

东南大学优秀研究生教学用书建设项目研究成果

The Sociolinguistics
of Language

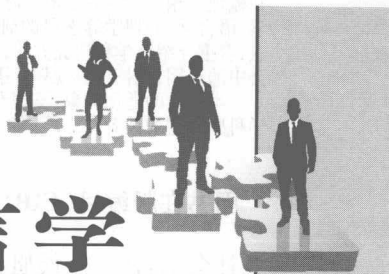
社会语言学

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· 南京 ·

内容简介

本教材共分八章,介绍社会语言学主要理论及研究成果。第一章介绍社会语言学兴起的社会、物质、学术背景,分析与相关学科的关系以及分支研究,突出社会语言学边缘学科的特点。第二、第三章介绍社会语言学最重要的研究成果之一——语言变异理论,着重梳理不同研究视角变异研究成果的关系。第四章介绍不同语言在现实生活中接触的状况,并以英语为例,介绍世界英语的理论以及世界英语的几种主要变体。第五章从言语交际研究的最初成果入手,介绍言语交际研究的民族学传统以及语用学成果,并梳理了相邻学科对言语交际的研究视角。第六章从语言、思维与文化的视角介绍哲学、语言学、心理学等学科的研究成果。第七章突出社会语言学理论与实证结合的特点,着重介绍该学科研究方法,并详尽介绍了经典研究实例。第八章重点探讨语言在社会中的运用,包括语言规划及语言教育。

本教材的适用对象:英语专业本科高年级学生、研究生以及其他对语言、社会相关学科感兴趣的读者。

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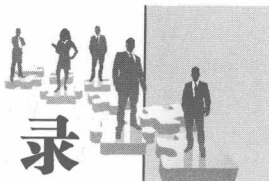
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Contents 目 录



Chapter 1 What is Sociolinguistics	(1)
1.1 Introduction	(1)
1.2 A compound term	(2)
1.3 The rise of sociolinguistics	(3)
1.3.1 Time	(3)
1.3.2 Background	(6)
1.4 Definitions of sociolinguistics	(10)
1.5 Sociolinguistics and relevant sciences	(12)
1.5.1 Sociolinguistics and dialectology	(13)
1.5.2 Sociolinguistics, anthropological and ethnographic linguistics	(15)
1.5.3 Sociolinguistics and pragmatics	(16)
1.5.4 Sociolinguistics and socio-semiotics	(17)
1.6 Branches of sociolinguistics	(18)
1.6.1 Social dialectology	(19)
1.6.2 Sociology of language	(21)
1.6.3 Ethnography of communication	(24)
1.6.4 Social psychology of language	(27)
1.6.5 Interactional sociolinguistics	(28)
1.7 Development of sociolinguistics	(29)
1.8 Theoretical construction	(31)
Chapter 2 Language Variation and Varieties	(36)
2.1 Introduction	(36)



2.2	Variation and variety	(37)
2.2.1	Definition of variety	(37)
2.2.2	Classification of language variation	(38)
2.3	Dialect	(39)
2.3.1	Regional/geographical dialect	(39)
2.3.2	Social dialect	(41)

Chapter 3 More on Language Variation (64)

3.1	Introduction	(64)
3.2	Register	(64)
3.3	Choice of varieties	(71)
3.3.1	Code-switching and code-mixing	(72)
3.3.2	Types of code-switching	(73)
3.3.3	Motivations of code-switching	(75)
3.4	Other theories on language variation	(76)
3.4.1	Speech community	(76)
3.4.2	Social network	(83)
3.5	Summary	(87)
3.6	Variation and social significance	(89)

Chapter 4 Language Contact (96)

4.1	Introduction	(96)
4.2	Consequences of language contact	(97)
4.2.1	Language assimilation	(97)
4.2.2	Language convergence	(110)
4.3	Language attitude	(118)
4.3.1	Definition and classification	(118)
4.3.2	Language loyalty and language competition	(119)
4.3.3	Measurement of language attitude	(122)
4.4	Varieties of English	(122)
4.4.1	Some facts	(123)

- 4.4.2 Factors shaping the varieties of English (124)
- 4.4.3 Examples of varieties of English (126)

Chapter 5 Speech Communication (138)

- 5.1 Introduction (138)
- 5.2 System of pronouns and address forms—a static perspective (139)
 - 5.2.1 T/V (140)
 - 5.2.2 Third person pronouns (144)
 - 5.2.3 Address terms (145)
 - 5.2.4 Social significance of the study (147)
- 5.3 Conversation analysis—a dynamic study (149)
 - 5.3.1 Origin and schools (149)
 - 5.3.2 Some basic findings (150)

Chapter 6 Language, Thought and Culture (177)

- 6.1 Language and thought (177)
- 6.2 Two stands (180)
- 6.3 History of language and thought (181)
- 6.4 Theories on language and thought (185)
 - 6.4.1 The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (185)
 - 6.4.2 Prototype theory (189)
 - 6.4.3 Basic-level concept (190)
- 6.5 Language and culture (191)
 - 6.5.1 Definitions of culture (191)
 - 6.5.2 Relationship between language and culture (193)
 - 6.5.3 Examples of researches on language and culture (197)

Chapter 7 Methodology (215)

- 7.1 Introduction (215)
- 7.2 Quantitative and qualitative study (217)
 - 7.2.1 Quantitative research methods (217)



7.2.2	Qualitative research methods	(219)
7.2.3	Summary	(224)
7.3	Sociolinguistics—the quantitative study of language	(225)
7.3.1	The procedure	(225)
7.3.2	Examples of the quantitative study	(233)
Chapter 8	Applied Issues	(239)
8.1	Language planning	(239)
8.1.1	Significance and motivation	(239)
8.1.2	Types and stages	(241)
8.1.3	Language planning in modern China	(246)
8.2	Language education	(248)
8.2.1	Communicative competence	(249)
8.2.2	Learners' factors	(252)
8.2.3	Teacher talk, power and solidarity	(257)
8.2.4	Code-switching and ESL/EFL context	(261)
Appendix		(267)
Appendix 1		(267)
Terminology		(267)
Appendix 2		(278)
Course Syllabus		(278)
Appendix 3		(287)
Evaluation Sheet		(287)



Chapter 1

What is Sociolinguistics

Warm-up questions

1. Judging from the compound word *sociolinguistics*, what do you think it is about?
2. How is sociolinguistics different from and related to general linguistics?
3. Why is sociolinguistics important?



1.1 Introduction

Trudgill (1983) illustrated functions of language by means of an example of two Englishmen coming face to face in a railway compartment. What would the two men do? They started talking about the weather. Although it was possible that both of the two men happened to be interested in meteorology, there might exist other explanations. One of them was to break the embarrassment of not speaking anything. In this case, talking about some neutral topics like weather would be an ideal choice because they were able to break the embarrassment without actually having to say very much. Therefore, as the example shows, language is not simply a means of communicating information but also a means of establishing and maintaining relationships with other people. Then, Trudgill further analyzed that talking about the weather might have some other functions. For example, the two men expected to get

some information about each other such as where the other person was from, what job he did and what social status he had. However, it would be very rude to ask each other directly. Instead, judging by how they spoke would help obtain the answer. In this case, language carries another important social function, the function of conveying information about the user.

1.2 A compound term

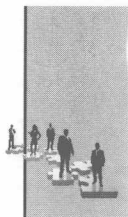
The term *sociolinguistics* is a compound word composed of *socio* and *linguistics*, in which *socio* stands for “sociology”. Judging by how such a compound word is formed, people may have some ideas of what sociolinguistics is about. But before we further explore this question, we will take a look at some examples.

Hudson (2000) describes three worlds to help illustrate how language is closely related to society. First of all, he describes an imaginary world where all language users use exactly the same kind of language in terms of pronunciation, grammar, meaning of words and where circumstances have no influence on what people say, either in terms of content or form. In one word, this is a homogenous society where the influence of society upon language can be completely ignored. Then, Hudson describes another world which is unfamiliar thus exotic to most people. In this world of the northwest Amazon, due to the fact that firstly, there are five tribes where completely different languages are used, secondly, a man can only marry a woman from another tribe, and thirdly, a married woman can only use the language of her husband, the situation of language is so complicated that it is impossible to mention a language without clearly stating who the user is and under what circumstances a language is used. Finally, Hudson describes a real and familiar world that most people are living in. He tries to point out that in this real and familiar world, though it is not as

exciting as the case in the second example, it is definitely not the same as the first example. That is, in reality language is closely related to society and a homogenous society does not exist.

Now we will try to ask ourselves some questions and by answering these questions, we may have some ideas on what sociolinguistics is about. Do you, your parents and grandparents address people in the same way? Do you talk with your friends in the same way as you talk to your teachers? Look for five classmates from five different parts of China and observe their language. Observe how boys and girls use language. How do you chat with people on line? How can you obtain information about a stranger without directly asking where he is from and what he is?

The point of doing this exercise is to make us aware of how much there is to say about our language in relation to society. Generally speaking, such relation between language and society is what sociolinguistics is interested in.



1.3 The rise of sociolinguistics

1.3.1 Time

Studies on the social functions and significance of language as reflected in sociolinguistics have existed for a long time both in Chinese and Western history and achievements are mainly attributed to researches in relationship between language and society, language and culture in the field of philosophy, psychology, anthropology, ethnography and dialectology. In ancient China, Xunzi(荀子), one of the famous philosophers in the Warring States period, said in his work *Analysis of Noun* (正名篇), there is no fixed correlation between names and things; the appropriateness of names is decided by conventions. (名无固宜, 约之以名。约定俗成谓之宜, 异于约则谓之不宜。) What Xunzi discussed was the relation between language

arbitrariness and the users of language, the logic between signifier and signified and the general principle in naming things.

In Western history, discussions on the relationship between language and the world also reflect what sociolinguistics is concerned with, and this tradition can be traced back to the ancient Greek time when Socrates, Plato and Aristotle lived, though at that time, their discussions mainly focused on what the world was and language was only a byproduct of such thinking. By the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century when historical comparative linguistic studies prevailed, W. Humboldt, the famous German linguist had pointed out explicitly, "The diversity of languages is not a diversity of signs and sounds but a diversity of views of the world." (Trabant, 2000) The task of comparative linguistics should include four parts: language; end of language use; human development and nation, among which at least two were related to sociolinguistics. On the one hand, language is related to nation. It represents a nation's spirit and characteristics. On the other hand, language is related to thought. Thought determines language and language restricts thought. By the 1920s, there had appeared two important linguistic schools in Europe and America and they helped establish basis for the formation and development of sociolinguistics (杨永林, 2004). The first school is London or Functional School represented by B. Malinowsky and J. Firth. The second school is North American Anthropological Linguistics represented by F. Boas and E. Sapir. As time goes by, both schools have developed a close relation between sociolinguistics. On the one hand, M. A. K. Halliday, student of J. Firth, creates systemic-functional grammar, emphasizing functions of language, forming a sharp contrast with the formal linguistics. On the other hand, B. L. Whorf, student of E. Sapir, puts forward the famous "Sapir-Whorf hypothesis", believing that different language systems might determine

the way that people think. Halliday (1974) considers the nature of language as social semiotics by which human beings interact with each other, or language is a type of social behavior. Therefore, it is not enough to study language within the intra-organism, as has been done by formal or structural linguistics. Instead, language should be studied in social context in which language and society are observed together.

After World War II, with the cooperation between scholars in field of linguistics, sociology, culture and anthropology in Great Britain and America, achievements have been accomplished in field studies in Asia, Africa and Latin America concerning the situation of language use to help explore close relationships between language and society, including Gumperz's concept of repertoire (variety) and B. Bernstein's hypothesis on social class and language use.

The Oxford English Dictionary Supplement (as cited in Coulmas, 2001) records the term *sociolinguistic* as first used by E. Nida in the second edition of his standard work *Morphology* in 1949 (p. 19); as a discipline, *sociolinguistics* was first referred to in 1939 in T. C. Hodson's paper *Sociolinguistics in India*, though it has been generally acknowledged that the term *sociolinguistics* first appeared in H. C. Currie's paper *Projection of Sociolinguistics: the Relationship of Speech to Social Status* in 1952, and sociolinguistics, as a new and independent research field, was born in America in the 1960s, particularly in 1964 when several remarkable events happened. Firstly, *Language in Culture and Society: A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology* compiled by D. Hymes was published. 69 papers on the social functions and significance of language ever since the 1920s were collected in this book. Secondly, *The Ethnography of Communication* compiled by J. Gumperz and D. Hymes was published. Thirdly, W. Labov published his famous paper *Phonological Correlates of Social Stratification*. Fourthly, W. Bright, the famous linguist invited scholars to address on social



significance of language at the first sociolinguistics conference held at University of California at Los Angeles and two years later, *A Collection of Sociolinguistics: Proceedings of the UCLA Sociolinguistics Conference* was published. In addition, another event in 1968 also marked the birth of sociolinguistics. *Readers in Sociology of Language* compiled by J. Fishman, was published in this year.

1.3.2 Background

As a new subject, sociolinguistics appeared in the 1960s under certain conditions. Firstly, specific social conditions are closely related to its appearance. Ever since the 1930s, dramatic social, political and economic changes have taken place in the world and they greatly influence people's perceptions to the world, including language. Language becomes an important part in the formation of a nation and plays important roles in maintaining independence and unification, consolidating regime, prospering economy and strengthening nationality ascription. Therefore, it is a great issue for governments and linguists to decide upon language policy for a country. For instance, since World War II, many colonies in Africa and Asia have obtained independence whose official languages are their colonists' mother tongues. After they became independent, the governments must make decisions on which language to choose as their official languages. They must consider whether the candidate is the most representative and at the same time, whether it has practical values in administration, trade, and education. For example, Singapore used to be a colony of Great Britain and English was the official language. After it became independent, Singapore government decided that Malay was the national language because it used to be the native language of the aborigines before it became a colony, and meanwhile English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil were chosen as official languages, each representing the population of its native speakers. Another example is America. J. A. Fishman, the



American sociologist once called upon the government to pay attention to the language use situation of immigrants in the country. It was found that though these immigrants were of certain size, they were losing their speech right, thus leading to the weakening of the country's political and cultural foundations. With Fishman's effort, the government has developed tens of bilingual curricula at school since the 1960s and the 1970s.

Secondly, the birth of sociolinguistics is attributed to some important development in research methods and technological improvement. As is known, before the 1930s, linguistics mainly focused on analysis and explanation of classical documents and made great achievements. However, the research data were not reliable and representative enough. By the 1930s, great progress had been made in research method, including random sampling and statistics. W. Labov, the American sociolinguist, once used these two methods to study how residents in Lower East New York pronounced /r/ and found disciplinary differences among people from different social classes, age groups and in different situations and reached a conclusion that there was a close correlation between use of language and the user's social and economic status, educational level, gender, age and the context. Meanwhile, dramatic development in science and technology has also created indispensable conditions for the birth of sociolinguistics. For instance, cassette recorders became much lighter and more convenient to carry in the 1960s than twenty years ago, making it possible for researchers to record large quantities of language materials.

Finally, the birth of sociolinguistics is also an inevitable consequence of academic development itself. Kuhn, Hymes and Yang (杨永林, 2004) once commented that from its very birth, sociolinguistics had manifested its nature of criticism. If we take a closer look at how modern linguistics develops, we may understand the

comment better.

Before the 19th century, linguistics was not an independent subject yet and studies on language were only for political or administrative purposes. Since the 1800s, historical comparative linguistics has been established. Historical comparative linguistics focuses on kinship between languages and it is an important signal of independent development of modern linguistics. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, F. de Saussure began to criticize historical comparative linguistics and established structural linguistics. According to F. de Saussure, language is not isolated. It is a system that combines form and meaning. It can be divided into two parts, namely *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* refers to the abstract system of language whereas *parole* refers to the specific speech. Structural linguistics studies *langue* rather than *parole*. Bloomfield also says that structural linguistics only studies the structure of language itself and does not study language in its social context. The development of structural linguistics greatly fosters the discovering of rules of language for structural linguistics offers a very scientific and appropriate linguistic theory for the study of a concrete language system. However, with the generalization of rules and systems of language, linguists tend to neglect those irregular phenomena existing in language. Sapir points out that though linguistic achievements so far can match those in natural sciences, linguists should remember that these theories are only perfect frameworks that generalize those various and changing languages in reality. And ever since the 1950s, Chomsky and his generative grammar have liberated people from structural linguistics in that it changes how people understand language. According to generative grammar, it is far from enough only to study language structure. It is more important to explore how language structure is generated. However, like structural linguistics, Chomsky's generative grammar



focuses only on the universal and general principles of language. According to Chomsky (as quoted by Wardhaugh, 2000, p. 3),

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitation, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. This seems to me to have been the position of the founders of modern general linguistics, and no cogent reason for modifying it has been offered. To study actual linguistic performance, we must consider the interaction of a variety of factors, of which the underlying competence of the speaker-hearer is only one. In this respect, study of language is no different from empirical investigation of other complex phenomena.

If we try to understand this extensively quoted statement in the context where structural linguistics was criticized by more and more people, it would be easier for us to agree with Chomsky in his emphasis on competence of an ideal speaker-listener rather than performance because generative grammar regards language a psychological phenomenon and therefore tries to tackle this biological mystery of human beings as general. And it is in this distinction between competence and performance, or psychological or social phenomenon that general linguistics departs with sociolinguistics.

In fact, some scholars of sociological and anthropological background such as J. Fishman, J. Gumperz and W. Labov began to realize that research on language should not be limited to descriptive or structural

linguistics, and therefore they acted against the trust of traditional approaches and helped establish theoretical foundation for the establishment of sociolinguistics (刘援朝, 2004, p. 111). According to W. Labov, there is no linguistics other than “socially realistic linguistics” and to study language without reference to society would be like studying courtship behavior without relating the behavior of one partner to that of the other (Hudson, 2000), thus regarding being social as the primary characteristics of linguistics. Xu Daming (徐大明, 2004) also holds the opinion that language structure, or grammar, is a set of social norms, subject to social conditions, rather than a biological organism self sufficient and independent to its living context.

To sum up, the discrepancy between general linguistics and sociolinguistics lies in their different understandings of the nature of language, which should not prevent people from acknowledging their contributions to the research on language as a whole and most importantly, the fact that the task of linguistics includes two parts, to work out the rules of language X and the relationship between these rules and society. Both help open our eye to the panorama of language and form a complete picture of language from the internal and external perspectives as mentioned by Saussure.

1.4 Definitions of sociolinguistics

Broadly speaking, sociolinguistics is a science that studies the social function and meaning of language and its relation to society by using theories from linguistics and other social sciences such as sociology, anthropology, ethnography, psychology, geography, philosophy and history. As a matter of fact, there have existed different terms referring to this newborn subject at the beginning. For instance, in the