Sociolinguistics

社会语言学

李素琼　编著

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图书在版编目（CIP）数据

社会语言学/李素琼编著．—成都：电子科技大学出版社，2005.6

ISBN 7-81094-857-1

Ⅰ．社… Ⅱ．李… Ⅲ．社会语言学—高等学校—教材 Ⅳ．H0

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字（2005）第 063634 号

社会语言学

李素琼 编著

出　　版　电子科技大学出版社（成都市建设北路二段四号，邮编：610054）

责任编辑　罗　雅

发　　行　电子科技大学出版社

印　　刷　四川文瑞印务有限责任公司

开　　本　850×1168　1/32　印张　8　　字数　201 千字

版　　次　2005 年 6 月第一版

印　　次　2005 年 6 月第一次印刷

书　　号　ISBN 7-81094-857- 1/ H・32

定　　价　15.00 元

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湖南省社会科学规划项目

（04YB053）

Acknowledgments

I wish to make acknowledgements and express gratitude to all those who have given me help and support during the writing of this book.

My special thanks will go to Mr. Wu Changyong (吴长镛), a professor in East China Normal University, who had given me valuable guidance, great encouragement and constructive advice during my study of sociolinguistics. Without his help, I couldn't have accomplished my work.

Specifically, I want to express my thanks to Ms Wen Weiping(文卫平), the head of Foreign Languages Institute of Xiangtan University. It is she who had given me great confidence and encouragement that I was badly in need. Without her encouragement, I dared not have my lecture notes published.

Sincere appreciation will be given to the support of Hunan Social Science Planning Office.

Sincere thanks will also go to all the authors of the books and papers from which I have consulted a lot of references.

Last, but not the least, I'd like to give my thanks to Luo Ya (罗雅) and her colleagues for the publication of this book.

LI Suqiong
April 7, 2005

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Preface

This book is dedicated to undergraduates, postgraduates of English majors and all those who are interested in the study of sociolinguistics.

Nowadays, sociolinguistics has been recognized as a course at university level on linguistics or language, and is indeed one of the main growth points in the study of language, from the point of view of both teaching and research. Several years ago, I got a chance to be a visiting scholar in East China Normal University, and I became very interested in this subject. I tried to do some research on it, and gave lectures to the postgraduates in our university. This book is just based on my lecture notes.

There are already a lot of books on sociolinguistics, and most of them are comprehensive, authoritative, and excellent in their way. Generally speaking, they are essentially academic and tend to be lengthy and technical. There is a need for an introductory book that will ease students into an understanding of complex ideas. This book is designed to serve this need.

The whole book is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 is a brief introduction of sociolinguistics. The readers will be clear about what sociolinguistics is and what this subject will study. Chapter 2 is about the basic concepts of sociolinguistics. In chapter 3, we talk

about the sociolinguistic research. We make clear the way of research in sociolinguistics through a lot of typical examples. Chapter 4 is about the variation of language, which is a very important part in sociolinguistics. We especially talk about the relation between language and social class, gender and ethnicity. Chapter 5 is about the basic concepts of communicative competence, which is also a very important part in sociolinguistics. In chapter 6, we can find some important research on communication by some linguists. Chapter 7 is about language contact. The last chapter is about language planning, which is the application of sociolinguistics.

When I first wrote this lecture notes, I consulted a lot of relevant books and papers. Since I had no intention to get it published originally, I didn't point out the sources of the references. So, before I got it published, I tried my best to make it up. And my postgraduates Xiao Ming (肖敏) and Lin Deyan (林德燕) helped me to do some of it. Wu Zhuang (吴庄), a postgraduate and a young teacher in our university drafted the last chapter.

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1 Introduction

1.1 The appearance of sociolinguistics

Why do some people pronounce the same word differently? Why do you say "Hi" to some people, and "Good morning" to others? Why do some people smile too much and others are stony-faced? Why are some insults taken seriously, while others are just considered teasing? Has anyone ever accused you of having an accent? Do you notice that other people have accents? Why are there different accents, anyway? Why are some immigrant groups lost the languages that their ancestors spoke, whereas others have retained those languages? Do you feel uncomfortable talking to people from cultures different from your own?

These are the kinds of questions that interest people who study sociolinguistics. The term "sociolinguistics" first appeared in *A Projection of Sociolinguistics: the Relationship of Speech to Social Status*, a paper written by an American Scholar H. Currie in 1952. It became a subfield of linguistics in about 1964. In this year, several important books on sociolinguistics were published in the United States: 1) *Language in Culture and Society: A reader in Linguistics and Anthropology*, edited by D. Hymes. 2) *The Ethnography of Communication*, edited by J. Gumperz and D. Hymes. 3) *Social Dialects and Language Learning*, edited by R. W. Shuy. 4)

Phonological Corelates of Social Stratification, written by William Labov. In May, 1964, the first symposium on Sociolinguistics were held. In the summer of the same year, at a conference on linguistics, all the experts of linguistics agreed that sociolinguistics was a subfield of linguistics. So sociolinguistics is a very young subject and it has a history of only about 40 years.

Nowadays, sociolinguistics has been recognized as a course at university level on linguistics or language, and is indeed one of the main growth points in the study of language, from the point of view of both teaching and research. There are now major English-language journals devoted to research publications (eg. *Language in Society*, *Language Variation and Change and International Journal of Sociology of Language*) and a number of introductory textbooks (eg. Fasold, R. *The Sociolinguistics of Language*; Hudson, R.A. *Sociolinguistics Second Edition*; Wardhaugh, R. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* Third Edition. Wolfson, Nessa. *Perspectives: Sociolinguistics and TESOL*; Labov, William. *Sociolinguistic Pattern.* Spolsky, Bernard. *Sociolinguistics*). There are altogether more than ten introductory textbooks on sociolinguistics. But each book emphasizes different respects of sociolinguistics.

1.2 Language and society

Language and society are so intertwined that it is impossible to understand one without the other. There is no human society that does not depend upon language. There is no language that is not shaped by society. There is no society that does not itself shape language. Every

social institution is maintained by language (Chaika, 1982: 2). Law, religion, government, education, family——all are carried on with language. Individually, we use language to "carry on" love and to "carry out" hate. We use language to reveal or conceal our personal identity, our character, and our background. And we are often unconscious that we are doing so. Almost all of our contact with family and friends, and much of our contact with strangers, involves speaking. And, much of that speaking is strongly governed by rules, rules that dictate not only what we should say, but also how we say it. We manipulate others with language, and they manipulate us, often without either part being at all aware of the manipulation.

Sociolinguistics is the study of the ways people use language in social interaction. The sociolinguist concerned with stuff of everyday life: how you talk to your friends, family, and teachers, as well as to shopkeepers and strangers——everyone you meet in the course of a day——and why you talk as you do and they talk as they do. Apparently, Sociolinguistics is concerned with trivial matters, with the talk on streetcorners as well as in the classroom, the things that people do when they want to talk and the ways they signal when they are listening. Sociolinguists even concern matters like where you choose to sit in a cafeteria or at a meeting, or the amount of space you want between you and someone else when you are talking.

Such everyday matters are highly revealing and showing what groups make up that society. Examing the speech activities of different social groups casts light on the conditions, values, and beliefs that have helped shape the groups. Conversely, it also shows how social situations determine what kinds of speech will be used and how speech develops to meet social needs. Perhaps most

important, sociolinguistics tells us what messages we are really giving when we speak, messages that are not necessarily put into actual words. It shows how and why we feel uncomfortable, even hostile, to some people, especially those who do not share the rules of speech behaviour that we abide by, rules so thoroughly learned that we are not even aware of them.

1.3 Definition of sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is the field that studies the relation between language and society. Hudson (2000: 1) defined it as *the study of language in relation to society*. This definition is general and abstract. We can have different explanations for it. Broadly speaking, sociolinguistics means the study of language from the angle of sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, philosophy and so on. Or we can say, looking through the workings of language at the societal level. It's also called macrosociolinguistics, or the sociology of language. Narrowly speaking, sociolinguistics studies the relation between the variation of language uses and the social contexts. Simply put, people speak differently according to their different social class, ethnicity, sex, age, education, religion and so on. That's to say, looking through the speech at the level of face-to-face interaction. It's called microsociolinguistics, or sociolinguistics. Macrosociolinguistics emphasizes social elements. And microsociolinguistics emphasizes language. Some scholars would rather call macrosociolinguitics as the sociology of language, and others think only the variation study is real sociolinguistics.

Language, both as medium and subject of study, is more than a system of sounds, meaning units, syntax, more than simply a tool for getting meaning across (Wolfson, 1989: 1). More than anything else, language is a social behavior, and it is upon this fact that sociolinguistics is predicted. Language behaviour maybe studied in its sociocultural context (Wolfson, 1989: 2). Sociolinguists look at the complex connections between the variations within a language.

The early research of sociolinguistics is mostly macro. The most original and influential of the early research in the area of sociolinguistic variations was carried out by an American sociolinguist William Labov (1966). Another representative is Peter Trudgill. W. Labov's book was in great part responsible for the development of sociolinguistics as a separate subfield of linguistics. Sociolinguistics is all about variation, and seeks socially relevant explanations for regular patterns of variation in language use. Variation study is the key part of sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics is "a socially realistic linguistics". "The material of sociolinguistic research must come from daily life" (Labov, 1972). Trudgill said that sociolinguitics is"a way of doing linguistics"(Trudgill, 1983). We can see their purpose was to improve the research of linguistics.

1.4 Sociolinguistic varieties

1.4.1 Language and social class

In New York City, for instance, the pronunciation of "r" marks the social class of the speaker. R-ful pronunciation enjoys high

prestige.

William Labove (1966) investigated the social class differences in speech behaviour and found that the higher social class, the more "r" sound is pronounced. The use of \ r\ marks which social class you belong to.

1.4.2 Language and ethnicity

Because of ethnic discrimination, Black English is considered as "non-standard English". But sociolinguist found that actually Black English has its own rule:

(1) Linking verb

He nice. (= He is nice at the moment.)

He be nice. (=He is nice sometimes.)

(2) Double negative

It wasn't nothing to do. (= There is nothing to do.)

(3) Double subject

Linda she sick. (=Linda is sick.)

(4) No inversion when inversion is necessary

He coming with us? (= Is she coming with us?)

You understand? (=Do you understand?)

(5) No possessive marker

William mother (= William's mother)

He book　him book (= his book)　We book (= our books)

(6) Use *don't* instead of *doesn't*

It don't…(= It doesn't…)

(7) Pronunciation

th——\ t \:　thin——tin

th——\ d\ :　they——day

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