UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Structure

1.0   OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you to

- get an insight into the significant relationship between language and society.

- understand and define sociolinguistics as an independent discipline.

- trace the growth of sociolinguistics from the 1960's to some recent research work.

- appreciate and get familiar with the great diversity of phenomena that sociolinguists investigate, for instance, language variation, language change, language maintenance, language planning, etc.

1.1   INTRODUCTION

1.1.1   What is sociolinguistics?

We all use language everyday. But how many of us stop to think about the relevance or significance of language in our lives? Is language not unique to only humans? Is it not something that makes us distinct from animals? Are we all not creative in our use of language? Do we not use language in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes?

Well, language is actually a great mystery. And perhaps that is why we need to think about it more deeply and carefully.

The mysterious nature of language will begin to unfold itself once you realize that it cannot be studied in isolation. It is used in society and therefore, we need to study language in relation to society. Language is what members of a society speak. But what is society? A society comprises of a group of individuals who are normally

drawn together for a certain purpose or purposes. Whatever may be the purpose, the use of language is undoubtedly an integral part of being human. Infact, an inability to use language appropriately or adequately can affect one's status in society, and may even alter one's personality.

Language cannot exist and develop outside society. What lyrics are to music, language is to society. The relationship between the two is that of interdependence. To ignore the influence of language on society or of society on language would give only an incomplete picture of the relationship that language and society share. The main concern of sociolinguistics is to examine this complex relationship between language and society.

Some of the questions that sociolinguists investigate are:

1. Is language static or variable?
2. To what extent are social factors responsible for language variation?
3. How is it that people are able to communicate despite variation?
4. Are standard languages different from dialects?
5. Why should each social context be examined in its own right?
6. Are there any homogenous societies in reality?
7. Can language be used as a tool for power in all spheres of social life, like education, religion, and administration, etc and lead to social exploitation?
8. Can language initiate a social change?
9. Why do languages change?
10. Is language planning essential?

Although all the questions will not be addressed in this unit, some of the theories, which will be discussed in the following sections, will deal with these issues.

It is since the 1960's that sociolinguistics has expanded considerably and become an independent field of academic research. The widespread interest in this field arose primarily because of a growing dissatisfaction with the Structural and Chomsky's perspectives on language. While the former were interested in examining the structural properties of language, the latter's main concern has been an ideal speaker-learner in a completely homogenous speech community who know their language perfectly. As a result, linguists have been engaged in characterizing the abstract knowledge or the competence that native speakers of a language possess to the total exclusion of the social context in which language is learnt and used. Apart from considering language as a system of grammar, sociolinguists find it equally important to study its usage and functions in various situations.

Sociolinguistics is a meeting ground for linguists and social scientists. However, many a t mes there have been diametrically opposite views on the relationship betweer .anguage and society. While some have perceived social reality in terms of language, others have believed that the form and function are determined by social factors. Nevertheless, diverse orientations as these may be, they help us to reflect on the nature of both language and society and realize how in reality the relationship between the two is inextricably interwoven.

Sociolinguists examine the variable nature of language. They believe that language is not a static entity but is dynamic. Just as a piece of currency keeps evolving and changing, so do languages. Language variation can be investigated at any of the levels: phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic or discourse. Variation may be due to a number of factors like geographical separation, sex, age, education, social class, caste etc. or because of style and register differences. Language can also vary according to the situation or the social context. Sociolinguists try to examine and explain linguistic variation in terms of personal, geographical or social reasons.

The social context is considered to be of utmost importance in sociolinguistics. The sociolinguistic reality of a relatively homogenous society of America is very different from the heterogeneity of India. The fact that as many as 1,652 languages are spoken in India is in itself a good enough reason to believe that there is a great deal of diversity. Yet, despite this diversity and linguistic variation, there seems to be some kind of underlying unity, which enables communication to take place quite easily. It is not unusual for an individual in India to maintain multiple identities. For example, a gujarati speaker in Delhi may be speaking in gujarati at home with his family members, English in his office, Hindi with his friends and yet another language in another context. What is important is to remember that each social context should be examined in its own right.

Another concern of sociolinguists has been to regard **language as a marker of group solidarity** and **group identity**. An individual creates his/her identity in terms of the social group or groups he/she belongs to. He/she shares certain social and linguistic norms with the other members of the social group. There is, therefore, a sort of conformity to a social group. Yet, the uniqueness of each individual's experience of language and the society he/she belongs to enables him/her to filter his/her experience of new situations in his/her own way. This obviously means that since no two individuals are alike or have the same experience, they interpret situations in different ways and construct mental maps according to their own interpretation. Hence, there are as it were, two forces operating, one leading to similarities between individuals by conforming to a social group or groups and their norms and the other leading to individual differences. These forces are often referred to as **conformity** and **individualism**. The amount of variation between speakers within a social group depends on the relative strengths of these two forces.

Language is also often used as a tool of power in all spheres of social life, be it education, religion, media, administration and so on. Language of the rich and the powerful is often made a 'standard' variety at the cost of all other varieties, which are in no way linguistically inferior. Think for a moment about a school classroom in India. Just the way a school uniform is imposed on children so that they all start looking similar, standard Hindi/English is made a compulsory media of instruction in schools. This negates the multiplicity of languages that children bring with them to the classroom and leaves them feeling socially disadvantaged. More so, because a standard variety becomes essential for upward social mobility. Instead of using multilingualism as a classroom resource, variability is shunned at and classroom interaction remains largely monolithic in nature. Sociolinguists in India are now increasingly getting concerned with issues such as these and are keen to bring about a social change in keeping with our sociolinguistic reality.

The study of sociolinguistics is partly empirical and partly theoretical. It must be founded on an adequate data base like censuses, documents, surveys, and interview. Conclusions are based on evidence and scientific analysis. Language variation, for instance, could be examined at the level of phonology. Questions like why is it that a word like 'boy' is called 'larka' by some and 'larika' by some others can be empirically tested. Is it because these two sets of people inhabit two different regions? Or is it because they belong to two different castes? Or is it because they belong to different social stratas of society?

To conclude, Fishman's description of sociolinguistics appears to be quite apt and interesting. He considers sociolinguistics to encompass everything from 'who speaks (or writes) what language (or what language variety) to whom and when and to what end' (1972 b).

1.1.2 The problem of variation

Linguists, since long, have been concerned with describing and writing the system or the grammar that each speaker 'knows'. This knowledge is not only something that

every individual possesses but is also some kind of shared knowledge that is possessed by all those who speak that language. Although this knowledge is abstract, as a native speaker of a particular language, one knows what is in the language and what is not, what is grammatical and what is not, what is ambiguous and what is not. Most of all, the creative ability of producing and understanding an infinite number of novel sentences from a finite set of rules is what distinguishes humans from animals.

Noam Chomsky has been the most influential personality in the late 20thC. He stresses the importance of 'competence' that native speakers possess. According to him, it is the linguist's task to characterize this 'competence'. Matters' relating to 'performance' which is the ability to be able to use specific utterances in a variety of ways according to a situation or context is not important at all. The paradigm that he has advocated has led mainstream linguists to turn their back on society and sociology. But by not addressing a whole range of questions regarding the actual usage of language or its varied nature, linguistics as a discipline, has constructed language as a highly abstract object.

What exactly does it mean that people in Delhi and Eastern U.P. speak 'Hindi' or that people in America, England and Australia speak 'English'? Everyone knows that what is spoken in Delhi is quite different from what is spoken in Eastern U.P. or that American English, British English and Australian English differ in significant ways.

Apart from this kind of variation, which deals with different varieties, we also know that the language we use everyday is remarkably varied. All languages have a considerable amount of internal variation and we make constant use of the many options that we have with us. No one speaks the same way all the time.

Recognition of variation implies that we understand that language is not just an abstract object of study, but something that we use. Meaningful insights into language can only be gained if matters of language use and variation are included as part of the data which is collected only to write grammars.

In the following sections, we will study the evolution of sociolinguistics, which begins with dialectology. The dialectologists were concerned with regional variation. A distinction is often made between regional and social variation. Regional variation deals with regional dialects, which mark off the residents of one region from those of the other regions. Social variation, on the other hand, deals with varieties associated with a specific social class or social status or caste, etc.

1.2   DIALECTOLOGY: A PROGENITOR IN EARLY SOCIOLINGUISTIC WORK

In the latter part of the 19thC, some dialectologists like Jules Gillieron, George Wenker, Hans Kurath and others attempted to write certain dialect forms, either in dictionaries or on maps. They mapped these dialects on a regional basis showing that languages differentiate internally as speaker's distance themselves from one another over time and space. This results in the creation of dialects of the language.

They tried to analyze speech variation and believed that speech communities are essentially heterogeneous. They were of the opinion that if a language is spoken by atleast two people, then there are always some differences of usage and if the numbers increase to thousands or millions of people, then variations of usage get more pronounced with the social and geographical structure of the society to which the speakers belong.

Several atlases like the 'Linguistic Atlas of France', 'Linguistic Atlas of New England', 'Survey of England's Dialects' and many others were prepared which mapped the geographical distribution of variant forms for 'the same thing' in 'the same language'. A list of items of usage was prepared to be checked at certain geographical locations like the pronunciation of the word 'bath' or 'greasy'. Lines called 'isoglosses' were marked on a map creating geographical boundaries indicating that on the one side of the boundary, people pronounce 'a' of 'bath' with the first vowel of 'father', and on the other side, perhaps people pronounce it with the vowel of 'cat'. Or on one side of the boundary, people pronounce 'greasy' with a 's' sound, whereas on the other side, with a 'z' sound.

One basic assumption of the dialectologists was that regional dialects are quite easy to sample. Two people in a particular location were interviewed exclusively in rural areas, which were regarded as 'conservative' in the sense that they were seen to preserve 'older' forms of language under investigation. The representative dialect speaker had to be relatively uncontaminated by education. Urban areas were acknowledged to be innovative, unstable linguistically and difficult to approach. The typical informant was the non-mobile older rural male, the NORM who had not travelled much. They were asked how they pronounced certain words or referred to certain objects.

By focussing only on the NORM, the dialectologists did not consider the 'corrupt' speech of the towns and tended to locate 'some real old dialect'. But data so collected was basically normative in nature and was restricted to only phonology and grammar. A lot of importance was given to 'pure' and 'accurate' data.

It was almost as if the dialectologists were looking for reasons for language change from one geographical region to another rather than accepting diversity as the base line. In trying to do so, they assumed a static structure by comparing like with the like. Also, more often than not, the dialect areas that were outlined by isoglosses on the map were artifacts of the geographer.

Although the dialectologists were keen to investigate regional variation, they failed to develop a comprehensive theory to explain it.

1.3   SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

A distinction is often made between sociolinguistics and the sociology of language. Since sociolinguistics is a meeting ground for both linguists and social scientists, it is not surprizing that there are as it were, two centers of gravity known as micro and macro sociolinguistics. These represent different orientations. Micro-issues concern the linguistic aspects of society and are taken up by linguists, dialectologists and others in language centered fields. Macro issues deal with understanding the social aspects of language and are a major concern to sociologists and social psychologists. While the former is considered sociolinguistics, the latter falls in the realm of the sociology of language.

The micro perspective investigates how social structure influences the way people talk and how language varieties and patterns of language use correlate with attributes such as class, age, sex, etc. The macro perspective studies what societies do with their languages, for example language planning, language shift and maintenance, etc.

The difference between sociolinguistics and the sociology of language is that of emphasis according to whether the concern is language or society and the focus of

analysis linguistic or social structures. Just as sociolinguistics is defined as the study of language in relation to society, the sociology of language is defined as the study of society in relation to language.

While sociolinguistics investigates the relationship between language and society with the goals of understanding the structure of language and of how languages function in communication, the goal of the sociology of language is to discover how social structures can be better understood through the study of language.

Both sociolinguistics and the sociology of language require a systematic study of language and society and there is general agreement that both perspectives are indispensable for a fuller understanding of language as a social phenomena.

Language planning is an area of particular interest in the sociology of language, although it operates on both the micro and macro levels. It has much to do with society's deliberate intervention in the course of language development. Language planning involves dealing with issues of standardization, status, prestige and the allocation of functions of languages in a society. Language planning is particularly important in multilingual countries, where the government usually tries to manipulate the existence of multiple languages in a particular direction.

Language planning has been of crucial importance in India. Efforts have gone into developing Hindi for serving every possible function in society. Hindi has been promoted in the Devnagari script as the official language.

Fishman has done a lot of work in this area, as language planning has become a serious concern in the United States in the recent years. Since U.S.A has a large indigenous Spanish speaking population and many immigrants, Americans have adopted a purely pragmatic approach to English. It is something to be used rather than something to take pride in. This has resulted in English being maintained in the public interest for securing progress, modernity, and efficiency.

1.4 THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION

Dell Hymes initiated the study of ethnography of communication in the 1960's. He was concerned that both linguists and anthropologists were missing a large and important area of communication by not considering speech as an activity in its own right. Anthropologists were concerned primarily with conducting ethnographic studies of different aspects of cultures, such as kinship systems, but were completely ignoring language. Linguists on the other hand, were concerned only with language as an abstract system and were not addressing issues of how somebody used one of those sentences in actual situations. By focussing exclusively on 'competence' in 'a language', **'communicative competence'** was being ignored. 'Ethnography of speaking/communication examines the role of language in the 'communicative conduct of communities' - i.e. the way in which language is used in diverse cultures. It examines the functions and uses of styles, dialects and languages, and explores the way in which speech acts are interpreted and carried through in particular cultures and societies.

The ethnography of communication was therefore, proposed to fill the gap between what is usually described in ethnographies and in grammars. Although both the anthropologists and the linguists use speech as evidence of other patterns, neither brings it into focus.

The ethnography of communication is actually a question of what a child internalizes about speaking, beyond rules of grammar and a dictionary, while becoming a full-

fledged member of its speech community. It is also a question of what a foreigner must learn about a group's behaviour in order to participate appropriately and effectively in its activities. An individual speaker can in fact simultaneously belong to several speech communities.

Hymes felt that children acquire knowledge of a set of ways in which sentences are used. From a finite experience of speech interaction, they develop a general theory of speaking which is appropriate in their community. This knowledge is just like any other form of tacit cultural knowledge, which they acquire in conducting and interpreting social life. Therefore, in learning to speak, one also learns to 'talk' in the sense of communicating in those ways, which are considered as appropriate by the group to which the child belongs. Since these ways differ from group to group or from one language to another, one must learn new ways if he/she wishes to fit into that new group or new language.

The study of address form usage, for example, tells us quite a bit about how the speakers of a particular language, in a particular community, organize their social relationships. In Hindi, for instance, the use of 'tu', 'tum' and 'a:p' can convey a great deal about the way people organize their relationships. It is interesting to note that while 'tu' may be used in intimate relationships, it is also used in talking to people who are perceived as belonging to low class like the maids who work at home, vegetable vendors, drivers etc. 'tum' may be used amongst friends, workmates, etc. and 'a:p' is reserved for formal relations, like talking to a boss or a teacher and when talking to elder people. Therefore, the use of language is related to social and cultural values of a community, situations and uses. In order to study the communicative behaviour of a speech community, units of interaction like the situation, speech events and speech acts have to be studied through participant observation and introspection. But, we will not go into details of the units of interaction at this stage.

Research in the ethnography of communication is sometimes criticized for the repetitive collection of data from numerous communities in order to build a general theory of human communication.

1.5   VARIATION STUDIES

1.5.1   New York City : William Labov

The work of William Labov is regarded as the most influential in setting the model for studies of language variation and language change. His classic work 'The social stratification of English in New York City' (1966) is an important work in this area.

He investigated the sound /r/ in New York City, as he believed that r- pronuncia after vowels as in *park* and *fourth* was being reintroduced into New York speech. His hypothesis was that the pronunciation of / r/ by New York City speakers varies according to the social class that they belong to. In order to investigate whether the pronunciation varied in a systematic way, he had to carry out a large-scale survey.

He tested his hypothesis by walking around three New York City department stores: Saks, Macy's, and S.Klein which are distinguished according to the social class groups they cater to. Saks caters to the upper social class and is therefore, the most prestigious. Macy's caters to the middle class and is not as prestigious as Saks and S. Klein caters to the lower social class and is therefore, the least prestigious. He asked the shop assistants working in these stores, the location of the departments he knew to be located on the *fourth floor* thus eliciting the use of 'r' that he required. He assumed that by investigating the speech of the shop assistants, he would get a good idea of the stratification of the customers since it would be mirrored in a similar

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stratification of these shop assistants. When they answered, Labov would seek a careful repetition of 'fourth floor' by pretending not to have heard the initial response.

The incidence of r- pronunciation was found to be maximum at Saks where it was used over 60% of the time, at Macy's it was inserted 50% of the time and under 20% at S. Klein. As he had anticipated, the results suggested that the pronunciation of /r/ varies according to the social status of the speakers. The analysis resulted in a pattern called **class stratification.**

An interesting observation was that when he had sought a **careful** repetition of 'fourth floor', shop assistants from Macy's and S. Klein (the less prestigious stores) tended to improve their speech by bringing it closer to the prestigious variety - thus indicating their awareness of the prestige variants. Labov found that r- pronunciation was more likely at the ends of words (floor) than before consonants (fourth). He also noticed that it was a feature of younger people rather than of older people.

Labov claimed that r-pronunciation is highly valued and is associated with the upper middle class even though members of that class may not use it on all occasions. A further analysis of the department store data led Labov to conclude that it is the middle and low social class groups which tend to change their pronunciation in careful pronunciation because of their social aspirations to denote certain status and prestige.

Labov also introduced the variable of **style stratification** into his analysis. He recorded formal and informal speech, reading aloud from a text, and reading a series of minimal pairs like 'bit' and 'bid', to cover the range from least to most relaxed speech.

The final analysis showed that the amount of r-use increases by the formality of style, in addition to the social class we have discussed. The most interesting finding was that the lower middle class speakers outperformed the upper middle class speakers when they read word lists and minimal pairs. Labov called this hypercorrection. Since r-pronunciation is considered prestigious, they monitor their speech carefully in order to sound like the upper middle class but land up outperforming them. There is also a tendency amongst New York speakers to insert an /r/ in words where it actually doesn't occur. For example, 'idea' is pronounced as [aydiyar] or 'India' as [indiar]. This happens as speakers try to overcompensate or overcorrect their pronunciation by believing that it is incorrect to drop /r/ because it denotes prestige.

Labov's major contribution to sociolinguistics has been that variation is now understood to be systematic and is believed to crucially depend on interaction with the social setting in terms of class stratification, age, gender, etc. He has, undoubtedly, been able to establish that there is nothing pathological associated with language variation.

However, there has been some criticism of certain aspects of the Labovian model. For instance, his procedure for identifying the linguistic and social variables is suspect. In the Labovian framework, the investigator begins with a predetermined list of linguistic variables and their variants, as well as a range of hypotheses about the social variables, such as social class, sex, region, age, etc. to which the linguistic variables are related. It is believed that there is a danger of prejudging the issue by beginning with a wrong hypotheses about the linguistic and social variables.

Another problem with Labov-type studies is that it assumes that societies are rigidly stratified, with different socio-economic layers stacked up on top of one another. However, this is an oversimplification of the way societies function. In practice, people do not live in such clear-cut layers and do interact with other social class members as well.

1.5.2   Norwich Study: Peter Trudgill

He carried out research in Norwich, England, much the same way as Labov did in New York City. He investigated phonological variables and demonstrated how the use of variant forms is related to social class and the level of formality.

Trudgill was himself a native of Norwich and therefore, had a good deal of 'inside' knowledge about the social structure of Norwich and its accent which encouraged his speakers to speak more naturally with him.

He identified five social classes: Middle middle class, Lower middle class, upper working class, middle working class, and lower working class. He examined the following phonological variables: /ng/ in singing; /t/ in butter; and /h/ in hammer. He found that as he moved up the social scale to middle middle class, the variant forms used were /n/; /t/; and /h/ whereas as one moved down the social scale, the variants used were /n/; /?/; and /h/ was dropped. The variants used by the middle middle class were the standard variants and were therefore, more prestigious and the variant forms used by the middle or low working class were the non-standard variants.

Trudgill concluded that linguistic usage of standard forms correlates positively to the upper level of social class while the usage of non-standard forms correlates positively with the lower level social class.

1.6   SOCIAL NETWORK AND LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

In the preceding sections, the two studies that have been discussed, tried to account for patterns of variability in language and looked for evidence of ongoing linguistic change. Lesley Milroy's focus of research study, was however, not on change and variability but on stability and focussing.

In the early 1980's, Milroy carried out an extensive analysis of the language of the low status working class speakers of Belfast, North Ireland. She emphasized the importance of social networks, which tend to cluster people in groups and enables them to regularly interact with one other. Such networks, she suggested, originate in kinship ties and help individuals to develop close and continuing relationships with each other. Once strong network of relationships is established, they determine ac r to employment and other resources and also guard against external threats.

It is in these contexts that a stable set of linguistic norms emerges and maintains in a community. These norms, Milroy calls, **vernacular norms**. These are see symbol of solidarity and reciprocity and are in contrast to publicly legitimized linguistic norms, which denote status.

The vernacular norms are different from the status legitimate linguistic norms in th. they are not codified in the form of dictionaries, grammar books etc. And yet, these norms are able to maintain solidarity and group identity. There is a sense of belonging to a locality and this is mostly true for working class networks in urban contexts. These tightly knit networks help to maintain non-standard language norms and thereby, minority languages. An example of such a strong network of relationships is the Black English vernacular, which has managed to maintain itself in a consistent form over a long period of time.

Milroy was able to identify these networks, as she became a part of them by joining them as a 'friend of a friend'. This ensured that she was accepted, and that people

would talk relatively normally in front of her. This was a better strategy than the one Labov used, in which it was sometimes difficult to observe people talking 'normally' She studied each of her informants on a six-point scale, which characterized that person's participation in networks. The informants were scored on density and multiplexity. '**Density**' was used to refer to the same social contacts which many of her informants shared. '**Multiplexity**' was used to refer to the links that her informants had with each other as a kin, neighbour, workmate etc.

She examined an individual's network strength on factors like 'membership in a high density'or 'working with atleast two people of the same area'. She then correlated these factors with certain linguistic variables. Such an analysis illustrated the strength or weakness of the ties within a community. It also showed the degree of attachment of individuals to the group, having either strong or weak ties. The stronger the social network, the greater was the use of certain linguistic features of the vernacular.

She concluded that a close-knit network has the capacity to function as mechanism for maintaining vernaculars and exhibiting solidarity and group identity.

Network studies can be of immense importance as they provide a more realistic picture of the way people interact in real life.

1.7   ACTS OF IDENTITY

You are already familiar with the concepts of conformity and individualism. Society is actually structured in a multi-dimensional space and each individual, besides constructing a mental map of this space, also decides where to locate himself/herself in it. Language is a particularly important part of this space as one chooses to conform to certain linguistic and cultural norms and yet be different.

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) in their studies tested a hypothesis of how each utterance of speech can be seen as an act of identity in this multi-dimensional space. They stated that each individual creates his/her own linguistic system either to resemble those of the group or groups he/she wishes from time to time to be identified with, or distinguish or distance himself/herself away from it. The success in doing so depends on:

1.   the ability to identify a group or groups.
2.   the extent of their access to them and ability to analyze their linguistic systems.
3.   The strength of their motivation to either join or differentiate themselves from the group(s). .
4.   Their ability to change their behaviour.

Individuals can be classified more or less independently on the dimensions of age, region, class, sex; each of these being relevant to language. Language becomes an important dimension since it can signal their choice of being part of a certain group or groups and be seen as an act of identity to that group or group(s).

1.8   CONCLUSION

Our consideration of the various issues and theories must have revealed to you the complexity of the relationship between language and society. It is certainly not easy to make generalizations about the nature of their relationship. Yet, as we have said

before, to study language without considering either its uses or users in society, can give us only an abstract and incomplete picture.

The complexity of language becomes more pronounced when we consider the issue of variation. Variation is an inherent property of language. The reasons for language variation may be many but sociolinguists try to characterize this variation according to various regional, social or personal factors.

The dialectologists tried to investigate regional variation at the levels of phonology and grammar but could not develop a comprehensive theory. The studies of Labov and Trudgill deal with social variation and show how language varies according to social class and levels of formality. Labov has suggested that language variation leads to a process of language change, as the low social class people become conscious of publicly legitimized prestigious variety.

Milroy's work on social networking, on the other hand, focuses on the maintenance of vernacular norms and on forces that resist change and maintain group solidarity. Le Page tries to show how each speech act of an individual is an act of identity in a multi-dimensional space.

A common thread, that seems to tie all the issues and theories, which we have discussed in this unit, is the crucial role that language plays in society.

1.9   KEY WORDS

sociolinguistics	a branch of linguistics which studies all aspects of the relationship between language and society.
conformity	a force leading to similarities between individuals as they adhere to common linguistic, cultural and social norms.
individualism	a force leading to differences between individuals as they try to filter their experiences through their own mental map that they have constructed of society to which they belong and are affected by in different ways.
language variation	difference in linguistic behaviour because of differences in regions, social class, education, sex etc.
competence	a term used to refer to a person's 'knowledge of her/his language', the system of rules s/he has mastered so that is able to produce and understand an indefinite number of sentences, and is able to recognize grammatical mistakes as ambiguities. This is an idealized conception of language.
performance	this is seen in opposition to the notion of competence and refers to the specific utterances of speech.
dialectology	the systematic study of all forms of dialect, especially regional dialect. Dialectology studies commenced in the late 19th C.
isoglosses	lines marked on maps to indicate geographical boundaries.
sociology of language	study of society in relation to language which involves issues such as language planning.

ethnography of communication	the study of language in relation to the entire range of extralinguistic variables which identify the social basis of communication, the emphasis being on the description of linguistic interaction.	
communicative competence	the ability to produce and understand sentences which are appropriate to the context in which they occur.	
hypercorrection	a careful attempt to monitor one's speech by imitating the prestigious variety but outperforming the original.	
social network	a network of relationships which originates in kinship ties.	
vernacular norms	a stable set of linguistic norms which maintains itself in a community.	
density	refers to the social contacts which many people in a community share.	
multiplexity	refers to the links people in a community have with each other, for example, as a neighbour, friend, workmate, etc.	
acts of identity	considering speech to be acts of identity conforming to a social group(s) norms.	

1.10   QUESTIONS

1.   We have said that languages contain a great deal of variety. What evidence can you cite from personal experience of the differences in the linguistic choices you make? Consider, for example, how many different ways you can ask someone to let you see your favourite programme on television. Would you speak the same way to your younger sibling as you would to your father, mother, grandfather, grandmother or any other elder member of your family at home? If not, what are the reasons for this variation?

2.   Undertake a survey to examine the relationship between language and society. Make a list of the kinship system of your mothertongue, and consider the various relationships covered by those terms. Does it have many terms for defining relationships? Are there any significant differences regarding kinship system between your mothertongue and English? What could be the reasons for these differences?

We all know that India is a multilingual country and it is not unusual to find people who know more than two languages. Collect data from any five people to find out the languages they use in the following situations:

At home with:

Grandfather

Grandmother

Father

Mother

Elder brother/sister

Younger brother/sister

In the neighbourhood with:

People elder people to them

People younger to them

People of the same age

People of the same sex

Friends of the same sex

Friends of the opposite sex

In the school/college/office with (whichever applicable):

Teachers

Classmates

Friends of the same sex

Friends of the opposite sex

Boss

Colleagues

4.   What generalizations can you draw on the basis of the data you have collected? Do you think that maintaining multiple identities is a way of life in India?

5.   Do you agree with the view that 'A language teacher should gainfully use the multilingual character of her classroom'? Do you think that the children will begin to enjoy learning if their linguistic background is not ignored? Give reasons to support your answer.

6.   Do you have a friend who speaks the same language as yours? Are there any differences in the way you two pronounce certain words or use different words for the same thing? Make a list of such words. What do you attribute these differences to: personal, regional or social factors? Elaborate.

1.11   BIBLIOGRAPHY

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