

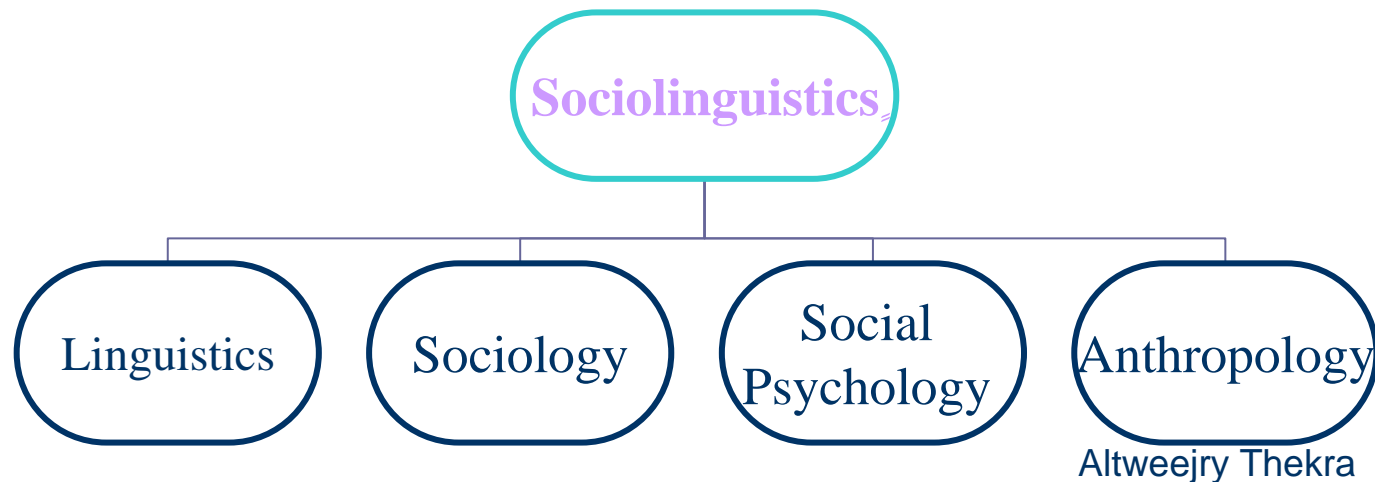
Language and Social Variation

1.Introduction:

- In the previous lecture, we focused on the variation in language use in different geographical areas.
- However, people living in the same geographical area, but differ in their education and economic status, often speak differently.
- These differences indicate their membership to different social groups or *speech communities*.
- Speech community: A group of people who share a set of norms and expectations regarding the use of language.

2. Sociolinguistics:

- *Sociolinguistics*: is the study of relationship between language and society.
- This is a broad area of investigation that developed through the interaction of linguistics with a number of other academic disciplines.

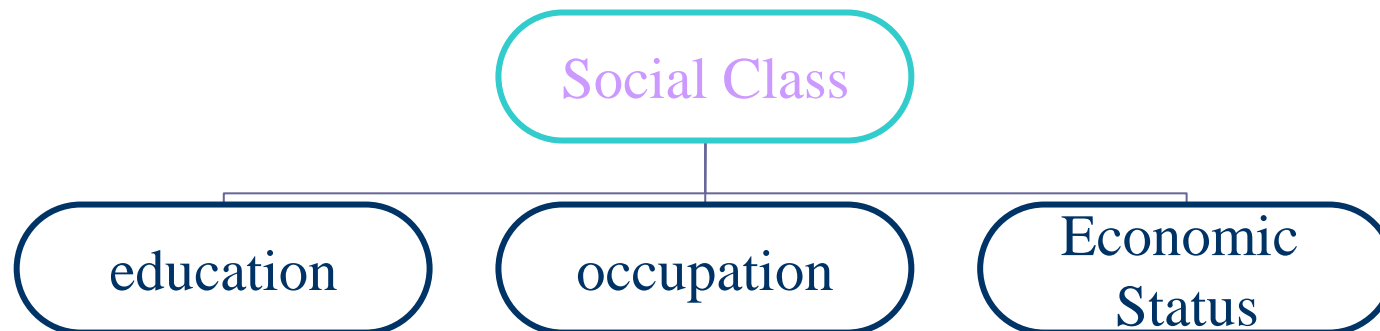


2. Sociolinguistics:

- *What do you think are the factors influencing the way people speak which are investigated by sociolinguistics?*
- Social class
- Education
- Occupation
- Economic status
- Gender
- Age

3. Social Classes:

- In the social study of dialects, it is *social class* that is used to define a group of speakers as having something in common.
- *What do you think are the criteria used in the classification of the social classes?*



3. Social Classes:

- Accordingly, two main social classes can be identified:
more years of education + non-manual work *'middle -class'*
less years of education + manual work *'working -class'*
- Additional terms 'lower' and 'upper' are frequently used in order to subdivide the social classes, on economic basis.
- In the study of dialects, only certain features of language , such as pronunciation, words , or structure, are treated as relevant in the analysis of social dialects.

4. Education and Occupation:

- *How do you think that education and occupation would affect the way that people speak?*
- Labov (1966) P.207 (Occupation)
- Trudgill (1974) P.207 (Education)

Labov (1966)

Labov (1966) combined elements from place of occupation and socio-economic status by looking at pronunciation differences among salespeople in three New York City department stores. They were Saks Fifth Avenue (with expensive items, upper-middle-class status), Macy's (medium-priced, middle-class status) and Klein's (with cheaper items, working-class status). Labov went into each of these stores and asked salespeople specific questions, such as *Where are the women's shoes?*, in order to elicit answers with the expression *fourth floor*. This expression contains two opportunities for the pronunciation (or not) of **postvocalic /r/**, that is, the /r/ sound after a vowel. Strictly speaking, it is /r/ after a vowel and before a consonant or the end of a word.

In the department stores, there was a regular pattern in the answers. The higher the socio-economic status of the store, the more /r/ sounds were produced, and the lower the status, the fewer /r/ sounds were produced by those who worked there. So, the frequency of occurrence of this linguistic variable (r) could mark the speech samples as upper middle class versus middle class versus working class.



Trudgill (1974)

In a British study conducted in Reading, about 40 miles west of London, Trudgill (1974) found that the social value associated with same variable (r) was quite different. Middle-class speakers in Reading pronounced fewer /r/ sounds than working-class speakers. In this particular city, upper-middle-class speakers didn't seem to pronounce postvocalic /r/ at all. They said things like *Oh, that's mahvellous, dahling!*

Findings:

Table 19.1 *Percentages of groups pronouncing postvocalic /r/*

Social class	New York City	Reading
upper middle class	32	0
lower middle class	20	28
upper working class	12	44
lower working class	0	49

5.Social Marker:

- According to the previous studies, the /r/ indicates the speaker membership in a particular social group in a specific place.
- So, post vocalic /r/ functions as a social marker.
- Social marker: a linguistic feature that marks the speaker as a member of a particular social group.
- E.g. dropping /g/ in –ing and dropping initial /h/ p.208
- *Think of linguistic features that function as a social marker in your society?*

6. Speech Style and Style-Shifting:

- Labov (1966) included another element that allowed him to investigate speech style.
- Speech style: away of speaking that is either formal/ careful or informal/casual.
- He noticed that some shift from informal to formal style. *When?*

6. Speech Style and Style-Shifting:

When Labov initially asked the salespeople where certain items were, he assumed they were answering in an informal manner. After they answered his question, Labov then pretended not to have heard and said, “Excuse me?” in order to elicit a repetition of the same expression, which was pronounced with more attention to being clear. This was taken as a representative sample of the speaker’s more careful style. When speakers repeated the phrase *fourth floor*, the frequency of postvocalic /r/ increased in all groups. The most significant increase in frequency was among the Macy’s group. In a finding that has been confirmed in other studies, middle-class speakers are much more likely to shift their style of speaking significantly in the direction of the upper middle class when they are using a careful style.

7. Prestige:

In a finding that has been confirmed in other studies, middle-class speakers are much more likely to shift their style of speaking significantly in the direction of the upper middle class when they are using a careful style.

- *Why?*
- This would be better explained in relation to the idea of ‘prestige’.
- Lower-middle-class speakers shift radically from casual to careful style more than lower-working class, in order to be perceived as having higher social status.

7. Prestige:

- Lower-middle-class speakers show *overt prestige*, status that is generally recognized as ‘better’ or more positively valued in the larger community.
- Lower-working-class speakers show *covert prestige*, status that has a positive value, but which is ‘hidden’ or not valued similarly in the larger community.

8. Speech Accommodation:

- Variation in speech style can be a function of speaker's social class, attention to speech, as well as his perception of the listener.
- Speakers accommodate their speech according to the listener.
- Speech accommodation: modifying speech style toward or a way from the perceived style of the person being talked to.

toward the listener  convergence

Away from the listener  divergence

What kind of speech accommodation do we have?

A-

C'mon Tony, gizzalook, gizzalook

Excuse me. Could I have a look at your photos too, Mrs. Hall?

B-

TEENAGER: *I can't do it, sir.*

TEACHER: *Oh, come on. If I can do it, you can too.*

TEENAGER: *Look, I cannae dae it so . . .*

8. Speech Accommodation:

- Convergence: adopting a speech style that attempts to reduce the social distance by using forms that are similar to the person being talked to.
- Divergence: adopting a speech style that attempts to emphasize the social distance by using forms that are different from those being used by the person being talked to.

9. Register and Jargon:

- Register is one of the factors that influence the speech style.
- Register: is the use of language that is appropriate in a specific context, that is often characterized by the use of jargon.
- Jargon: special technical vocabulary associated with specific area of work or interest as part of the register.

10. Slang:

- Slang: words or phrases used instead of more everyday forms by younger speakers or groups of special interest.
- Slang is an aspect of social life that is subject to fashion.
- It is used by speakers who share the same ideas and attitudes in order to distinguish themselves from others.
- It is used as a group marker during a limited stage of life.
- Slang expressions ‘grow old’ quickly.
- Taboo terms: words or phrases that are avoided for reasons related to religion, politeness, or prohibited behavior.

Next

**Language and the
Brain**