for English, French, or Swahili independent of the existence of those who speak those languages.

Today, most linguists agree that the knowledge that speakers have of the language or languages they speak is knowledge of something quite abstract. It is a knowledge of rules and principles and of the ways of saying and doing things with sounds, words, and sentences, rather than just knowledge of specific sounds, words, and sentences. It is knowing what is *in* the language and what is not; it is knowing the possibilities the language offers and what is impossible. This knowledge explains how it is we can understand sentences we have not heard before and reject others as being *ungrammatical*, in the sense of not being possible in the language. Communication among people who speak the same language is possible because they share such knowledge, although how it is shared – or even how it is acquired – is not well understood. Certainly, psychological and social factors are important and possibly genetic ones too. Language is however a communal possession, although admittedly an abstract one. Individuals have access to it and constantly show that they do so by using it properly. As we will see, a wide range of skills and activities is subsumed under this concept of 'proper use'.

Confronted with the task of trying to describe the grammar of a language like English, many linguists follow the approach which is associated with Noam Chomsky, undoubtedly the most influential figure in late twentieth century linguistic theorizing. Chomsky has argued on many occasions that, in order to make meaningful discoveries about language, linguists must try to distinguish between what is important and what is unimportant about language and linguistic behavior. The important matters, sometimes referred to as *language universals*, concern the learnability of all languages, the characteristics they share, and the rules and principles that speakers apparently follow in constructing and interpreting sentences; the less important matters have to do with how individual speakers use specific utterances in a variety of ways as they find themselves in this situation or that.

Chomsky has distinguished between what he has called *competence* and *performance*. He claims that it is the linguist's task to characterize what speakers know about their language, i.e., their competence, not what they do with their language, i.e., their performance. The best-known characterization of this distinction comes from Chomsky himself (1965, pp. 3–4) in words which have been extensively quoted:

> Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its 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. This seems to me to have been the position of the founders of modern general linguistics, and no cogent reason for modifying it has been offered. To study actual linguistic performance, we must consider the interaction of a variety of factors, of which the underlying competence of the speaker–hearer is only one. In this respect, study of language is no different from empirical investigation of other complex phenomena.

From time to time we will return to this distinction between competence and performance. However, the kind of competence we must explain involves much more than Chomsky wishes to include, and indeed includes much that Chomsky subsumes under what he calls performance. Knowing a language also means knowing how to use that language.

Discussion

1. Hymes (1964b, p. 16) presents the following two instances of behavior which the participants, speakers of Ojibwa, an American Indian language, describe as language behavior:

> An informant told me that many years before he was sitting in a tent one afternoon during a storm, together with an old man and his wife. There was one clap of thunder after another. Suddenly the old man turned to his wife and asked, 'Did you hear what was said?' 'No,' she replied, 'I didn't catch it.' My informant, an acculturated Indian, told me he did not at first

know what the old man and his wife referred to. It was, of course, the thunder. The old man thought that one of the Thunder Birds had said something to him. He was reacting to this sound in the same way as he would respond to a human being, whose words he did not understand. The casualness of the remark and even the trivial character of the anecdote demonstrate the psychological depth of the 'social relations' with other-than-human beings that becomes explicit in the behavior of the Ojibwa as a consequence of the cognitive 'set' induced by their culture.

A white trader, digging in his potato patch, unearthed a large stone similar to the one just referred to. He sent for John Duck, an Indian who was the leader of the *wábano*, a contemporary ceremony that is held in a structure something like that used for the Midewiwin (a major ceremony during which stones occasionally had animate properties such as movement and opening of a mouth). The trader called his attention to the stone, saying that it must belong to his pavilion. John Duck did not seem pleased at this. He bent down and spoke to the boulder in a low voice, inquiring whether it had ever been in his pavilion. According to John the stone replied in the negative.

It is obvious that John Duck spontaneously structured the situation in terms that are intelligible within the context of Ojibwa language and culture . . . . I regret that my field notes contain no information about the use of direct verbal address in the other cases mentioned (movement of stone, opening of a mouth). But it may well have taken place. In the anecdote describing John Duck's behavior, however, his use of speech as a mode of communication raises the animate status of the boulder to the level of social interaction common to human beings. Simply as a matter of observation we can say that the stone was treated *as if* it were a 'person', not a 'thing', without inferring that objects of this class are, for the Ojibwa, necessarily conceptualized as persons.

Hymes argues that 'in general, no phenomenon can be defined in advance as never to be counted as constituting a message.' How does this observation apply to the above examples? Can you think of possible examples drawn from your own experience? Note that a basic assumption here is that 'messages', whatever they are, require a 'language'. Should every 'language' in which you can send 'messages' be of equal interest to us as sociolinguists, e.g., the 'language' of flowers, semaphore signaling, dress codes, and road signs? If not, what principles should guide us in an attempt to constrain our interests? And how do you view the 'languages' of logic, mathematics, and computers?

2. What obstacles do you see in an attempt to define English as a language when you consider that such a definition must cover all of the following (and much more): both Cockney and Jamaican English; the speech of two-year-olds; fast colloquial speech; the language of formal written documents such as real estate transfers; formulaic expressions such as *How do you do?* and *It never rains but it pours*; completely novel sentences, i.e., sentences you have not heard or seen before (e.g., just about any sentence in this book); and slips of the tongue, e.g., *queer dean for dear Queen?* What kind of abilities must you yourself have in order even to consider attempting such a task?

The Problem of Variation

The competence–performance distinction just mentioned is one that holds intriguing possibilities for work in linguistics, but it is one that has also proved to be quite troublesome, particularly when much of the variety we experience within language is labeled 'performance' and then put to one side by those who consider 'competence' to be the only valid concern of linguists. The language we use in everyday living is remarkably varied. In fact, to many investigators it appears that it is that very variety which throws up serious obstacles to all attempts to demonstrate that each language is at its core, as it were, a homogeneous entity, and that it is possible to write a complete grammar for a language which makes use of *categorical rules*, i.e., rules which specify exactly what is – and therefore what is not – possible in the language. Everywhere we turn we seem to find at least a new wrinkle or a small inconsistency with regard to any rule we might wish to propose. When we look closely at any language, we will discover time and time again that there is considerable internal variation, and that speakers make constant use of the many different possibilities offered to them. No one speaks the same way all the time, and people constantly exploit the nuances of the languages they speak for a wide variety of purposes. The consequence is a kind of paradox: while many linguists would like to view any language as a homogeneous entity and each speaker of that language as controlling only a single style, so that they can make the strongest possible theoretical generalizations, in actual fact that language will exhibit considerable internal variation, and single-style speakers will not be found (or, if found, will appear to be extremely 'abnormal' in that respect, if in no other!).

A recognition of variation implies that we must recognize that a language is not just some kind of abstract object of study. It is also something that people

use. Can we really set aside, at any point in our study of language, this fact of use? It is not surprising therefore that a recurring issue in linguistics in recent years has been the possible value of a linguistics that deliberately separates itself from any concern with the use, and the users, of language. Following Chomsky's example, many linguists have argued that you should not study a language in use, or even how the language is learned, without first acquiring an adequate knowledge of what language itself is. In this view, linguistic investigations should focus on developing this latter knowledge. The linguist's task should be to write grammars that will help us develop our understanding of language: what it is, how it is learnable, and what it tells us about the human mind. Surveys of language use have little to offer us in such a view. Many sociolinguists have disagreed, arguing that an *asocial* linguistics is scarcely worthwhile. Hudson (1980, p. 19) has argued that such an asocial view must lead to a linguistics which is essentially incomplete. An alternative view is that meaningful insights into language can be gained only if such matters as use and variation are included as part of the data which must be explained in an adequate linguistic theory; an adequate theory of language must have something to say about the uses of language. This is the view I will adopt here.

As we will see, there is considerable variation in the speech of any one individual, but there are also definite bounds to that variation: no individual is free to do just exactly what he or she pleases so far as language is concerned. You cannot pronounce words any way you please, inflect or not inflect words such as nouns and verbs arbitrarily, or make drastic alterations in word order in sentences as the mood suits you. If you do any or all of these things, the results will be unacceptable, even gibberish. The variation you are permitted has limits: what is surprising, as we will see, is that these limits can be described with considerable accuracy, and that they also apparently apply to groups of speakers, not just to individuals. That is, there are group norms so far as variation is concerned.

Moreover, individuals have knowledge of the various limits (or norms), and that knowledge is both very precise and at the same time almost entirely unconscious. It is also difficult to explain how individual speakers acquire a knowledge of these norms of linguistic behavior, for they appear to be much more subtle than the norms that apply to such matters as social behavior, dress and table manners. This is another issue to which we will return from time to time. As we will see, the task will be one of trying to specify the norms of linguistic behavior that exist in particular groups and then trying to account for individual behavior in terms of these norms. This task is particularly interesting because most people have no conscious awareness that we can account for much of their linguistic behavior in this way.

Discussion

1. I have said that languages contain a great deal of variety. What evidence can you cite to show some of the variety? Consider, for example, how many different ways you can ask someone to open a window or seek permission to open the window yourself because the room you are in is too warm. How many ways can you pronounce variants of *and, have, do, of*, and *for*? When might *Did you eat yet?* sound like *Jeejet*? What did you do with the words and sounds? Do you speak the same way to a younger sibling at home over the breakfast table as you would to a distinguished public figure you meet at a ceremonial dinner? If you do not, and it is almost certain that you do not, what are the differences in the linguistic choices you make? Why do you make them?

2. An individual can use language in a variety of ways and for many different purposes. What might cause a speaker to say each of the following? When would each be quite inappropriate?

a. Do you think it's cold in here?
b. The airport, as fast as you can.
c. I do.
d. I leave my house to my son George.
e. Do you love me?
f. How strange!
g. Can we have some silence at the back?
h. What a beautiful dress!
i. Cheers!
j. Will you marry me?
k. Do you come here often?
l. Keep to the right, please.
m. Damn!
n. You don't love me anymore.

Do you know of any grammar book that tells you when to use (or not to use) each of the above? Would you describe your knowledge of when to use (or not to use) each as a matter of competence or of performance? (In thinking about this you might consult just about any discussion of Chomsky's work on linguistic theory.)

3. Do you always agree with people you know about the 'correct' choice to make of certain linguistic forms? What do you, and they, regard as the

correct completions of the *tag questions* found in the following examples? (The first is done for you.)

a. He's ready, *isn't he?*
b. I have a penny in my purse, _____?
c. I may see you next week, _____?
d. I'm going right now, _____?
e. The girl saw no one, _____?
f. No one goes there anymore, _____?
g. Everyone hates one another here, _____?
h. Few people know that, _____?
i. The baby cried _____?
j. Either John or Mary did it, _____?
k. Each of us is going to go, _____?

What kinds of difficulties did you find in completing this task? What kinds of agreements and disagreements do you find when you compare your responses to those of others? What do the 'standard' grammars have to say about 'correctness' here? How would you advise an adult learning English as a foreign language concerning this particular problem?

4. Describe some aspects of your own speech which show how that speech varies from certain other people known to you. Do you pronounce words differently, use different word forms, choose different words, or use different grammatical structures? If you assume that others make exactly the same choices as you, how would you describe this group of individuals? How would you describe those who make other choices?

5. Hudson (1980, p. 14) says that one may be impressed by the amount of agreement that is often found among speakers. This agreement goes well beyond what is needed for efficient communication. He particularly points out the conformity we exhibit in using such forms as *went* for the past tense of *go, men* as the plural of *man*, and *best* as the superlative of *good*. This *irregular morphology* has no communicative value; all it shows is our conformity to rules established by others. How conformist do you consider yourself to be so far as language is concerned? What 'rules' do you obey? When do you 'flout the rules', if you ever do?

The Scientific Investigation of Language

The scientific study of language, its uses, and the linguistic norms that people observe poses a number of problems. Such a study must go a long way beyond

merely devising schemes for classifying the various bits and pieces of linguistic data you might happen to observe. That would be a rather uninteresting activity, a kind of butterfly collecting. A more profound kind of theorizing is called for: some attempt to arrive at an understanding of the general principles of organization that surely must exist in both language and the uses of language. It is just such an attempt that led Saussure (1959) to distinguish between *langue* (group knowledge of language) and *parole* (individual use of language); Bloomfield (1933) to stress the importance of *contrastive distribution* (since *pin* and *bin* are different words in English, /p/ and /b/ must be contrastive units in the structure of English); Pike (1967) to distinguish between *emic* and *etic* features in language (/p/ and /b/ are contrastive, therefore *emic*, units, but the two pronunciations of *p* in *pin* and *spin* are not contrastive, therefore *etic*); and Sapir (1921) and, much later, Chomsky (1965) to stress the distinction between the 'surface' characteristics of utterances and the 'deep' realities of linguistic form behind these surface characteristics. A major current linguistic concern is with matters such as language universals (i.e., the essential properties and various typologies of languages – see Cook, 1988, Comrie, 1989, and Greenberg, 1963, 1966), with the factors that make languages learnable by humans (but not by non-humans), and with the conditions that govern such matters as linguistic change.

There is not just one way to do linguistics, although it is true to say that some linguists occasionally behave as though their way is the only way. It is actually quite possible for two linguists to adopt almost entirely different approaches to both language and linguistic theorizing in their work while still doing something that many consider to be genuine linguistics. Perhaps nowhere can such differences of approach be better observed than in attempts to study the relationship of language to society. Such attempts cover a very wide range of issues and reveal the diversity of approaches: different theories about what language is; different views of what constitute the data that are relevant to a specific issue; different formulations of research problems; different conceptions of what are 'good' answers in terms of statistical evidence, the 'significance' or 'interest' of certain findings, and the generalizability of conclusions; and different interpretations of both the theoretical and 'real-world' consequences of particular pieces of research, i.e., what they tell us about the nature of language or indicate we might do to change or improve the human condition.

What we will see then, time after time, is a sociolinguistics without a single unifying theme – except that it is about the relationship of language to society – and without a single unifying approach. That view should not necessarily disturb us, if for no other reason than that the 'parent' disciplines, linguistics and sociology, may not be much better off in this respect: internal controversy rather than widespread agreement seems to be the norm in both. Moreover, there is little reason to suppose that work done with a single theme and

approach would encompass all that we would want it to do: it would do no more than illuminate a small part of the various problems that exist and do so in its own peculiar light. In the current state of our knowledge, we can scarcely afford to choose too readily such a limited focus for our investigations.

Discussion

1. Find out what you can about Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* and about Pike's *etic–emic* distinction. How might these distinctions relate to any study of language use in society?

2. Bloomfield's views on contrastive distribution are very important. Be sure you know what is meant by the concept of 'contrast' in linguistics. You might test out your knowledge of the concept by trying to find out how many contrastive consonant and vowel sounds you have in the variety of English you speak. If you find the number of consonant sounds to be any other than 24 and the number of vowel sounds to be far different from 14, you may be on the wrong track.

Relationships Between Language and Society

I propose, therefore, to look at a considerable variety of ways in which language and society are related. The possible relationships have long intrigued investigators. Indeed, if we look back at the history of linguistics it is rare to find investigations of a language which are entirely cut off from concurrent investigations of the history of that language, or its regional and/or social distributions, or its relationship to objects, ideas, events, and actual speakers and listeners in the 'real' world. That is one of the reasons why a number of linguists have found Chomsky's *asocial* view of linguistic theorizing to be a rather sterile type of activity, with its explicit rejection of any concern for the social uses of language.

There is a variety of possible relationships between language and society. One is that social structure may either influence or determine linguistic structure and/or behavior. Certain evidence may be adduced to support this view: the *age-grading* phenomenon, whereby young children speak differently from older children and, in turn, children speak differently from mature adults; studies which show that the varieties of language that speakers use reflect such matters as their regional, social, or ethnic origin and possibly even their sex; and other studies which show that particular ways of speaking,

choices of words, and even rules for conversing are determined by certain social requirements. We will also find that 'power' is a useful concept that will help explain much linguistic behavior. Power, as both something to achieve and something to resist, exerts considerable influence on the language choices that many people make.

A second possible relationship is directly opposed to the first: linguistic structure and/or behavior may either influence or determine social structure. This is the view that is behind the Whorfian hypothesis (see chapter 9), the claims of Bernstein (see chapter 14), and many of those who argue that languges rather than speakers of these languages can be 'sexist' (see chapter 13). A third possible relationship is that the influence is bi-directional: language and society may influence each other. One variant of this approach is that this influence is dialectical in nature, a Marxian view put forward by Dittmar (1976), who argues (p. 238) that 'speech behaviour and social behaviour are in a state of constant interaction' and that 'material living conditions' are an important factor in the relationship.

A fourth possibility is to assume that there is no relationship at all between linguistic structure and social structure and that each is independent of the other. A variant of this possibility would be to say that, although there might be some such relationship, present attempts to characterize it are essentially premature, given what we know about both language and society. Actually, this variant view appears to be the one that Chomsky himself holds: he prefers to develop an asocial linguistics as a preliminary to any other kind of linguistics, such an asocial approach being, in his view, logically prior.

We must therefore be prepared to look into various aspects of the possible relationships between language and society. It will be quite obvious from doing so that correlational studies must form a significant part of sociolinguistic work. Gumperz (1971, p. 223) has observed that sociolinguistics is an attempt to find correlations between social structure and linguistic structure and to observe any changes that occur. Social structure itself may be measured by reference to such factors as social class and educational background; we can then attempt to relate verbal behavior and performance to these factors. However, as Gumperz and others have been quick to indicate, such correlational studies do not exhaust sociolinguistic investigation, nor do they always prove to be as enlightening as one had hoped. It is a well-known fact that a correlation shows only a relationship between two variables; it does not show ultimate causation. To find that X and Y are related is not necessarily to discover that X causes Y (or Y causes X), for it is also quite possible that some third factor, Z, may cause both X and Y (or even that some far more subtle combination of factors is involved). We will therefore have to be very much on our guard when we attempt to draw conclusions from any such relationships that we observe: they may not be causal.

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A worthwhile sociolinguistics, however, must be something more than just a simple mixing of linguistics and sociology which takes concepts and findings from the two disciplines and attempts to relate them through correlational techniques or in any other simple way. Hymes (1974, p. 76) has pointed out that a mechanical amalgamation of standard linguistics and standard sociology is not likely to suffice in that adding a speechless sociology to a sociology-free linguistics may miss entirely what is important in the relationship between language and society. Specific points of connection between language and society must be discovered, and these must be related within theories that throw light on how linguistic and social structures interact. We must assume too that our investigations will draw our attention to important theoretical issues. We will be looking for these constantly – to avoid butterfly collecting!

Discussion

1. To convince yourself that there are some real issues here with regard to the possible relationships between language and society, consider your responses to the following questions and compare them with those of others.

a. Does an Inuit 'see' a snowscape differently from a native of Chad visiting the cold north for the first time because the Inuit has a well developed vocabulary for types of snow and the native of Chad lacks this vocabulary?

b. If men and women speak differently, is it because the common language they share has a sexual bias, because boys and girls are brought up differently, or because part of 'sex marking' is the linguistic choices one can – indeed, must – make?

c. Is language just another cultural artifact, like property, possessions, or money, which is used for the expression of power and/or as a medium of exchange?

d. If language is an essential human attribute and humans are necessarily social beings, what problems and paradoxes do you see for theoretical work in sociolinguistics if the latter is to grapple with the relationships between linguistic and social factors?

2. One aspect of the 'power' of professionals is said to be the way they are able to use language to control others. How do physicians, psychiatrists, lawyers, social workers, teachers, priests, police officers, etc. use language to control others? Does this same power principle apply to parents (in relation

to children), men (in relation to women), upper social classes (in relation to lower social classes) speakers of 'standard' languages (in relation to speakers of 'non-standard' languages), and so on?

Sociolinguistics and the Sociology of Language

Some investigators have found it appropriate to try to introduce a distinction between *sociolinguistics* and the *sociology of language*. In this distinction, sociolinguistics is concerned with investigating the relationships between language and society with the goal being a better understanding of the structure of language and of how languages function in communication; the equivalent goal in the sociology of language is trying to discover how social structure can be better understood through the study of language, e.g., how certain linguistic features serve to characterize particular social arrangements. Hudson (1980, pp. 4–5) has described the difference as follows: sociolinguistics is 'the study of language in relation to society', whereas the sociology of language is 'the study of society in relation to language'. In other words, in sociolinguistics we study society in order to find out as much as we can about what kind of thing language is, and in the sociology of language we reverse the direction of our interest. The view I will take here is that both sociolinguistics and the sociology of language require a systematic study of language *and* society if they are to be successful. Moreover, a sociolinguistics that deliberately refrains from drawing conclusions about society seems to be unnecessarily restrictive, just as restrictive indeed as a sociology of language that deliberately ignores discoveries about language made in the course of sociological research. So while it is possible to do either kind of work to the exclusion of the other, I will be concerned with looking at both kinds.

Consequently, I will not attempt to make the kinds of distinctions found in Trudgill (1978). He tries to differentiate those studies that he considers to be clearly sociolinguistic in nature from those that clearly are not, for, as he says, 'while everybody would agree that sociolinguistics has *something* to do with language and society, it is clearly also not concerned with everything that could be considered "language and society."' The problem, therefore, lies in the drawing of the line between *language and society* and *sociolinguistics*. Obviously, different scholars draw the line in different places (p. 1). Trudgill argues that certain types of language studies are almost entirely sociological in their objectives: they seem to fall outside even the sociology of language. Included in this category are ethnomethodological studies (see chapter 10) and work by such people as Bernstein (see chapter 14). For Trudgill, such work is

definitely not sociolinguistics, however defined, since it apparently has no linguistic objectives.

According to Trudgill, certain kinds of work combine insights from sociology and linguistics. Examples of such work are attempts to deal with the structure of discourse and conversation (see chapter 12), speech acts (see chapter 12), studies in the ethnography of speaking (see chapter 10), investigations of such matters as kinship systems (see chapter 9), studies in the sociology of language, e.g., bilingualism, code-switching, and diglossia (see particularly chapter 4), and certain 'practical' concerns such as various aspects of teaching and language behavior in classrooms. While Trudgill considers all such topics to be genuinely sociolinguistic, he prefers, however, to use that term in a rather different and somewhat narrower sense. In another place (1983b, pp. 32–3), he says that such concerns are perhaps better subsumed under anthropological linguistics, geolinguistics, the social psychology of language, and so on.

For Trudgill there is still another category of studies in which investigators show a concern for both linguistic and social matters. This category consists of studies which have a linguistic intent. 'Studies of this type are based on empirical work on language as it is spoken in its social context, and are intended to answer questions and deal with topics of central interest to linguists' (1978, p. 11). These studies are just another way of doing linguistics. Included in this category are studies in variation theory and linguistic change (see chapters 6–8), and the seminal figure is William Labov. According to Trudgill, Labov has addressed himself to issues such as the relationship between language and social class, with his main objective not to learn more about a particular society or to examine correlations between linguistic and social phenomena, but to learn more about language and to investigate topics such as the mechanisms of linguistic change, the nature of linguistic variability, and the structure of linguistic systems. Trudgill's view is that 'all work in this category is aimed ultimately at improving linguistic theory and at developing our understanding of the nature of language' (1978, p. 11). For him this is genuine sociolinguistics.

From what I have just said and the references given to certain chapters that follow, it is obvious that my concerns will be far less narrowly focused than those of Trudgill. While there may be differences between sociolinguistic investigations and investigations into the sociology of language, I prefer to adopt the position of Hudson (1980, p. 5) in the matter:

> The difference between sociolinguistics and the sociology of language is very much one of emphasis, according to whether the investigator is more interested in language or society, and also according to whether he

has more skill in analysing linguistic or social structures. There is a very large area of overlap between the two and it seems pointless to try to divide the disciplines more clearly than at present.

Discussion

1. Ethnomethodology is the study of commonsense knowledge and practical reasoning. To convince yourself that you have such knowledge and do employ such reasoning, see what happens if you react 'literally' when someone next addresses you with such formulaic expressions as *How do you do?* or *Have a nice day*. For example, you can respond *What do you mean, 'How do I do?'* or *How do you define 'a nice day'* (Be careful!) You should find that commonsense knowledge tells you not to take everything you hear literally. So far as practical reasoning is concerned, collect examples of how people actually do reach conclusions, give directions, and relate actions to consequences or 'causes' to 'effects'. Do they do this in any 'scientific' manner?

2. In various places (see Bibliography and chapter 14), Basil Bernstein, a British sociologist, has claimed that some children acquire only a rather limited exposure to the full range of language use as a result of their upbringing, and may consequently be penalized in school. What kinds of evidence would you consider to be relevant to confirming (or disconfirming) such a claim?

3. Conversations are not simple matters. What can you say about each of the conversations that follow? Do you see anything you might call 'structural' in some that you do not see in others? How, in particular, does the last 'fail'?

    a. A. Excuse me!
        B. Yes.
        A. Gotta match?
        B. Sorry!
        A. Thanks.
    b. A. Gotta match?
        B. Nope!
    c. A. Excuse me, gotta match?
        B. Yes. (offer)
        A. (silence)

4. Labov (1970, p. 30) has described the ethnography of speaking as follows:

> There is a great deal to be done in describing and analyzing the patterns of use of languages and dialects within a specific culture: the forms of speech events, the rules for appropriate selection of speakers; the interrelations of speaker, addressee, audience, topic, channel and setting; and the ways in which the speakers draw upon the resources of their language to perform certain functions.

5. Labov (1970, p. 30) has also described the sociology of language as follows:

> It deals with large-scale social factors, and their mutual interaction with languages and dialects. There are many open questions, and many practical problems associated with the decay and assimilation of minority languages, the development of stable bilingualism, the standardization of languages and the planning of language development in newly emerging nations. The linguistic input for such studies is primarily that a given person or group uses language X in a social context or domain Y.

What are some of the 'questions' and 'problems' you see in your society, either broadly or narrowly defined, that fall within such a sociology of language?

6. As a further instance of a topic that might be covered in the sociology of language, consider who speaks English in the world, where, and for what purposes? You might also contrast what you can find out about the uses of English with what you can find out about the uses of Latin, Swahili, French, Haitian Creole, Basque, and Esperanto.

7. Studies of linguistic variation make use of the concept of the 'linguistic variable'. One simple linguistic variable in English is the pronunciation of the final sound in words like *singing, running, fishing*, and *going* (*-ing* or *-in'*) in contexts such as 'He was singing in the rain', 'Running is fun', 'It's a fishing boat', and 'Are you going?' and on various occasions (e.g., in casual conversation, in formal speech making, or in reading individual words out aloud). What do you find? How might you try to explain any differences you find?

Some Basic Methodological Concerns

The approach to sociolinguistics adopted in this text is that it should encompass everything from considering 'who speaks (or writes) what language (or what language variety) to whom and when and to what end' (Fishman, 1972b, p. 46), that is, the social distribution of linguistic items, to considering how a particular linguistic variable (see above) might relate to the formulation of a specific grammatical rule in a particular language or dialect, and even to the processes through which languages change. Whatever sociolinguistics is, it must be oriented toward both data and theory: that is, any conclusions we come to must be solidly based on evidence, but also must be motivated by questions that are posed in terms such that they can be answered in an approved scientific way. Data collected for the sake of collecting data can have little interest, since without some kind of focus – that is, without some kind of non-trivial motive for collection – they can tell us little or nothing. A set of random observations about how a few people we happen to observe use language cannot lead us to any useful generalizations about behavior, either linguistic or social. We cannot be content with 'butterfly collecting', no matter how beautiful the specimens are!

In like manner, questions phrased in ways that do not allow for some kind of empirical testing have no more than a speculative interest. Those who seek to investigate the possible relationships between language and society must have a twofold concern: they must ask good questions, and they must find the right kinds of data that bear on those questions. We will discover how wide the variety of questions and data in sociolinguistics has been: correlational studies, which attempt to relate two or more variables (e.g., certain linguistic usages to social class differences); implicational studies, which suggest that if X, then Y (e.g., if someone says *tess* for *tests*, does he or she also say *bes'* for *best*?); microlinguistic studies, which typically focus on very specific linguistic items or individual differences and uses and seek for possibly wide-ranging linguistic and/or social implications (e.g., the distribution of *singing* and *singin'*); macrolinguistic studies, which examine large amounts of language data to draw broad conclusions about group relationships (e.g., choices made in language planning – see chapter 15); and still other studies, which try to arrive at generalizations about certain universal characteristics of human communication, e.g., studies of conversational structure.

Since sociolinguistics is an empirical science, it must be founded on an adequate data base. As we will see, that data base is drawn from a wide variety of sources. These include censuses, documents, surveys, and interviews. Some

data require the investigator to observe 'naturally occurring' linguistic events, e.g., conversations; others require the use of various elicitation techniques to gain access to the data we require and different varieties of experimental manipulation, e.g., the 'matched-guise' experiments referred to in chapters 4 and 14. Some kinds of data require various statistical procedures, particularly when we wish to make statements about the typical behavior of a group, e.g., a social class; other kinds seem best treated through such devices as graphing, scaling, and categorizing in non-statistical ways, as in dialect geography (see chapter 6) or the study of kinship systems (see chapter 9).

A bona fide empirical science sets stringent demands so far as data collecting and analysis are concerned, demands involving sampling techniques, error estimation, and the confidence level, or the *level of significance* with which certain statements can be made, particularly when arguments are based on numbers, e.g., averages, percentages, or proportions. As we will see (chapters 6–7), some sociolinguists have tried to meet these statistical demands when they have been required, but on occasion may have fallen short. Consequently, we can have less confidence in certain claims than we might otherwise have. However, many of the conclusions we can draw from sociolinguistic studies are of a non-statistical nature and have no element of doubt attached to them. This is because much of language use is categorical (i.e., something is or is not) rather than statistical (i.e., something occurs either more or less). A recurring concern, then, must be with considering the certainty with which we can draw any conclusions in sociolinguistics. What is the theoretical framework? What are the relevant data? What confidence can we have in the gathering of the data, and in the analysis? What do the results really show? In these respects sociolinguistics is like all other sciences, so we should expect no less than that these requirements be met.

As part of an attempt to work out a set of principles, or axioms, which sociolinguistic investigations should follow, Bell (1976, pp. 187–91), drawing extensively on the work of Labov, has suggested eight as worthy of consideration:

1. *The cumulative principle*. The more that we know about language, the more we can find out about it, and we should not be surprised if our search for new knowledge takes us into new areas of study and into areas in which scholars from other disciplines are already working.

2. *The uniformation principle*. The linguistic processes which we observe to be taking place around us are the same as those which have operated in the past, so that there can be no clean break between *synchronic* (i.e., descriptive and contemporary) matters and *diachronic* (i.e., historical) ones.

3. *The principle of convergence*. The value of new data for confirming or interpreting old findings is directly proportional to the differences in the ways in which the new data are gathered; particularly useful are linguistic data gathered through procedures needed in other areas of scientific investigation.

4. *The principle of subordinate shift*. When speakers of a non-standard (or subordinate) variety of language, e.g., a dialect, are asked direct questions about that variety, their responses will shift in an irregular way toward or away from the standard (or superordinate) variety, e.g., the standard language, so enabling investigators to collect valuable evidence concerning such matters as varieties, norms, and change.

5. *The principle of style-shifting*. There are no 'single-style' speakers of a language, because each individual controls and uses a variety of linguistic styles and no one speaks in exactly the same way in all circumstances.

6. *The principle of attention*. 'Styles' of speech can be ordered along a single dimension measured by the amount of attention speakers are giving to their speech, so that the more 'aware' they are of what they are saying, the more 'formal' will the style be.

7. *The vernacular principle*. The style which is most regular in its structure and in its relation to the history of the language is the vernacular, that relaxed, spoken style in which the least conscious attention is being paid to speech.

8. *The principle of formality*. Any systematic observation of speech defines a context in which some conscious attention will be paid to that speech, so that it will be difficult, without great ingenuity, to observe the genuine 'vernacular'.

The last principle accounts for what Labov has called the 'observer's paradox'. He points out (1972b, pp. 209–10) that the aim of linguistic research is to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed, but the data are available only through systematic observation. Somehow speakers must have their attention diverted away from the fact that they are being observed so that the vernacular can emerge. This can happen when speakers become emotional. Labov found that a question like 'Have you been in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?' nearly always produces a shift of style away from careful speech toward the vernacular, thus providing the linguist with the kinds of data being sought.

Discussion

1. The uniformation principle mentioned above proposes that there is a relationship between *synchronic* (i.e., descriptive) and *diachronic* (i.e., historical) statements made about a language. There has been a long

advocacy in linguistics for separating the two (see Saussure, 1959, Bloom-field, 1933, and just about any introductory linguistics text written prior to the mid-1970s). Try to discover the reasons that are usually given for such an insistence on separation.

2. To convince yourself that there are no 'single-style' speakers, try for an hour or two not to vary your speech style as circumstances change. For example, try to speak to your cat (or dog), your close friends, your teachers, and complete strangers with exactly the same degree of formality (or informality), principles of word choice, precision of articulation, and method of address (e.g., *John, Mr Smith, Sir*). Report what happened and how you felt about what you were doing as the setting and participants changed. How did others react? (Be careful: you might run into difficulties!)

3. For Labov and other sociolinguists the *vernacular* is very important. What do you understand by this term? When do you use such a variety? How easy or difficult is self-observation of that variety?

4. On the whole we will be concerned with the spoken varieties of languages rather than the written varieties. What are some of the essential differences between the two? What do linguists mean when they say that the spoken language is 'primary' and the written language is 'secondary'? How do most people relate the spoken and written varieties?

Sociolinguistics and Related Disciplines

Linguists and sociologists are not the only researchers involved in studies of language in society. Scholars from a variety of other disciplines have an interest too, e.g., anthropologists, psychologists, educators, and planners. We will see, for example, that a number of anthropologists have done work which we can describe as sociolinguistic in nature, for example in the exploration of kinship systems. The same may be said of certain psychologists, particularly those concerned with the possible effects of linguistic structure on social and psychological behavior. Many educators too must make decisions about matters involving language, such as the teaching of standard languages and the skills of literacy. As we will discover in the latter case, some sociolinguists have been quite active in trying to influence educators in their attitudes toward certain kinds of linguistic behavior or varieties of language spoken by specific groups of children, such as the English spoken by certain black inhabitants of many cities in the northern United States, a variety sometimes referred to as Black English'(see chapter 14). Language planners obviously need a consider-able amount of linguistic knowledge in making sound decisions about, for

example, which language or language variety to encourage in certain cir-cumstances, or in any attempts to standardize a particular language or variety, or to change existing relationships between languages or varieties. We will observe that there are many interconnections between sociolinguistics and other disciplines and also between concerns which are sometimes labeled *theoretical* and others which are said to be *practical*. At the very least, sociolinguistics is a socially relevant variety of linguistics, but it is probably much more. You will be able to form your own views on both issues as we proceed through the various topics treated in the chapters that follow.

Further Reading

Downes (1984), Hudson (1980), Trudgill (1983b), and Fasold (1984, 1990) are basic introductory works on sociolinguistics, and Montgomery (1986) and Peñalosa (1981) on the sociology of language. Edwards (1985) is also very informative on a number of issues. Less recent books on either or both topics are those by Bell (1976), Burling (1970), Dittmar (1976), Farb (1974), Fishman (1971, 1972c), Platt and Platt (1975), Pride (1971) and Robinson (1972). Ammon, Dittmar, and Mattheier (1987) offers a comprehensive survey of issues. Andersen (1988) and Fairclough (1989) focus on the relationship of language and 'power.'

There are several collections of useful articles, notably those by Fishman (1968a, 1971–2), Giglioli (1972), Gumperz and Hymes (1972), Hymes (1964a), Laver and Hutcheson (1972), Pride and Holmes (1972), Pugh, Lee, and Swann (1980), and Giles (1979). Akmajian, Demers, Farmer, and Harnish (1990) and Finegan and Besnier (1989) introduce basic linguistic concepts. Lyons (1977) provides an introduction to the earlier ideas of Noam Chomsky and Cook (1988) to more recent ideas. Crystal (1987) is an invaluable source of information on many aspects of language.

Two very useful journals are *Language in Society* and the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*.

2   Language, Dialects, and Varieties

I stated in the previous chapter that all languages exhibit a great deal of internal variation. Another way of formulating this statement is to say that each language exists in a number of varieties and is in one sense the sum of those varieties. However, such a reformulation requires some attempt to define *variety*. Hudson (1980, p. 24) defines a variety of language as 'a set of linguistic items with similar distribution', a definition that allows us to say that all of the following are varieties: English, French, London English, the English of football commentaries, and so on. The definition also allows us 'to treat all the languages of some multilingual speaker, or community, as a single variety, since all the linguistic items concerned have a similar social distribution'. A variety can therefore be something greater than a single language as well as something less, less even than something traditionally referred to as a dialect. Ferguson (1971, p. 30) offers another definition of variety: 'Any body of human speech patterns which is sufficiently homogeneous to be analyzed by available techniques of synchronic description and which has a sufficiently large repertory of elements and their arrangements or processes with broad enough semantic scope to function in all formal contexts of communication.'

Such definitions are comprehensive in that they allow us to call a whole language a variety and also any special set of linguistic usages that we associate with a particular region or social group. Bilingual and multilingual communities too will each have their varieties.

What is particularly important in both of these attempts at a definition is that 'variety' is defined in terms of a specific set of 'linguistic items' or 'human speech patterns' (presumably, sounds, words, grammatical features, etc.) which we can uniquely associate with some external factor (presumably, a geographical area or a social group). Consequently, if we can identify such a unique set of items or patterns for each group in question, it should be possible to say there are such varieties as Standard English, Cockney, lower-class New York City speech, Oxford English, legalese, cocktail party talk, and so on. One important task, then, in sociolinguistics is to determine if such unique sets of items or patterns do exist. We will encounter certain difficulties as we proceed, but it is unlikely that we will easily abandon the concept of 'variety', no matter how serious these difficulties prove to be. It is just too useful a concept to be easily cast aside.

Discussion

1. I have just suggested that, although a concept like 'variety' may be difficult to define, it may still be useful in sociolinguistic work. Linguists have found such concepts as 'sound', 'syllable', 'word', and 'sentence' equally difficult to define (in contrast to lay usage, in which they are just assumed to be obvious and uncontroversial). In one sense, linguistics is all about trying to provide adequate definitions for words such as *sound, syllable, word, sentence*, and *language*. What are some of the problems you are aware of concerning the linguist's difficulty with these words and the associated concepts? What parallels do you see, if any, between these problems and the sociolinguist's problem with *variety* (and the other terms to be used in the remainder of this chapter)?

2. Hymes (1974, p. 123) has observed that language boundaries between groups are drawn not on the basis of the use of linguistic items alone, because attitudes and social meanings attached to those items also count. He says:

> Any enduring social relationship or group may come to define itself by selection and/or creation of linguistic features, and a difference of accent may be as important at one boundary as a difference of grammar at another. Part of the creativity of users of languages lies in the freedom to determine what and how much linguistic difference matters.

How does this interrelationship between linguistic items and the social evaluations of such items apply in how we regard each of the following pronunciations?

a.   butter, budder, bu'er
b.   fishing, fishin'
c.   farm, fahm
d.   width pronounced like wit, like with
e.   Cuba pronounced as Cuber
f.   ate pronounced like eight, like et
g.   been pronounced like bean, like bin
h.   mischievous pronounced with four syllables
i.   aluminum, aluminium
j.   pólice, gúitar, Détroit (with the stress as indicated)

And each of the following utterances?

a.   He hurt hisself.
b.   He done it.
c.   He dove in.
d.   He run away last week.
e.   It looks like it's going to rain.
f.   To whom did you give it?
g.   She's taller than me now.
h.   Yesterday he laid down after lunch for an hour.
i.   Can I leave the room?
j.   He ain't got no money left.
k.   Try and do it soon.
l.   Between you and me, I don't like it.
m.   He stupid.
n.   He be stupid.
o.   I wants it.
p.   You done it, did you?
q.   Stand over by them boys.
r.   Is he the one what said it?
s.   They don't learn you nothing there.

Language and Dialects

Most speakers can give a name to whatever it is they speak. On occasion, some of these names may appear to be strange to those who take a scientific interest in languages, but we should remember that human naming practices often have a large, 'unscientific' component to them. However, many speakers do experience difficulty in deciding whether what they speak should be called a *language* or a *dialect* of a language. Such indecision is not surprising: exactly how do you decide what is a language and what is a dialect of a language? What criteria can you possibly use to determine that, whereas variety X is a language, variety Y is only a dialect of a language? What are the essential differences between a language and a dialect?

Haugen (1966a) has pointed out that *language* and *dialect* are ambiguous terms. Ordinary people use them quite freely to speak about various linguistic situations, but scholars often experience considerable difficulty in deciding that one term should be used rather than the other in certain situations. As Haugen says, the terms 'represent a simple dichotomy in a situation that is almost infinitely complex'. He points out that the confusion goes back to the

Ancient Greeks. The Greek language that we associate with Ancient Greece was actually a group of distinct local varieties (Ionic, Doric, and Attic) descended by divergence from a common spoken source with each variety having its own literary traditions and uses, e.g., Ionic for history, Doric for choral and lyric works, and Attic for tragedy. Later, Athenian Greek, the *koinē* – or 'common' language – became the norm for the spoken language as the various spoken varieties converged on the dialect of the major cultural and administrative center. Haugen points out (p. 923) that the Greek situation has provided the model for all later usages of the two terms and the resulting ambiguity. *Language* can be used to refer either to a single linguistic norm or to a group of related norms, and *dialect* to refer to one of the norms.

The situation is further confused by the distinction the French make between *un dialecte* and *un patois*. The former is a regional variety of a language that has an associated literary tradition, whereas the latter is a regional variety that lacks such a literary tradition. Therefore *patois* tends to be used pejoratively; it is something less than a dialect because of its lack of an associated literature. *Dialecte* in French, like *Dialekt* in German, cannot be used in connection with the standard language, i.e., no speaker of French considers Standard French to be a dialect of French. In contrast, it is not uncommon to find references to Standard English being a dialect – admittedly a very important one – of English.

Haugen points out that, while English has never seriously adopted *patois* as a term to be used in the description of language, it has tried to employ both *language* and *dialect* in a number of conflicting senses. *Dialect* is used both for local varieties of English, e.g., Yorkshire dialect, and for various types of informal, lower-class, or rural speech. 'In general usage it therefore remains quite undefined whether such dialects are part of the "language" or not. In fact, the dialect is often thought of as standing outside the language . . . . As a social norm, then, a dialect is a language that is excluded from polite society' (Haugen, 1966a, pp. 924–5). It is often equivalent to *nonstandard* or even *substandard*, when such terms are applied to language, and can connote various degrees of inferiority, with that connotation of inferiority carried over to those who speak a dialect.

In English at least, *language* and *dialect* may be employed virtually interchangeably. In some cases which term is used depends entirely on extralinguistic considerations, particularly on certain political or social factors. The result is often a considerable amount of popular confusion, so that questions such as 'Which language do you speak?' or 'Which dialect do you speak?' may be answered quite differently by people who appear to speak in an identical manner. As Gumperz (1982a, p. 20) has pointed out, many regions of the world provide plenty of evidence for what he calls 'a bewildering array of language and dialect divisions'. He adds: 'socio-historical factors play a crucial

role in determining boundaries. Hindi and Urdu in India, Serbian and Croatian in Yugoslavia, Fanti and Twi in West Africa, Bokmål and Nynorsk in Norway, Kechwa and Aimara in Peru, to name just a few, are recognized as discrete languages both popularly and in law, yet they are almost identical at the level of grammar. On the other hand, the literary and colloquial forms of Arabic used in Iraq, Morocco and Egypt, or the Welsh of North and South Wales, the local dialects of Rajesthan and Bihar in North India are grammatically quite separate, yet only one language is recognized in each case.'

The Hindi–Urdu situation that Gumperz mentions is an interesting one. Hindi and Urdu are the same language, but one in which certain differences are becoming more and more magnified for political and religious reasons. Hindi is written left to right in the Devanagari script, whereas Urdu is written right to left in the Persian–Arabic script. Whereas Hindi draws on Sanskrit for its borrowings, Urdu draws on Arabic and Persian sources. Large religious differences make much of small linguistic differences. The written forms of the two varieties, particularly those favored by the elites, also emphasize these differences. They have become highly symbolic of the growing differences between India and Pakistan. (We should note that the situation in India and Pakistan is in almost direct contrast to that which exists in China, where mutually unintelligible Chinese languages (called 'dialects' by the Chinese themselves) are united through a common writing system and tradition.)

Gumperz (1971, pp. 56–7) points out that everyday living in parts of India, particularly in the large cities and among educated segments of those communities, requires some complex choices involving the distinction between Hindi and Urdu:

> Since independence Hindi has become compulsory in schools, but Urdu continues to be used extensively in commerce, and the Ghazal, the best known form of Urdu poetry, is universally popular. If we look at the modern realist Hindi writers, we find that they utilize both Sanskrit and Persian borrowings. The juxtaposition of the two styles serves to express subtle shades of meaning and to lend reality to their writings. Similarly on the conversational level the use of Hindi and Urdu forms is not simply a matter of birth and education. But, just as it is customary for individuals to alternate between dialect and standard depending on the social occasion, so when using the standard itself the speaker may select from a range of alternatives. Hindi and Urdu therefore might best be characterized not in terms of actual speech, but as norms or ideal behavior in the sociologist's sense. The extent to which a speaker's performance in a particular communication situation approximates the norm is a function of a combination of factors such as family background, regional origin, education and social attitude and the like.

So far as everyday use is concerned, therefore, it appears that the boundary between the spoken varieties of Hindi and Urdu is somewhat flexible, one that changes with circumstances, with a whole range of factors contributing to a definition of *circumstances*.

The language–dialect situation in Yugoslavia which was referred to above is also complicated. Yugoslavia is a country in which many different languages are spoken: Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, Macedonian, Albanian, Hungarian, Turkish, Bulgarian, Romanian, and so on. However, many people who speak the first of these insist that, in fact, Serbo-Croatian is not one language but two. (The actual differences between the two varieties mainly involve different preferences in vocabulary rather than in pronunciation and grammar. That is, Serbs and Croats often use different words for certain concepts, e.g., Serbian *varos*/Croatian *grad* ('train'), rather than different sounds or ways of constructing utterances.) Many Croatians insist that the language of Croatia is not just a western variant or dialect of Serbo-Croatian but a separate language in its own right, and that Yugoslavia should have four national languages (Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Macedonian) rather than three. Feelings of difference are reinforced by the different scripts used for the two varieties (Roman for Croatian and Cyrillic for Serbian) and also by the different religious loyalties of Croats and Serbs (the western and eastern rites of Catholicism). Many Croats see themselves as members of quite a different ethnic group from the Serbs and regard their variety of language as one marker of that ethnicity. They also equate having a different language as establishing some kind of claim for separate nationhood, much like many Welsh, Basques, Bretons, Ukrainians, and French Canadians.

In direct contrast to the Croatian situation, we can observe that the loyalty of a group of people need not necessarily be determined by the language they speak. Although the majority of the people in Alsace are speakers of a variety of German in so far as the language of their home-life is concerned, their loyalty is unquestionably toward France. They look west not east for national leadership and they use French, not German, as the language of mobility and higher education. However, we can contrast this situation with another area of France. In Brittany a separatist movement, that is, a movement for local autonomy if not complete independence, is centered on the Breton language, a Celtic remnant in this northwest part of the country.

The language–dialect situation along the border between the Netherlands and Germany is an interesting one. Historically, there was a continuum of dialects of one language, but the two that eventually became standardized as the languages of the Netherlands and Germany, Standard Dutch and Standard German, are not *mutually intelligible*, that is, a speaker of one cannot understand a speaker of the other. In the border area speakers of the local varieties of Dutch and German do still remain largely intelligible to one

another, yet the people on one side of the border say they speak a variety of Dutch and those on the other side, a variety of German. On the Dutch side, the residents of the Netherlands look to Standard Dutch for their model; they read and write Dutch, are educated in Dutch, and watch television in Dutch. They say they use a local variety, or dialect, of Dutch in their daily lives. On the other side of the border, German replaces Dutch in all equivalent situations. The interesting linguistic fact, though, is that there are more similarities between the local varieties spoken on each side of the border than between the one dialect (of Dutch?) and Standard Dutch and the other dialect (of German?) and Standard German, and more certainly than between that dialect of German and certain south German and Austrian dialects of German.

Gumperz has suggested some of the confusions that result from popular uses of the terms *language* and *dialect*. To these we can add the situation in Scandinavia as further evidence. Danish, Norwegian (actually two varieties), and Swedish are often distinguished from one another, yet if you speak any one of these languages you will experience little difficulty in communicating while traveling in Scandinavia (excluding, of course, Finland, or at least the non-Swedish-speaking parts of that country). Both Danes and Swedes claim good understanding of Norwegian. However, Danes claim to comprehend Norwegians much better than Norwegians claim to comprehend Danes. The poorest mutual comprehension is between Danes and Swedes with Danes understanding Swedes better than the Swedes understanding Danes. If we turn our attention to China, we will find that speakers of Cantonese and Mandarin will tell you that they share the same language. However, if one speaker knows only Cantonese and the other only Mandarin, they will not be able to converse with each other: they actually speak different languages, certainly as different as German and Dutch, for example. If the speakers are literate, however, they will be able to communicate with each other through a shared writing system. They will almost certainly insist that they speak different *dialects* of Chinese, not different *languages*, for to the Chinese a shared writing system and a powerful social and cultural tradition form essential parts of their definition of *language*.

The situation can become even more confused. A speaker of Cockney, a highly restricted London variety of English, may find it difficult to communicate with natives of the Ozark Mountains in the United States. Do they therefore speak separate languages? Is there one English language spoken in Britain and another, American, spoken in the New World? The famous American journalist and writer H. L. Mencken (1919) had very definite views that the varieties spoken on the two sides of the Atlantic were sufficiently distinctive to warrant different appellations. It is also not unusual to find French translations of American books described on their title pages as translations from 'American' rather than 'English'. Is the French of Quebec a

dialect of Standard (continental) French, or should it be regarded as a separate language, particularly after a political separation of well over two centuries? Is Haitian Creole a variety of French, or is it an entirely separate language, and if so in what ways is it separate and different? How do the different varieties of English spoken in Jamaica relate to other varieties of English? Or is that question really answerable? What, above all, is English? How can one define it as something apart from what Speaker A uses, or Speaker B, or Speaker C? If it is something A, B, and C share, just what is it that they do share?

We undoubtedly agree that this book is written in English and that English is a language, but we may be less certain that various other things we see written or hear spoken in what is called *English* should properly be regarded as English rather than as dialects or varieties of English, perhaps variously described as Indian English, Australian English, New York English, West Country English, Black English, non-Standard English, public school English, and so on. A language then would be some unitary system of linguistic communication which subsumes a number of mutually intelligible varieties. It would therefore be bigger than a single dialect or a single variety. However, that cannot always be the case, for some such systems used by very small numbers of speakers may have very little internal variation. Yet each must be a language, for it is quite unlike any other existing system. Actually, neither the requirement that there be internal variation nor the 'numbers game', i.e., that a language must somehow be 'bigger' than a dialect, offers much help. Many languages have only a handful of speakers; several have actually been known to have had only a single remaining speaker at a particular point in time and the language has 'died' with that speaker.

Still another difficulty arises from the fact that *language* and *dialect* are also used in an historical sense. It is possible to speak of languages such as English, German, French, Russian, and Hindi as Indo-European dialects. In this case the assumption is that there was once a single language, Indo-European, that the speakers of that language (which may have had various dialects) spread to different parts of the world, and that the original language eventually diverged into the various languages we subsume today under the *Indo-European family* of languages. However, we should also be aware that this process of divergence was not as clean-cut as this classical *neo-grammarian* model of language differentiation suggests. (In such a model all breaks are clean, and once two varieties diverge they lose contact with each other.) Processes of convergence must also have occurred, even of convergence among entirely unrelated languages (that is, languages without any 'family' resemblance). For example, Indo-European and Dravidian languages have influenced each other in southern India and Sri Lanka, and in the Balkans there is considerable evidence of the spread of common features across languages such as Albanian, Greek, Turkish, and several Slavic languages. In such situations, language and

dialect differences become further obscured, particularly when many speakers are also likely to be multilingual.

Perhaps some of the difficulties we have with trying to define the term *language* arise from trying to subsume various different types of systems of communication under that one label. An alternative approach might be to acknowledge that there are different kinds of languages and attempt to discover how languages can differ from one another yet still be entities that most of us would want to call *languages* rather than *dialects*. It might then be possible to define a dialect as some sub-variety of one or more of these entities.

One such attempt (see Bell, 1976, pp. 147–57) has listed seven criteria that may be useful in discussing different kinds of languages. These criteria (standardization, vitality, historicity, autonomy, reduction, mixture, and *de facto* norms) may be used to distinguish one type of language from another. They also make it possible to speak of some languages as being more 'developed' in certain ways than others, thus addressing a key issue in the language–dialect distinction, since speakers usually feel that languages are generally 'better' than dialects in some sense.

Standardization refers to the process by which a language has been codified in some way. That process usually involves the development of such things as grammars, spelling books, and dictionaries, and possibly a literature. We can often associate specific items or events with standardization, e.g., Wycliffe's and Luther's translations of the Bible into English and German, respectively, Caxton's establishment of printing in England, and Dr Johnson's dictionary of English published in 1755. Standardization also requires that a measure of agreement be achieved about what is in the language and what is not. Once a language is standardized it becomes possible to teach it in a deliberate manner. According to these criteria, both English and French are quite obviously standardized, Italian somewhat less so, and the variety known as Black English (see chapter 14) not at all.

Haugen (1966a) has indicated certain steps that must be followed if one variety of a language is to become the standard for that language. In addition to what he calls the 'formal' matters of codification and elaboration, the former referring to the development of such things as grammars and dictionaries and the latter referring to the use of the standard in such areas as literature, the courts, education, administration, and commerce, Haugen says there are important matters to do with 'function'. These seem logically prior. He says a norm must be selected and accepted because neither codification nor elaboration is likely to proceed very far if the community cannot agree on some kind of model to provide a norm. That norm is likely to be – or to become – an idealized norm, one that users of the language are asked to aspire to rather than one that actually accords with their observed behavior.

Selection of the norm may prove difficult because choosing one vernacular as a norm means favoring those who speak that variety. It also diminishes all the other varieties and possible competing norms and those who use those varieties. The chosen norm inevitably becomes associated with 'power' and the rejected alternatives with lack of 'power'. Not surprisingly, it usually happens that the variety associated with an elite is chosen. Attitudes are all important, however. A group that feels intense solidarity may be willing to overcome great linguistic differences in establishing a norm, whereas one that does not have this feeling may be unable to overcome relatively small differences and be unable to agree on a single variety and norm.

The standardization process itself performs a variety of functions (Mathiot and Garvin, 1975). It unifies individuals and groups within a larger community while at the same time separating the community that results from other communities. Therefore, it can be employed to reflect and symbolize some kind of identity: regional, social, ethnic, or religious. A standardized variety can also be used to give prestige to speakers, marking off those who employ it from those who do not, i.e., those who continue to speak a nonstandard variety. It can therefore serve as a kind of goal of linguistic behavior for those who have somewhat different norms; Standard English and Standard French are such goals for many whose norms are dialects of these languages, but these goals are not always pursued and are sometimes resisted.

It still may not be at all easy for us to define *Standard English* because of a failure to agree about the norm or norms that should apply. For example, Trudgill (1983b, p. 17) defines Standard English as follows (note his use of 'usually' and 'normally' in this definition):

> Standard English is that variety of English which is usually used in print, and which is normally taught in schools and to non-native speakers learning the language. It is also the variety which is normally spoken by educated people and used in news broadcasts and other similar situations. The difference between standard and non-standard, it should be noted, has nothing in principle to do with differences between formal and colloquial language, or with concepts such as 'bad language'. Standard English has colloquial as well as formal variants, and standard English speakers swear as much as others.

Historically, the standard variety of English is based on the dialect of English that developed after the Normal Conquest resulted in the removal of the Court from Winchester to London. This dialect became the one preferred by the educated, and it was developed and promoted as a model, or norm, for wider and wider segments of society. It was also the norm that was carried overseas,

but not one unaffected by such export. Today, Standard English is codified to the extent that the grammar and vocabulary of English are much the same everywhere in the world English is used: variation among local standards is really quite minor, being differences of 'flavor' rather than of 'substance', so that the Singapore, South African, and Irish varieties are really very little different from one another so far as grammar and vocabulary are concerned. Indeed, Standard English is so powerful that it exerts a tremendous pressure on all local varieties, to the extent that many of the long-established dialects of England have lost much of their vigor and there is considerable pressure on them to converge toward the standard. This latter situation is not unique to English: it is also true in other countries in which processes of standardization are under way. But it sometimes creates problems for speakers who try to strike some kind of compromise between local norms and national, even supranational, ones.

Governments sometimes very deliberately involve themselves in the standardization process by establishing official bodies of one kind or another to regulate language matters or to encourage changes which are felt to be desirable. One of the most famous examples of an official body established to promote the language of a country was Richelieu's establishment of the Académie Française in 1635. Founded at a time when a variety of languages existed in France, when literacy was confined to a very few, and when there was little national consciousness, the Académie Française faced an unenviable task: the codification of French spelling, vocabulary, and grammar. Its goal was to fashion and reinforce French nationality, a most important task considering that, even in the early nineteenth century, the French of Paris was virtually unknown in many parts of the country, particularly in the south. Similar attempts to found academies in England and the United States for the same purpose met with no success, individual dictionary-makers and grammar-writers having performed much the same function for English. Since both French and English are today highly standardized, one might question whether such academies serve a useful purpose, yet it is difficult to imagine France without the Académie Française: it undoubtedly has had a considerable influence on the French people and perhaps on their language.

Standardization is sometimes deliberately undertaken quite rapidly for political reasons. In the nineteenth century the Finns developed their spoken language to make it serve a complete set of functions. They needed a standardized language to assert their independence from both the Swedes and the Russians. They succeeded in their task so that now the Finnish language has become a strong force in the nation's political life and a strong marker of Finnish identity among Germanic tongues on the one side and Slavic tongues on the other. In the twentieth century the Turks under Atatürk were likewise successful in their attempt to both standardize and 'modernize' Turkish.

Today, we can see similar attempts at rapid standardization in countries such as India (Hindi), Israel (Hebrew), Papua New Guinea (Tok Pisin), Indonesia (Bahasa Indonesia), and Tanzania (Swahili). In each case a language or a variety of a language had to be selected, developed in its resources and functions, and finally accepted by the larger society.

The standardization process occasionally results in some languages actually achieving more than one standardized variety. Norwegian is a good example with its two standards, Nynorsk and Bokmål. In this case there is a special problem, that of possibly melding the two varieties into one in a way that pleases everyone. Serbo-Croatian is really two partially standardized varieties of the same language but, as indicated previously, for political reasons many Croats would like the two to be recognized as separate, thoroughly standardized languages rather than two varieties of one standard language. They would prefer to be in a position like speakers of Ukrainian toward speakers of Russian (who consider themselves to be, and are considered to be, speakers of a different language) or, better still, like speakers of Hindi and Urdu (with the additional clear political separation of independent nationhood).

So far as Hindi itself is concerned, it is still in the process of being standardized in India. That process is hindered by widespread regional resistance to Hindi out of the fear that regional languages may be submerged or, if not submerged, quite diminished. So far as standardization is concerned, there are problems with accepting local varieties, and with developing and teaching the existing standard as though it were a classical language like Sanskrit and down-playing it as a living language. Hindi is still often taught much like Latin in schools in the West; it is in many places an underused second language at best; children are not encouraged 'to play in Hindi', and teachers rarely employ Hindi as a language of instruction. Likewise, the kinds of literature available in Hindi are still very limited, there being a paucity of everyday reading materials that might appeal to the young, e.g., comic books, mystery stories, and collections of folk tales. Consequently, the process of the standardization of a 'living' Hindi is a slow one.

The standardization process is also obviously one that attempts either to reduce or to eliminate diversity and variety. However, there may well be a sense in which diversity and variety are 'natural' to all languages, assuring them of their vitality and enabling them to change (see chapter 8). To that extent, standardization imposes a strain on languages or, if not on the languages themselves, on those who take on the task of standardization. That may be one of the reasons why various national academies have had so many difficulties in their work: they are essentially in a no-win situation, always having to 'fix up' the consequences of changes that they cannot prevent, and continually being compelled to issue new pronouncements on linguistic matters. Unfortunately, those who think you can standardize and 'fix' a

language for all times are often quite influential. They often find ready access to the media, there to bewail the fact that English, for example, is becoming 'degenerate' and 'corrupt', and to advise us to return to what they regard as a more perfect past. They may also resist what they consider to be 'dangerous' innovations, e.g., the translation of a sacred book into a modern idiom or the issue of a new dictionary. Since the existence of internal variation is one aspect of language and the fact that all languages keep changing is another, we cannot be too sympathetic to such views.

Vitality, the second of Bell's seven criteria, refers to the existence of a living community of speakers. This criterion can be used to distinguish languages that are 'alive' from those that are 'dead'. Two Celtic languages of the United Kingdom are now 'dead': Manx, the old language of the Isle of Man, and Cornish. Manx died out after World War II, and Cornish disappeared at the end of the eighteenth century, one date often cited being 1777, when the last known speaker, Dorothy Pentreath of Mousehole, died. Many of the aboriginal languages of the Americas are also dead; Latin is dead in this sense; and Biblical Hebrew has been successfully revived in modern Israel. Many languages, while not dead yet, nevertheless are palpably dying: the number of people who speak them diminishes drastically each year and the process seems irreversible, so that the best one can say of their vitality is that it is flagging. For example, the French dialects spoken in the Channel Islands of Jersey, Guernsey, and Sark are rapidly on their way to extinction.

We should note that a language can remain a considerable force even after it is dead, that is, even after it is no longer spoken as anyone's first language and exists almost exclusively in one or more written forms, knowledge of which is acquired only through formal education. Classical Greek and Latin still have considerable prestige in the Western world, and speakers of many modern languages continue to draw on them in a variety of ways. Sanskrit is important in the same way to speakers of Hindi; Classical Arabic provides a unifying force and set of resources in the Islamic world; and Classical Chinese has considerably influenced not only modern Chinese but also Japanese and Korean. Such influences cannot be ignored, because the speakers of languages subject to such influences are generally quite aware of what is happening: we can even say that such influence is part of their 'knowledge' of the language. We can also periodically observe deliberate attempts to throw off an influence perceived to be 'alien': for example, Atatürk's largely successful attempt to reduce the Arabic influence on Turkish, and periodic attempts to 'purify' languages such as French and German of borrowings from English. While in the case of Hebrew, a language used only in a very restricted way for religious observances was successfully revived for everyday use, we should note that a similar attempt to revive Gaelic in Ireland has been almost a complete failure.

Historicity refers to the fact that a particular group of people finds a sense of identity through using a particular language: it belongs to them. Social, political, religious, or ethnic ties may also be important for the group, but the bond provided by a common language may prove to be the strongest tie of all. Historicity can be long-standing: speakers of the different varieties of colloquial Arabic make much of a common linguistic ancestry, as obviously do speakers of Chinese. It can also, as with Hebrew, be appealed to as a unifying force among a threatened people.

Autonomy is an interesting concept because it is really one of feeling. A language must be felt by its speakers to be different from other languages. However, this is a very subjective criterion. Ukrainians say their language is not Russian. Some speakers of Black English (see chapter 14) maintain that their language is not a variety of English but is a separate language in its own right. In contrast, speakers of Cantonese and Mandarin deny that they speak different languages: they maintain that Cantonese and Mandarin are not autonomous languages but are just two varieties of Chinese. As we will see (chapter 3), creole and pidgin languages cause us not a few problems when we try to apply this criterion: how autonomous are such languages?

Reduction refers to the fact that a particular variety may be regarded as a sub-variety rather than as an independent entity. Speakers of Cockney will almost certainly say that they speak a variety of English, will admit that they are not 'representative' speakers of English, and will recognize the existence of other varieties with equivalent subordinate status. Sometimes the reduction is in the kinds of opportunities afforded to users of the variety. For example, there may be a reduction of resources; that is, the variety may lack a writing system. Or there may be considerable restrictions in use; e.g., pidgin languages are much reduced in the functions they serve in society in contrast to standardized languages.

Mixture refers to feelings speakers have about the 'purity' of the variety they speak. This criterion appears to be more important to speakers of some languages than of others, e.g., more important to speakers of French and German than to speakers of English. However, it partly explains why speakers of pidgins and creoles have difficulty in classifying what they speak as full languages: these varieties are, in certain respects, quite obviously 'mixed', and the people who speak them often feel that the varieties are neither one thing nor another, but rather are debased, deficient, degenerate, or marginal varieties of some other standard language.

Finally, having *de facto norms* refers to the feeling that many speakers have that there are both 'good' speakers and 'poor' speakers and that the good speakers represent the norms of proper usage. Sometimes this means focusing on one particular sub-variety as representing the 'best' usage, e.g., Parisian

French or the Florentine variety of Italian. Standards must not only be established (by the first criterion above), but they must also be observed. When all the speakers of a language feel that it is badly spoken or badly written almost everywhere, that language may have considerable difficulty in surviving; in fact, such a feeling is often associated with a language that is 'dying'. Concern with the norms of linguistic behavior may become very important among specific segments of society. For example, so far as English is concerned, there is a quite profitable industry devoted to telling people how they should behave linguistically, what it is 'correct' to say, what to avoid saying, and so on. As we will see (chapters 7–8), people's feelings about norms have important consequences for an understanding of both variation and change in language.

If we apply the above criteria to the different varieties of speech we observe in the world, we will see that not every variety we may want to call a language has the same status as every other variety. English is a language, but so are Dogrib, Haitian Creole, Ukrainian, Latin, Tok Pisin, and Chinese. Each satisfies a different sub-set of criteria from our list. Although there are important differences among them, we would be loath to deny that any one of them is a language. They are all equals as languages, but that does not necessarily mean that all languages are equal! The first is a linguistic judgment, the second a social one.

As we have just seen, trying to decide whether something is or is not a language or in what ways languages are alike and different can be quite troublesome. However, we usually experience fewer problems of the same kind with regard to dialects. There is usually little controversy over the fact that they are either regional or social varieties of something that is widely acknowledged to be a language. That is true even of the relationship of Cantonese and Mandarin to Chinese if the latter is given a 'generous' interpretation as a language. Notice though that it does not help us solve the Serbo-Croatian problem, with Croatians insisting that what they speak is a separate language and Serbians tending to downplay the differences so as to help assert Serbian hegemony.

Some people are also aware that the standard variety of any language is actually only the preferred dialect of that language: Parisian French, Florentine Italian, or the Zanzibar variety of Swahili in Tanzania. It is the variety that has been chosen for some reason, perhaps political, social, religious, or economic, or some combination of reasons, to serve as either the model or the norm for other varieties. As a result, the standard is often not called a dialect at all, but is regarded as the language itself. One consequence is that all other varieties become related to that standard in some way and come to be regarded as dialects of that standard. Of course, that usually involves a complete restructuring of the historical facts. If language X^1 differentiates in three areas to

become dialects XA, XB, and XC, and then XA is elevated to become a later standard X^2, then XB, and XC are really historical variants of X^1, not sub-varieties of X^2. What happens in practice is that XB and XC undergo pressure to change toward X^2, and X^2, the preferred variety or standard, exerts its influence over the other varieties.

We see a good instance of this process in Modern English. The new standard is based on the dialect of the areas surrounding London – just one of several dialects of Old English, and not the most important, for both the western and northern dialects were once at least equally as important. However, in the modern period, having provided the base for Standard English, this dialect exerts a strong influence over all the other dialects of England so that it is not just first among equals but rather represents the modern language itself to the extent that the varieties spoken in the west and north are generally regarded as its local variants. Historically, they arise from different sources, but now they are seen only in relation to the standardized variety.

A final comment seems called for with the regard to the terms *language* and *dialect*. A dialect is a subordinate variety of a language, so that we can say that Texas English and Swiss German are, respectively, dialects of English and German. The language name (i.e., *English* or *German*) is the superordinate term. We can also say of some languages that they contain more than one dialect; e.g., English, French, and Italian are spoken in various dialects. If a language is spoken by so few people, or so uniformly, that it has only one variety, we might be tempted to say that *language* and *dialect* become synonymous in such a case. However, another view is that it is inappropriate to use *dialect* in such a situation because the requirement of subordination is not met. Consequently, to say that we have dialect A of language X must imply also the existence of dialect B of language X, but to say we have language Y is to make no claim about the number of dialect varieties in which it exists: it may exist in only a single variety, or it may have two (or more) subordinate dialects: dialects A, B, and so on.

Finally, two other terms are important in connection with some of the issues discussed above: *vernacular* and *koinē*. Petyt (1980, p. 25) defines the former as 'the speech of a particular country or region,' or, more technically, 'a form of speech transmitted from parent to child as a primary medium of communication'. If that form of speech is Standard English, then Standard English is the vernacular for that particular child; if it is a regional dialect, then that dialect is the child's vernacular. A *koinē* is 'a form of speech shared by people of different vernaculars – though for some of them the *koinē* itself may be their vernacular.' A koinē is a common language, but not necessarily a standard one. Petyt's examples of koinēs are Hindi for many people in India and Vulgar Latin (*vulgar*: 'colloquial' or 'spoken') in the Roman Empire. The original

koinē was, of course, the Greek koinē of the Ancient World, which after Alexander's conquests (*circa* 300 BC) became the lingua franca of the western world, a position it held until it was eventually superseded, not without a struggle, by Vulgar Latin.

Discussion

1. A survey of the following kind might prove quite revealing. Ask a variety of people you know questions such as these, and then try to organize their responses in a systematic way:

a. Which language(s) do you speak?
b. Do you speak a dialect of X?
c. Where is the best X spoken?
d. What is your native language (or mother tongue)?
e. Do you speak X with an accent? If so what accent?

Try also to get definitions from your informants for each of the terms that you use.

2. A question found on many national census forms concerns the language or languages spoken (or known). It may ask respondents either to check one or more language names or to volunteer a name or names. What problems do you see in collecting data in such a way? Think of countries like the Soviet Union, the United States, Canada, India, Yugoslavia, Spain and Norway.

3. Is Afrikaans a dialect of Dutch or a different language? To attempt an answer to this question you will have to consider a variety of issues: What is the origin of Afrikaans (see chapter 3)? Are Afrikaans and Dutch mutually intelligible? How different are the orthographies (i.e., systems of spelling), sounds, vocabularies, and grammars? How important are the factors of the national consciousness of those who speak Afrikaans and South Africa's considerable isolation in the world? Is the initial question clearly answerable from the kinds of theories and data that are currently available to us?

4. Speakers of Faroese are said to understand speakers of Icelandic but not vice versa. Danes seem to understand Norwegians better than Norwegians understand Danes. Monolingual speakers of Mandarin and Cantonese cannot communicate with each other in speech. What do such facts have to say about using the criterion of mutual intelligibility in deciding whether we are dealing with a single language, with two dialects of one language, or with two separate languages? Consider the following pieces of evidence in

arriving at your answer. Speakers of Isoko in Nigeria say they cannot understand those who speak other Urhobo languages/dialects: but these others apparently understand them. This situation seems to have developed concurrently with demands for greater political autonomy and ethnic self-sufficiency.

5. Standard languages are usually based on an existing dialect of the language. For example, the British variety of English is based, historically at least, on the dialect of the area surrounding London, Continental French on the dialect of Paris, and Italian on the dialect of Florence or Tuscany (although Rome and Milan are becoming important influences in the late twentieth century). In other countries the situation is not so clear-cut. What can you find out about the difficulties of choosing a variety for standardization in Denmark, Indonesia, Greece, China, Haiti, and the Arab world?

6. Old English, the language spoken a thousand years ago in England, was a west country variety of English, West Saxon. The court was located at Winchester and the literature and documents of the period were written in West Saxon (or sometimes in Latin). By 1400 the English court was well established in London, which became the center of social, political, and economic power. It also became the literary center of the country, particularly after the development of printing. The variety of English spoken in and around London, including Oxford and Cambridge (which were important intellectual centers), became predominant. How would you use facts such as these to argue that no variety of a language is intrinsically better than another and that what happens to a language is largely the result of the chance interplay of external forces? Can you think of other examples which might support such a conclusion?

7. H. L. Mencken wrote a series of books under the general title *The American Language*. Why did he choose this particular title? Why not *The English Language in America*?

8. One of the goals Dr Johnson set himself in compiling his *Dictionary* of 1755 was to 'fix', i.e., standardize, English. What does Johnson say in the Preface to that dictionary about his success in meeting that goal?

9. The publication in 1961 of *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* caused a tremendous stir in North America being regarded by many critics as an attack on prevailing language standards. What were the issues? (See Sledd and Ebbitt, 1962, and Finegan, 1980.)

10. Latin is a dead language and Hebrew once again a live one. How did Latin die? (Remember, it is very much 'alive' in the sense that French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, i.e., its 'dialects', are spoken today!) How was Hebrew revived?

11. What are some of the difficulties faced in reviving a dead language or trying to maintain, even at some minimal level, a dying language? Consider

the current situations in Wales or Ireland, among many native peoples of the Americas, and within minority language groups, either indigenous or immigrant, in large modern states.

12.   Arabs have a particular historical view of Arabic and Turks of Turkish. Try to find out something about these views. How do they help Arabs and Turks to maintain their languages? Hindi and Urdu are now viewed as rather different by those who speak these languages. How is each language being reshaped to conform to these views?

13.   How would you evaluate each of the following languages according to the criteria stated above (standardization, vitality, historicity, autonomy, reduction, mixture, and *de facto* norms); that is, for each criterion, does the language possess the stated characteristic or lack it: Haitian Creole, Provençal, Singapore English, Old English, Pitcairnese, Black English, Tok Pisin, Cockney, Ukrainian, and the language of Shakespeare's plays?

14.   Find out what you can about Basic English. In what ways is it a reduced form of Standard English? Do the kinds of reductions introduced into Basic English make it 'simpler' to learn and use? (You will have to define 'simpler.')

15.   From time to time certain users of language such as French and German have objected to borrowings, in particular borrowings from English. What Anglicisms have been objected to? What kinds of native resources have been suggested as suitable alternative sources of exploitation in order to develop and/or purify the language? What motivates the objections?

16.   A number of Chinese are concerned with developing the vocabulary of Chinese to make it usable for every kind of scientific and technical endeavor. They reject the idea that such vocabulary should be borrowed from other languages. What do you think they hope to gain by doing this? Do they lose anything if they are successful?

17.   'A language is a dialect with an army and a navy' is a well-known observation. (Today we would add an 'airforce'!) True? And, if so, what are the consequences?

Regional Dialects

Regional variation in the way a language is spoken is likely to be one of the most noticeable ways in which we observe variety in language. As you travel throughout a wide geographical area in which a language is spoken, and particularly if that language has been spoken in that area for many hundreds of

years, you are almost certain to notice differences in pronunciation, in the choices and forms of words, and in syntax. There may even be very distinctive local colorings in the language which you notice as you move from one location to another. Such distinctive varieties are usually called *regional dialects* of the language. As we saw earlier (page 25), the term *dialect* is sometimes used only if there is a strong tradition of writing in the local variety. Old English and to a lesser extent Middle English had dialects in this sense. In the absence of such a tradition of writing the term *patois* may be used to describe the variety. However, many linguists writing in English tend to use *dialect* to describe both situations and rarely, if at all, use *patois* as a scientific term. You are likely to encounter it only as a kind of anachronism, as in its use by Jamaicans, who often refer to the variety of English spoken on the island as a 'patois'.

The *dialect–patois* distinction actually seems to make more sense in some situations, e.g., France, than in others. In medieval France, a number of languages flourished and several were associated with strong literary traditions. However, as the language of Paris asserted itself from the fourteenth century on, these traditions withered. Parisian French spread throughout France, and, even though that spread is still not yet complete (as visits to such parts of France as Brittany, Provençe, Corsica, and Alsace will confirm), it drastically reduced the importance of the local varieties: they continue to exist largely in spoken forms only; they have become disfavored socially and politically; they are patois to those who extol the virtues of Standard French.

There are some further interesting differences in the use of the terms *dialect* and *patois* (Petyt, 1980, pp. 24–5). Patois is usually used to describe only rural forms of speech; we may talk about an *urban dialect*, but to talk about an *urban patois* seems strange. Patois also seems to refer only to the speech of the lower strata in society; again, we may talk about a *middle-class dialect* but not, apparently, about a *middle-class patois*. Finally, a dialect usually has a wider geographical distribution than a patois, so that, whereas *regional dialect* and *village patois* seem unobjectionable, the same cannot be said for *regional patois* and *village dialect*. However, as I indicated above, many Jamaicans refer to the popular spoken variety of Jamaican English as a patois rather than a dialect. So again the distinction is in no way an absolute one.

This use of the term *dialect* to differentiate among regional varieties of specific languages is perhaps more readily applicable to twentieth-century conditions in Europe and some other developed countries than it would have been in medieval or renaissance Europe or today in certain other parts of the world, where it was (and still is) possible to travel long distances and, by making only small changes in speech from location to location, continue to communicate with the inhabitants. (You might have to travel somewhat slowly, however, because of the necessary learning that would be involved!) It

has been said that at one time a person could travel from the south of Italy to the north of France in this manner. It is quite clear that such a person began the journey speaking one language and ended it speaking something entirely different; however, there was no one point at which the changeover occurred, nor is there actually any way of determining how many intermediate dialect boundaries that person crossed.

Such a situation is often referred to as a *dialect continuum*. What you have is a continuum of dialects sequentially arranged over space: A, B, C, D, and so on. Over large distances the dialects at each end of the continuum may well be mutually unintelligible, and also some of the intermediate dialects may be unintelligible with one or both ends, or even with certain other intermediate ones. In such a distribution, which dialects can be classified together under one language, and how many such languages are there? As I have suggested, such questions are possibly a little easier to answer today in certain places than they once were. The hardening of boundaries in the modern world as a result of the growth of states, particularly nation-states rather than multinational or multi-ethnic states, has led to the hardening of language boundaries. Although residents of territories on both sides of the Dutch–German border or the French–Italian border have many similarities in speech even today, they will almost certainly tell you that they speak dialects of Dutch or German in the one case and French or Italian in the other. Various pressures – political, social, cultural, and educational – serve to harden current state boundaries and to make the linguistic differences among states more, not less, pronounced. Dialects continue therefore to disappear as national languages arise. They are subject to two kinds of pressure: one from within, to conform to a national standard, and one from without, to become different from standards elsewhere.

When a language is recognized as being spoken in different varieties, the issue becomes one of deciding how many varieties and how to classify each variety. *Dialect geography* is the term used to describe attempts made to map the distributions of various linguistic features so as to show their geographical provenance. For example, in seeking to determine features of the dialects of English and to show their distributions, dialect geographers try to find answers to questions such as the following. Is this an *r*-pronouncing area of English, as in words like *car* and *cart*, or is it not? What past tense form of *drink* do speakers prefer? What names do people give to particular objects in the environment, e.g., *elevator* or *lift*, *petrol* or *gas*, *carousel* or *roundabout*? Do people say 'I haven't any', 'I don't have any', or 'I ain't got none'? And so on. Sometimes maps are drawn to show actual boundaries around such features, boundaries called *isoglosses*, so as to distinguish an area in which a certain feature is found from areas in which it is absent. When several such isoglosses coincide, the result is sometimes called a *dialect boundary*. Then we may be

tempted to say that speakers on one side of that boundary speak one dialect and speakers on the other side speak a different dialect.

As we will see when we return briefly to this topic in chapter 6, there are many difficulties with this kind of work: finding the kinds of items that appear to distinguish one dialect from another; collecting data; drawing conclusions from the data we collect; presenting the findings; and so on. It is easy to see, however, how such a methodology could be used to distinguish British, American, Australian, and other varieties of English from one another as various dialects of one language. It could also be used to distinguish Cockney English from Texas English. But how could you use it to distinguish among the multifarious varieties of English found in cities like New York and London? Or even among the varieties we observe to exist in smaller, less complex cities and towns in which various people who have always resided there are acknowledged to speak differently from one another?

Finally, the term *dialect*, particularly when it is used in reference to regional variation, should not be confused with the term *accent*. Standard English, for example, is spoken in a variety of accents, often with clear regional and social associations: there are accents associated with North America, Singapore, India, Liverpool (Scouse), Tyneside (Geordie), Boston, New York, and so on, but many people who live in such places show a remarkable uniformity to one another in their grammar and vocabulary because they speak Standard English. One English accent has achieved a certain eminence, the accent known as *Received Pronunciation* (or RP). In the United Kingdom at least, this accent is 'usually associated with a higher social or educational background, with the BBC and the professions, and [is] most commonly taught to students learning English as a foreign language' (Wakelin, 1977, p. 5). For many such students it is the only accent they are prepared to learn, and a teacher who does not use it may have difficulty in finding a position as a teacher of English in certain non-English-speaking countries. Other names for this accent are *the Queen's English, Oxford English*, and *BBC English*. However, there is no unanimous agreement that the Queen does in fact use RP, a wide variety of accents can be found among the staff and students at Oxford University, and regional accents are now widely used in the various BBC services. Trudgill (1983b, p. 19) has pointed out what he considers to be the most interesting characteristics of RP: 'the relatively very small numbers of speakers who use it do not identify themselves as coming from any particular geographical region'; 'RP is largely confined to England' and there it is a '*non-localized* accent'; and 'it is . . . not necessary to speak RP to speak standard English' because 'standard English can be spoken with any regional accent, and in the vast majority of cases normally is'. RP is a 'class' accent: in England, the higher the social class of a speaker, the less the regional accent (and also the less use of local words and grammatical forms). The most generalized accent in North America is

sometimes referred to as *network English*. Other languages often have no equivalent to RP: for example, German is spoken in a variety of accents, none of which is deemed inherently any better than any other.

As a final observation I should add that it is impossible to speak English – or any language – without an accent. There is no such thing, therefore, as an 'un-accented English.' There are, however, different evaluations of the different accents, evaluations derived from social factors not linguistic ones.

Discussion

1. What regional differences are you aware of in the pronunciation of each of the following words: *butter, farm, bird, oil, bag, cot, caught, which, witch, Cuba, spear, bath, with, happy, house, Mary, merry, marry?*

2. What past tense or past participle forms have you heard for each of the following verbs: *bring, drink, sink, sing, get, lie, lay, help?*

3. What are some other variants you are aware of for each of the following sentences: 'I haven't any money', 'I ain't done it yet', 'He be farmer', 'Give it me', 'It was me what told her'? Who uses each variant? On what occasions?

4. What other names are you aware of for objects sometimes referred to as *seesaws, cobwebs, sidewalks, streetcars, thumbtacks, soft drinks, gym shoes, elevators?* Again, who uses each variant?

5. What do you yourself call each of the following: *cottage cheese, highway, first grade, doughnuts, griddle cakes, peanuts, spring onions, baby carriage, chest of drawers, faucet, frying pan, paper bag, porch, sitting room, sofa, earthworm?*

6. Each of the following is found in some variety of English. Each is comprehensible. Which do you yourself use? Which do you not use? Explain how those utterances you do not use differ from those you do use.

a. I haven't spoken to him.
b. I've not spoken to him.
c. Is John at home?
d. Is John home?
e. Give me it.
f. Give it me.
g. Give us it.
h. I wish you would have said so.
i. I wish you'd said so.
j. Don't be troubling yourself.
k. Coming home tomorrow he is.

7. How might you employ a selection of items from the above questions (or similar items) to compile a checklist that could be used to determine the geographical (and possibly social) origins of a speaker of English?

8. A local accent may be either positively or negatively valued. How do you value each of the following: a Yorkshire accent; a Texas accent; the accents of the Queen of England, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and the President of the United States? Think of some others. Why do you react the way you do? Is it a question of being able to identify with the speaker or not; of social class; of education; or stereotyping; or what? How appropriate would each of the following be: RP in a Tyneside working-class pub; network English at a Black Power rally in Harlem; and Parisian French at a hockey game at the Montreal Forum?

9. A. S. C. Ross, in *Noblesse Oblige* (Mitford, 1956), a book which discusses somewhat lightheartedly, but not un-seriously, differences between 'U' (upper-class) and 'non-U' (not upper-class) speech in the United Kingdom, observes (pp. 75–6):

> Many (but not all) U-speakers make *get* rhyme with *bit, just* (adverb) with *best, catch* with *fetch*. . . . U-speakers do not sound the *l* in *golf, Ralph* (which rhymes with *safe*), *solder*; some old-fashioned U-speakers do not sound it in *falcon, Malvern*, either, but it is doubtful how far this last survives . . . .

> *Real, ideal* have two, respectively, three syllables in U speech, one, respectively, two in non-U speech (note, especially, non-U *really*, rhyming with *mealie*) . . . . Some U-speakers pronounce *tyre* and *tar* identically (and so for many other words, such as *fire* – even going to the length of making *lion* rhyme with *barn*).

Ross makes numerous other observation about differences between the two varieties. Do you consider such differences to be useful, unnecessary, snobbish, undemocratic, inevitable, or what?

10. There may have been a recent fall-off in the high social prestige enjoyed by RP among certain social groups in England and elsewhere. How might you establish whether such is the case?

11. Differences in the accent one uses to speak a standard variety of a language may be more important in some parts of the world than others. Are differences in accent as important within the United States, Canada, and Australia as they appear to be in the British Isles? Do speakers of German from Hanover, Berlin, Vienna, and Zürich view differences in German accent in the same way as speakers of English? What factors appear to account for the different evaluations of accents?

12.   The fact that Standard English can be spoken with a variety of accents often poses certain difficulties for the teaching of English in non-English-speaking countries. What are some of the problems you might encounter and how might you try to solve them?

13.   Preston (1989) has demonstrated that speakers of English (in this case in the United States) have certain perceptions about regional varieties of English other than their own, i.e., what they are like and how their own variety differs. Try to describe what you believe to be the characteristics of another variety of English and then check out the facts. Try to account for any differences you find between the two, between beliefs and facts.

Social Dialects

The term *dialect* can also be used to describe differences in speech associated with various social groups or classes. There are social dialects as well as regional ones. An immediate problem is that of defining *social group* or *social class*, of giving the proper weight to the various factors that can be used to determine social position – factors such as occupation, place of residence, education, 'new' versus 'old' money, income, racial or ethnic origin, cultural background, caste, religion, and so on. Such factors as these do appear to be related fairly directly to how people speak. There is a British 'public-school' dialect, and there is a 'Black' dialect found in cities such as New York, Detroit, and Buffalo. Many people also have stereotypical notions of how different social types speak, and, as we will see in chapter 7 in particular, there is evidence from work of investigators such as Labov and Trudgill that social dialects can indeed be described systematically.

Whereas regional dialects are geographically based, social dialects originate among social groups and depend on a variety of factors, the principal ones apparently being social class, religion, and ethnicity. In India, for example, caste, one of the clearest of all social class differentiators, quite often determines which variety of a language a speaker uses. In a city like Baghdad the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim inhabitants speak different varieties of Arabic. In this case the first two groups use their variety solely within the group but the Muslim variety serves as a lingua franca, or common language, among the groups. Consequently, Christians and Jews who deal with Muslims must use two varieties: their own at home and the Muslim variety for trade and in all inter-group relationships. Ethnic variation can be seen in the United States, where one variety of English has become so identified with an ethnic

group that it is often referred to as 'Black English'. Labov's work in New York City showed that there were other ethnic differences too: speakers of Jewish and Italian ethnicity differentiated themselves from speakers of either the standard variety or Black English. They actually showed *hypercorrective* tendencies (that is, they tended to overdo certain imitative behaviors): Italians are inclined to be in the vanguard of pronouncing words like *bad* and *bag* with a vowel resembling that of *beard* and Jews in the vanguard of pronouncing words like *dog* with a vowel something like that of *book*. A possible motivation for such behavior is a desire to move away from the Italian and Yiddish vowels that speakers could so easily use in these words but which would be clear ethnic markers; however, the movement prompted by such avoidance behavior goes beyond the prevailing local norm and becomes an ethnic characteristic.

Studies in *social dialectology*, the term used to refer to this branch of linguistic study, confront many difficult issues, particularly when investigators venture into cities. Cities are much more difficult to characterize linguistically than are rural hamlets; variation in language and patterns of change are much more obvious in cities, e.g., in family structures, employment, and opportunities for social advancement or decline. Migration, both in and out of cities, is also usually a potent linguistic factor. Cities also spread their influence far beyond their limits and their importance should never be underestimated in considering such matters as the standardization and diffusion of languages.

In later chapters (particularly chapters 7–9) we will look closely at the importance of language variation in cities and will see how important such variation is in trying to understand how and why change occurs in languages. In this way we may also come to appreciate why some sociolinguists see such variation as being at the heart of work in sociolinguistics.

Discussion

1.   Gumperz (1968) maintains that separate languages maintain themselves most readily in closed tribal systems in which kinship dominates all activities; on the other hand, distinctive varieties arise in highly stratified societies. He points out that, when social change causes the breakdown of traditional social structures and the formation of new ties, linguistic barriers between varieties also break down. Can you think of any examples which either confirm or disconfirm this claim?

2.   If some social dialects may properly be labeled *nonstandard*, Labov (1970, p. 52) raises a very important issue in connection with finding speakers who can supply reliable data concerning such varieties. He says:

We have not encountered any non-standard speakers who gained good control of a standard language, and still retained control of the non-standard vernacular. Dialect differences depend upon low-level rules which appear as minor adjustments and extensions of contextual conditions, etc. It appears that such conditions inevitably interact, and, although the speaker may indeed appear to be speaking the vernacular, close examination of his speech shows that his grammar has been heavily influenced by the standard. He may succeed in convincing his listeners that he is speaking the vernacular, but this impression seems to depend upon a number of unsystematic and heavily marked signals.

If Labov's observation is correct, what must we do to gain access to any information we seek about 'the non-standard vernacular'? What difficulties do you foresee?

3. How are language norms established and perpetuated in rather isolated rural communities, e.g., a small village in the west of England, or in northern Vermont, or in the interior of British Columbia? How different do you think the situation is in London, New York, or Vancouver? Are there any similarities at all? How are language norms established overall in England, the United States, and Canada?

Styles and Registers

The study of dialects is further complicated by the fact that speakers can adopt different *styles* of speaking. You can speak very formally or very informally, your choice being governed by circumstances. Ceremonial occasions almost invariably require very formal speech, public lectures somewhat less formal, casual conversation quite informal, and conversations between intimates on matters of little importance may be extremely informal and casual. (See Joos, 1962, for an entertaining discussion.) We may try to relate the level of formality chosen to a variety of factors: the kind of occasion; the various social, age, and other differences that exist between the participants; the particular task that is involved, e.g., writing or speaking; the emotional involvement of one or more of the participants; and so on. We appreciate that such distinctions exist when we recognize the stylistic appropriateness of *What do you intend to do, your majesty?* and the inappropriateness of *Waddya intend doin', Rex?* While it may be difficult to characterize discrete levels of formality, it is nevertheless possible to show that native speakers of all

languages control a range of stylistic varieties. It is also quite possible to predict with considerable confidence the stylistic features that a native speaker will tend to employ on certain occasions. We will return to some related issues in chapters 7 and 11.

Register is another complicating factor in any study of language varieties. Registers are sets of vocabulary items associated with discrete occupational or social groups. Surgeons, airline pilots, bank managers, sales clerks, jazz fans, and pimps use different vocabularies. Of course, one person may control a variety of registers: you can be a stockbroker and an archeologist, or a mountain climber and an economist.

Dialect, style, and register differences are largely independent: you can talk casually about mountain climbing in a local variety of a language, or you can write a formal technical study of wine making. You may also be judged to speak 'better' or 'worse' than other speakers who have much the same background. It is quite usual to find some people who are acknowledged to speak a language or one of its varieties better or worse than others. In an article on the varieties of speech he found among the 1700 or so speakers of Menomini, an Amerindian language of Wisconsin, Bloomfield (1927) mentioned a variety of skills that were displayed among some of the speakers he knew best: a woman in her sixties who spoke 'a beautiful and highly idiomatic Menomini'; her husband, who used 'forms which are current among bad speakers' on some occasions and 'elevated speech', incorporating forms best described as 'spelling pronunciations', 'ritualistic compound words and occasional archaisms', on others; an old man who 'spoke with bad syntax and meagre, often inept vocabulary, yet with occasional archaisms'; a man round forty with 'atrocious' Menomini, with a small vocabulary, barbarous inflections, threadbare sentences; and two half-breeds, one who spoke using a vast vocabulary and the other who employed 'racy idiom'.

Value judgments of this kind sometimes emerge for reasons that are hard to explain. For example, there appears to be a subtle bias built into the way people tend to judge dialects. Quite often, though not always, people seem to exhibit a preference for rural dialects over urban ones. In England the speech of Northumbria seems more highly valued than the speech of Tyneside and certainly the speech of Liverpool seems less valued than that of the West Midlands as a whole. In North America the speech of upstate New York does not have the negative characteristics associated with much of the speech of New York City. Why such different attitudes should exist is not easy to say. Is it a preference for things that appear to be 'older' and 'more conservative'? a subconscious dislike of some of the characteristics of urbanization, including uncertainty about what standards should prevail? or some other reason or reasons?

Sometimes these notions of 'better' and 'worse' solidify into those of 'correctness' and 'incorrectness'. We may well heed Bloomfield's words (1927, pp. 432–3) concerning the latter notions:

> The popular explanation of 'correct' and 'incorrect' speech reduces the matter to one of knowledge versus ignorance. There is such a thing as correct English. An ignorant person does not know the correct forms; therefore he cannot help using incorrect ones. In the process of education one learns the correct forms and, by practice and an effort of will ('careful speaking'), acquires the habit of using them. If one associates with ignorant speakers, or relaxes the effort of will ('careless speaking'), one will lapse into the incorrect forms . . . there is one error in the popular view which is of special interest. The incorrect forms cannot be the result of ignorance or carelessness, for they are by no means haphazard, but, on the contrary, very stable. For instance, if a person is so ignorant as not to know how to say *I see it* in past time, we might expect him to use all kinds of chance forms, and, especially, to resort to easily formed locutions, such as *I did see it*, or to the addition of the regular past-time suffix: *I seed it*. But instead, these ignorant people quite consistently say *I seen it*. Now it is evident that one fixed and consistent form will be no more difficult than another: a person who has learned *I seen* as the past of *I see* has learned just as much as one who says *I saw*. He has simply learned something different. Although most of the people who say *I seen* are ignorant, their ignorance does not account for this form of speech.

As we have seen, many varieties of language exist and each language exists in a number of guises. However, languages do not vary in every possible way. It is still quite possible to listen to an individual speaker and infer very specific things about that speaker after hearing relatively little of his or her speech. The interesting problem is accounting for our ability to do that. What are the specific linguistic features we rely on to classify a person as being from a particular place, a member of a certain social class, a representative of a specific profession, a social climber, a person pretending to be someone he or she is not, and so on? One possible answer is that we rely on relatively few cues, e.g., the presence or absence of certain linguistic features. We are also sensitive to the consistency or inconsistency in the use of these cues, so that on occasion it is not just that a particular linguistic feature is always used but that it is used such and such a percent of the time rather than exclusively or not at all (see chapter 7). However, we may actually perceive its use or non-use to be categorical, i.e., the feature to be totally present or totally absent. This last hypothesis is an interesting one in that it raises very important questions about

the linguistic capabilities of human beings, particularly about how individuals acquire the ability to use language in such ways. If humans must learn not only that you have to use linguistic feature X (e.g., *-ing* endings on verbs) rather than linguistic feature Y (e.g., *-in'* endings on verbs) but that you have to use it such and such a percent in situation A, a different percent in situation B, and a still different percent in situation C, what does that tell us about innate human abilities and the human capacity for learning? What cognitive and social abilities are involved in mastering some of the variety we find to exist in any language?

The existence of different varieties is interesting in still another respect. While each of us may have productive control over only one or a very few varieties of a language, we can usually comprehend many more varieties and relate all of these to the concept of a 'single language'. That is, our *receptive* linguistic ability is much greater than our *productive* linguistic ability so far as varieties of a language are concerned. An interesting problem for linguists is knowing how best to characterize these abilities, that is, the 'knowledge' that we have which enables us to recognize something as being in the language but yet marked as 'different' in some way. Is that part of our *competence* or part of our *performance* in the Chomskyan sense? Or is that a false dichotomy? The first question is as yet unanswered but, as the second suggests, it could possibly be unanswerable. I will have more to say on such matters as we proceed to look further into the relationships between language and society.

Discussion

1. When might each of the following sentences be stylistically appropriate?

a. Attention!
b. I do hereby bequeath . . . .
c. Our Father, which art in Heaven . . . .
d. Been to see your Dad recently?
e. Get lost!
f. Now if we consider the relationship between social class and income . . . .
g. Come off it!
h. Take care!
i. Haven't we met somewhere before?

2. What stylistic characteristics do you associate with each of the following activities: talking to a young child; writing an essay for a professor; playing a board game with a close friend; approaching a stranger on the street to ask

for directions; attending a funeral; talking to yourself; getting stopped for speeding; burning your finger?

3. One of the easiest ways of persuading yourself that there are registers associated with different occupations is to read materials associated with different callings. You can quickly compile register differences from such sources as law reports, hairdressing or fashion magazines, scholarly journals, recipe books, sewing patterns, instruction manuals, textbooks, and so on. The supply is almost inexhaustible! You might compile lists of words from various sources and find out how long it takes one of your fellow students to identify the particular 'sources' as you read the lists aloud.

4. Hudson (1980, p. 49) says 'one's dialect shows who (or what) you *are*, while one's register shows what you are *doing*.' He acknowledges that 'these concepts are much less distinct than the slogan implies'; however, you might use them to sort out what would be dialect and register for a professor of sociology from Mississippi; a hairdresser from Newcastle working in London; a British naval commander; a sheep farmer in New Zealand; and a 'street-wise' person from any location you might choose.

5. Wolfram and Fasold (1974, p. 20) offer the following working definitions of what they called *standard, superstandard* (or *hypercorrect*) and *substandard* (or *nonstandard*) speech. They say of someone that:

If his reaction to the *form* (not the content) of the utterance is neutral and he can devote full attention to the meaning, then the form is standard for him. If his attention is diverted from the meaning of the utterance because it sounds 'snooty', then the utterance is superstandard. If his attention is diverted from the message because the utterance sounds like poor English, then the form is substandard.

What are your reactions to each of the following?

a. Am I not?
b. He ain't got none.
c. May I leave now?
d. Most everyone says that.
e. It is I.
f. It was pretty awful.
g. Lay down, Fido!
h. He wanted to know whom we met.
i. Between you and I, . . .
j. I seen him.
k. Are you absolutely sure?
l. Who did you mention it to?

Try to apply Wolfram and Fasold's definitions.

6. What judgments might you be inclined to make about a person who always clearly and carefully articulates every word he or she says in all circumstances? A person who insists on saying both *between you and I* and *It's I*? A person who uses malapropisms? A person who, in speaking rapidly in succession to a number of others, easily shifts from one variety of speech to another?

7. What do you regard as the characteristics of a 'good' speaker of English and of a 'poor' speaker? Consider such matters as pronunciation, word choice, syntactic choice, fluency, and style.

8. There seems to be evidence that many people judge themselves to speak 'better' than they actually do, or, if not better, at least less casually than they do. Do you know of any such evidence? If it is the case that people do behave this way, why might it be so?

9. Find some articles or books on 'good speaking', on 'how to improve your speech', or on 'how to impress others through increasing your vocabulary', and so on. How valuable is the advice you find in such materials?

10. If you had access to only a single style and/or variety of language, what difficulties do you think you might encounter in trying to express different levels of formality as the social situation changed around you, or to indicate such things as seriousness, mockery, humor, respect, and disdain? Is the kind of variation you need a resource that more than compensates for the difficulties that result in teaching the language or arriving at some consensus concerning such concepts as 'correctness' or 'propriety'?

11. Hudson (1980, p. 22) says that 'lay people' sometimes ask linguists questions such as 'Where is real Cockney spoken?' They assume such questions are meaningful. (Another is 'Is Jamaican creole a kind of English or not?') Hudson says that such questions 'are not the kind of questions that can be investigated scientifically'. Having read this chapter, can you think of some other questions about language which are frequently asked but which might also be similarly unanswerable? How about the following: Who speaks the best English? Where should I go to learn perfect Italian? Why do people write and talk so badly these days? Explain why each is unanswerable – by a linguist at least!

Further Reading

Chambers and Trudgill (1980), Davis (1983), and Petyt (1980) provide introductions to the study of dialects. Wolfram and Fasold (1974) focus speci-