



## SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND ITS PRINCIPLES

**Normetova Munira**

Assistant teacher Urgench state university

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12149856>

### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 14<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Accepted: 18<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Online: 19<sup>th</sup> June 2024

### KEYWORDS

*Sociolinguistics, micro-linguistics, macrolinguistics, sociology, gender, attachment, ethnomethodological research, geolinguistics, speech communities.*

### ABSTRACT

*In this article the author investigates sociolinguistics as an independent branch of linguistics, the relationships between language and society to understand structure and its role in communication. Sociolinguistics study the way social structure influences people speak and language varieties and usage patterns correlate with social attributes like class, gender, and age. the sociology of language aims to understand social structures by studying language, such as how specific linguistic features define certain social arrangements.*

Some researchers have suggested a distinction between sociolinguistics or micro-sociolinguistics and the sociology of language or macro-sociolinguistics. In this distinction, sociolinguistics focuses on exploring the relationships between language and society to better understand language structure and its role in communication. In contrast, the sociology of language aims to understand social structures by studying language, such as how specific linguistic features define certain social arrangements. Hudson described the difference as sociolinguistics being "the study of language in relation to society," while the sociology of language is "the study of society in relation to language." In other words, in sociolinguistics, we study language and society to learn more about the nature of language. In the sociology of language, we focus on how language helps us understand society. Coulmas explains that "micro-sociolinguistics investigates how social structure influences the way people speak and how language varieties and usage patterns correlate with social attributes like class, gender, and age." In contrast, "macro-sociolinguistics examines how societies use languages, including the attitudes and attachments that determine the functional distribution of speech forms in society, language shift, maintenance, and replacement, and the boundaries and interactions of speech communities."

The perspective I will adopt here is that both sociolinguistics and the sociology of language need a systematic study of language and society to be successful. Furthermore, a sociolinguistics that avoids making conclusions about society is unnecessarily limiting, just as a sociology of language that ignores linguistic findings from sociological research is restrictive. While it is possible to focus exclusively on one approach, I will consider both. My views align with those of who stated: There is no clear boundary between the two fields;



instead, they share a broad area of common interest. While sociolinguistic research focuses on several key issues, a strict division between micro and macro approaches appears artificial and unnecessary given our current understanding of the complex relationships between linguistic and social structures. Both fields will continue to contribute to a better understanding of language as both a requirement for and a result of social life.

Consequently, I will not try to make the distinctions found in Trudgill. Trudgill attempts to separate studies he considers clearly sociolinguistic from those that are not, arguing that while sociolinguistics relates to language and society, it does not encompass everything that pertains to "language and society." The challenge lies in defining the boundary between language and society and sociolinguistics, with different scholars placing this boundary in different areas. Trudgill contends that some language studies, particularly ethnomethodological research and work by scholars like Bernstein, are almost entirely sociological in their aims and fall outside even the sociology of language. For Trudgill, this type of work is definitely not sociolinguistics, as it lacks linguistic objectives. According to Trudgill, some types of work merge insights from both sociology and linguistics. Examples include studies on the structure of discourse and conversation, speech acts, the ethnography of speaking, kinship systems, the sociology of language such as bilingualism, code-switching, and diglossia, and practical issues like teaching and classroom language behavior. Trudgill considers these topics to be genuinely sociolinguistic but prefers to use the term in a narrower sense. He suggests that these concerns might be better categorized under anthropological linguistics, geolinguistics, or the social psychology of language.

For Trudgill, there is another category of studies where researchers focus on both linguistic and social aspects. This category includes studies with 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". These studies represent another approach to doing linguistics. Examples include research on variation and linguistic change, with Labov being a key figure. According to Trudgill, Labov's work addresses issues such as the relationship between language and social class, aiming not to learn more about a specific society or examine correlations between linguistic and social phenomena, but to understand language better and explore topics like the mechanisms of linguistic change, the nature of linguistic variability, and the structure of linguistic systems. Trudgill believes that "all work in this category is ultimately aimed at improving linguistic theory and developing our understanding of the nature of language". He considers this to be true sociolinguistics. Chambers shares a similar view, and Downes agrees, stating that "sociolinguistics is that branch of linguistics which studies those properties of language and languages that require reference to social, including contextual, factors for their explanation." However, Downes' scope in reviewing research on language and society goes beyond Trudgill's, even surpassing his glossary definition, where sociolinguistic research is described as "work intended to achieve a better understanding of human language by studying it in its social context and/or to achieve a better understanding of the relationship and interaction between language and society."

As I mentioned earlier regarding Cameron's views, there is an increasing body of work within broadly defined sociolinguistics that adopts an "interventionist" approach. This work,



described by Widdowson as "linguistics with a conscience and a cause," aims to expose how language is used and misused to exert power and suppress human rights. Prominent figures in this area include Fairclough and van Dijk, who advocate for "critical discourse analysis." This approach examines how language is employed to maintain power and privilege, support social institutions, and obscure the reality that many things perceived as "natural" and "normal" are actually influenced by societal power relations. It argues that politics, medicine, religion, education, law, race, gender, and academia can only be truly understood within the framework of critical discourse analysis, as systems that perpetuate unequal distribution of wealth, status, education, and more. Fairclough criticizes sociolinguistics for its limitations, stating that while it is effective at addressing "what?" questions such as the facts of variation, it falls short on "why?" and "how?" questions such as why the facts are as they are, how the existing sociolinguistic order was established and is maintained, and how it might be changed to benefit those dominated by it.

This perspective is deeply ideological, asserting that all language use and investigations are ideological, meaning there can be no "objective" or "neutral" sociolinguistics. Consequently, critical discourse analysis is inherently ideological and judgmental, positioning itself as a tool for those fighting against linguistic forms of domination and oppression. We should be cautious in evaluating such claims, as appeals to what is right can undermine genuine scientific inquiry..

Those investigating potential connections between language and society must address two key aspects: posing relevant questions and identifying suitable data to address those questions. The breadth of inquiries and data in sociolinguistics is vast: from correlational studies, which aim to link multiple variables like certain linguistic patterns with differences in social class, to implicational studies suggesting relationships between linguistic features e.g., the usage of "tess" correlating with "bes", to microlinguistic analyses focusing on specific linguistic elements or individual variations, exploring potential broader linguistic and social implications e.g., examining the distribution of "singing" versus "singin" , to macrolinguistic investigations scrutinizing large language datasets to draw overarching conclusions about group dynamics such as language planning decisions.

Additionally, there are studies aiming to generalize about universal features of human communication, such as those examining conversational structures.

In an effort to establish a set of guiding principles for sociolinguistic inquiries, Bell, heavily influenced by Labov's work, has proposed eight principles for consideration:

1. The cumulative principle: Our understanding of language expands with accumulated knowledge, leading us to explore new areas of study that may intersect with other disciplines.
2. The uniformation principle: Linguistic processes observed today mirror those of the past, indicating a continuity between descriptive synchronic and historical diachronic aspects of language.
3. The principle of convergence: The significance of new data in confirming or interpreting previous findings increases with the differences in data collection methods. Linguistic data gathered through procedures used in other scientific investigations are particularly valuable.
4. The principle of subordinate shift: When individuals who speak a non-standard variety of language, like a dialect, are directly questioned about that variety, their responses tend to



irregularly shift towards or away from the standard variety. This allows researchers to gather valuable evidence on topics such as language varieties, norms, and changes.

5. The principle of style-shifting: No speaker uses a single style of language; instead, individuals employ various linguistic styles depending on the situation.

6. The principle of attention: Speech styles can be categorized along a continuum based on the speaker's level of attentiveness to their speech. More conscious awareness results in a more formal style.

7. The vernacular principle: The most regular and historically grounded style of language is the vernacular, characterized by a relaxed, spoken style with minimal conscious attention paid to speech.

8. The principle of formality: Any structured observation of speech inherently involves some level of conscious attention to speech, making it challenging to observe genuine vernacular without significant effort.

The final principle addresses what Labov has termed the "observer's paradox." He explains that linguistic research aims to understand how people naturally speak, yet the data are only available through systematic observation. Speakers need to be unaware of being observed for the vernacular to emerge. This can occur when speakers become emotional. Labov discovered that questions such as "Have you been in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?" often prompt a shift from careful speech to the vernacular, providing linguists with the desired data. These principles form the basis of studies on language variation. Different types of studies will require different principles, which I aim to elucidate in the subsequent chapters.

### References:

1. Aitchison, J. (1991). *Language Change: Progress or Decay?* 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Coulmas, F. (1999). The Far East. In J. A. Fishman (ed.), *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3. Cameron, D. (1998a). Gender, Language, and Discourse: A Review Essay. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 23(4): 945–73.
4. Hudson, A. (1992). Diglossia: A Bibliographic Review. *Language in Society*, 21: 611–74.
5. Trudgill, P. (1988). Norwich Revisited: Recent Linguistic Changes in an English Urban Dialect. *English World-Wide*, 9: 33–49.
6. Labov, W. (1970). *The Study of Language in its Social Context*. *Studium Generale*, 23: 30–87.
7. Widdowson, H. G. (1998). Review Article: The theory and Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis. *Applied Linguistics*, 19(1): 136–51.