

LESSON TWO

- **Language Variation,**
- **dialects ,accents**
- **Standard Language**

Language Variation, dialects

- The study of language variation is concerned with social constraints determining language in its contextual environment. Code-switching is the term given to the use of different (1)
- varieties of language in different social situations. William Labov is often regarded as the founder of the study of sociolinguistics. He is especially noted for introducing the quantitative study of language variation and change, making the sociology of language into a scientific discipline.
- Sociolinguistics differs from sociology of language in that the focus of sociolinguistics is the effect of the society on the language, while the latter's focus is on the language's effect on the society. Before we review various aspects of language variation in more detail, I want to make sure we've got some basic terms and concepts down. So, here goes...

Language Varieties

- Language changes along social changes.
- Language varieties are related to region, social class, education background, and the degree of formality of a situation in which language is used.
- The varieties of language include standard language, dialects, registers, pidgins, creoles, and so on

Kinds of Variation

- **3. Kinds of Variation**
- if we identify a particular dialect, our understanding of how that dialect works requires an understanding of the phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of that dialect, as well as an understanding of who speaks it. So, here we'll cover grammatical aspects of language variation
- **Phonetic Variation** : In some New York City dialects, alveolar consonants are systematically produced with contact between the tongue tip and the upper teeth (i.e. they are dento-alveolar), while in so-called standard dialects, the alveolars are not dental. So, in New York English, the [t] word "two" is produced with contact between the tongue tip and the teeth. In so-called standard English, this isn't the case. Alveolar consonants are not always realized as dentals.
- **Phonological Variation** In a few dialects of American English people pronounce the vowel in "caught" as an [a]: [kat], thus rendering the two words "caught" and "cot" homophonous.

Standard Language

- Standard language or standard variety is the variety of a language which has the highest status in a community or nation and which is usually based on the speech and writing of educated native speakers of the language.
- The standard language of Chinese is *Putonghua*; *Received Pronunciation* (RP) for British English; *Standard American English* (SAE) for the American English.
- A standard language is generally used in government documents, in the news media and in literature, described in dictionaries and grammars, and taught in schools and taught to non-native speakers when they learn the language as a foreign language.

Dialects

- A variety of a language used recognizably in a specific region or by a specific social class is called a *dialect*.
- The major difference between a language and a dialect is that a language has an army behind it.
- The study of dialects is called dialectology. Dialects can be categorized into the following types:
- *Regional/geographical dialects*: varieties of a language spoken in a geographical area.
- *Temporal dialects*: varieties of a language used at particular stages in its historical development.
- *Social dialects or sociolects*: varieties of a language used by people belonging to particular social class.
- *Idiolects*: varieties of a language used by individual speakers, with peculiarities of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary

- A final note on accent. WE ALL HAVE ONE! There is no such thing as a person who speaks without an accent. In sum, a dialect is a particular variety of a language, and we all have a dialect. Accent refers to the phonology of a given dialect. Since we all have a dialect, we all have an accent.
- **Idiolect:** Another term that we must be familiar with is idiolect. "What's an idiolect. An idiolect is simply the technical term we use to refer to the variety of language spoken by each individual speaker of the language. Just as there is variation among groups of speakers of a language, there is variation from speaker to speaker. No two speakers of a language speak identically. Each speaks her or his own particular variety of that language. Each thus speaks her or his own idiolect. (2)
- A language, say English, is really a collection of dialects.
- A dialect is a particular variety of a language that differs noticeably from the variety or varieties of the same language spoken by another group or groups of people.
- Dialects themselves are collections of idiolects (and thus so are languages).

References

- E. Bouchard Ryan, H. Giles: Attitudes toward Language Variation. Edward Arnold, London, 1982.
- J. B. Bride, J. Holmes: Sociolinguistics. Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972.
- R. L. Cooper: Language Spread. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1982.
- W. Downes: Language and Society. Fontana, London, 1984.
- R. Fasold: The Sociolinguistics of Society. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984.
- (ed.) J. A. Fishman: Advances in the Sociology of Language, Vol. II. Mouton, The Hague, 1972.
- V. Fromkin, R. Rodman: An Introduction to Language. Harcourt Brace, Fort Worth, 1998.