

9 Sociolinguistics and Stylistics

Sociolinguistics studies those types of language variation which result from the correlation between language and social factors, such as social stratification (status), role, age, sex, ethnicity. Depending on the degree and pattern of their actualization, participants select from a variety of available codes (languages, dialects, varieties), they may switch between them, accommodate or mix them. It should be noted that besides this 'quantitative' paradigm, there has emerged a 'qualitative' approach within sociolinguistics; also known as interpretive or interactional sociolinguistics; the latter represents a variety of streams rooted in anthropology and ethnomethodology (cf. Nekvapil, 2000, see also CA, 8).

9.1 Status and Role

The social **status** indicates an individual's social position in a society which is based on power differences, prestige and social class, along with the associated rights and duties. The broadest social class categories are *upper*, *middle* and *lower* classes which correlate with accents (e.g., *posh*, *refined*, *RP* vs. *low*, *uneducated*, *regional*, *local dialect*) and speech varieties (*standard English* vs. *non-standard varieties*). Basic power categories include higher, equal and lower position which correlate with levels of formality (or 'speech styles': *more formal*, *neutral*, *more colloquial*), with address forms (see Attitudinal deixis, 10.1), etc.

The social **role** includes expected behaviour associated with a particular status. It is more flexible than status and varies also according to the speech situation (e.g., in dialogical interaction, the roles of speaker and listener shift constantly back and forth). Incompatibility of requirements imposed by roles upon individuals may result in a *role strain* and *role conflict* (e.g., a politician, being also a citizen, may have inhibitions as to adopting important decisions; conversely, in his election campaign speech s/he may try to diminish distance and establish closeness/familiarity with the fellow citizens). The patterning of statuses and roles in particular speech events yields expected patterns of language behaviour (*style*), such as the level of formality (cf. the degrees of formality suggested by Joos (cited in Crystal and Davy, 1969): *frozen*, *formal*, *consultative*, *casual*, *intimate*), T/V usage (a means of **attitudinal deixis** signalling aspects of respect, a pattern of pronominal usage parallel to the *tu/vous* distinction in French, or *tykanie/vykanie* in Slk) and **terms of address** (*title*, *first name*, *last name*, *nickname*, their combination or adopting 'no-naming' strategy). The last two phenomena, along with honorifics (politeness formulae, such as *may I ...*, *would you ...*) form the means of **social deixis**. It is important to note the existence of a general shift towards informal pole of interaction which is energized esp. by the trends in popular culture, massmedia, and esp. advertising (for example, advertisements often simulate casualness and intimacy with which they are trying to sneak into the consumers' consciousness, cf. also 13). The ways of signalling social distance (expressions of **deference**, i.e., respect for people of a higher status) and role relationships are studied within the field of research into politeness.

The category of **appropriateness** (suitability) concerns the adjustment of one's language usage (i.e., grammar, pronunciation and 'style') to suit the situation in which a communicative event takes place. The ability to recognize different types of speech events and corresponding social roles, to apply the knowledge of code (grammar and vocabulary), to use the rules of speaking (see CA, 8), to recognize and respond to different types of speech acts (see 10.2), to identify typical types of text (genres, functional styles) by means of textual cues, and to use language appropriately (register) is referred to as **communicative competence**.

9.2 Register

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

1. **field**, a) field as an activity: an utterance is a part of an activity whereby it helps sustain and shape that activity (i.e., *extrinsic* field, a talk by a chemistry professor while demonstrating an experiment), b) field as a subject matter (i.e., *intrinsic* field, e.g., political talk, financial services); it is particularly the lexis which is most directly affected by the field (cf. Province and Modality, 3.2.2),
2. **tenor** refers to the type of social (esp. status and power) relationship enacted in or constructed by a text, which is manifested esp. in the *level of formality* (i.e., coding relationships on the cline between distance to familiarity, which is one of the uses of the word style, cf. Trudgill 1984), strategies of positive and/or negative politeness, terms of address (cf. Status, 3.2.2); Černý (1992) offers a fine-grained scale of 'functional styles': *frozen, ceremonial, cultivated, formal, official, neutral, conversational, colloquial, familiar, intimate*; cf. also Joos' five degrees of formality (9.1); the Classical rhetoric used the triadic hierarchy of styles (*low, middle, high*) based on diction and genres,
3. **mode** concerns the adopted channel, esp. spoken for immediate contact and written for deferred contact (see 4.2.1).

Needless to say, these variables operate alongside and only when working together can they ensure the desired congruity (appropriateness) of text and situation; the opposite case is incongruity, or '*register clash*', e.g., a business letter which is too chatty, or *Got a cigarette, mate?* used by a lower rank soldier in approaching an army general, etc. Also, a shift in one variable may cause a corresponding shift in another - once we decide to use a phone or write a letter, we tend to be more aware of the type of choices we make (more formal, neutral, explicit, etc.) since the telephone as well as the mail are specific types of public institutions (hence a possibility of eavesdropping).

9.3 Code Variation and Code-switching

As to the choice of the type of code, there are more possibilities to select from since a particular national language (e.g., the English language) is not a monolithic structure but a 'sum' of all its dialects ('Englishes') of which one functions as the **standard** variety (Standard British or American English). Standard variety is associated with the highest status in the community because it is based on the speech of and is spoken by the highest social classes and by educated people, it is used in the media and literature, taught in schools and to foreign learners. The two principal types of variation of national language manifested in pronunciation (accent), grammar and vocabulary are the regional variation (**regional dialects**) and the social variation (**social dialects**, *sociolects*, also '*genderlect*', *jargon*, *slang*, *argot*, though these are not full-fledged codes). **Idiolect** represents a speech pattern by which an individual is recognized; it includes one's interaction habits (e.g., a tendency to produce lengthy conversational turns, or to make pauses before the completion of turn constructional units), favourite turns of phrase (catchphrases) as well as recognizable features of voice (pitch, *tembre*) and penmanship. There is a certain degree of predictability as to the code selection since the choice of code is motivated by the purpose, situation, characteristics of interlocutors (age, education, ethnic background), etc.

At particular periods of time, societies typically use several varieties with specialized functions (*diglossia* - 'high' vs. 'low' variety), and their members may master more than one variety (*bilingualism*). It is not uncommon for bilingual speakers in conversations to perform a **code-switching**, esp. for the purpose of quotation, addressee specification, issuing interjections, message qualification, reiteration, etc. (cf. Gumperz 1982). In order to demonstrate alignment and closeness, speakers reciprocally try to match their codes (e.g., user-friendly manuals supplied with modern electronic devices); or, conversely, when signalling independence or distance, a deliberate divergence of codes may take place (cf. *accommodation theory* by Beebe and Giles 1984, or *linguistic accommodation* in Crystal 1987). Some common examples of code adjustments are baby talk (motherese), foreigner talk occurring in cross-cultural communication, teacher talk, clinician talk, etc.

The sociological concept of **face** led to the elaboration of the influential theory of politeness by R. Brown and S. Levinson (10.5).