



SOCIOLINGUISTICS TODAY

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

EDITED BY KINGSLEY BOLTON
AND HELEN KWOK

ROUTLEDGE



Sociolinguistics Today

International Perspectives

**Edited by Kingsley Bolton and
Helen Kwok**



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Part I

Introduction

Introduction

All but two of the chapters included in this volume, *Sociolinguistics Today: international perspectives*, were originally presented as papers at the First Hong Kong Conference on Language and Society which was held on 24–8 April 1988. At the Hong Kong conference, the various sessions that were held were classified according to a number of categories that reflected the interests of participants. These included sessions on (1) 'Linguistic variation, dialects, and language attitudes', a category which spanned interests ranging from 'secular linguistics' to the social psychology of language; (2) 'Language, culture and society', which included papers on such areas as anthropological linguistics, interactional sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and literary sociolinguistics; (3) 'Multilingualism', including papers on aspects of both 'individual bilingualism' and 'societal multilingualism'; and (4) 'Language planning and language education', which included papers chiefly concerned with language policies, particularly in the Asian region.

For a number of reasons, including editorial economy, a somewhat different arrangement of material is presented in this volume: Part I contains an introduction to both a range of issues linked to sociolinguistics in Asia and the west, and the volume as a whole; Part II is chiefly concerned with 'sociolinguistic theory'; Part III is concerned with 'language variation, culture and society', and contains chapters on a variety of issues including secular linguistics, dialectology, the sociology of language, anthro-linguistics and literary sociolinguistics; Part IV is concerned with 'multilingualism' and language planning; and Part V contains three short chapters on 'current perspectives in sociolinguistics'.

The introductory chapter by Kingsley Bolton in Part I, entitled 'Sociolinguistics today: Asia and the west', attempts to fulfil a number of objectives: first, it gives the background to the organization of the Hong Kong conference; second, it tackles questions related to the scope and development of sociolinguistics in the west and in Asia; third, it provides a guide to current sociolinguistic research throughout the Asian region; and finally it provides an introduction to the various chapters included in this volume, noting the ways in which individual authors represent a number

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of differing interests and objectives in their approaches to the study of language and society. Bolton also emphasizes the 'international' nature of the contributions included in this collection. Of the fourteen articles included in Parts II–IV, six are primarily concerned with sociolinguistic issues in Asian societies (i.e. the chapters by Chen; Cheung; Davies; Gonzalez; Gupta; and Macdonald); five with issues in Europe and the west (Hasan; J. Milroy; L. Milroy; Tabouret-Keller; and Trudgill); and three with issues of international and cross-cultural significance (Fasold; Giles, Coupland and Wiemann; and Le Page). Part V comprises three articles (by Fasold, J. Milroy and Giles) on current directions in sociolinguistic theory.

1 Sociolinguistics today: Asia and the west

Kingsley Bolton

BACKGROUND

The vast majority of the chapters in this volume were originally presented as papers at the First Hong Kong Conference on Language and Society, which was held at the University of Hong Kong from 24 to 28 April 1988.¹

The Hong Kong conference

The theme of the Hong Kong conference was 'Sociolinguistics today: eastern and western perspectives'. In broad terms, the aims of the conference were to provide a forum for an exchange of views between academics working within the field of sociolinguistics in Asia and their counterparts in western societies, to promote the study of language and society in Asia, and to facilitate the establishing of academic contacts between researchers in Asia and those working in western universities.

In the event, the conference was truly international in terms of the provenance of those who attended. Approximately ninety participants from sixteen countries presented papers at the conference. Of these sixteen countries, six were western, i.e. Australia, Britain, Canada, France, New Zealand and the United States of America. Ten Asian societies were represented; Hong Kong, Macau, India, Japan, Malaysia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand. In addition, approximately ninety other linguists and academics, primarily from the Asian region, also took part in the conference as observers.²

The Hong Kong conference of 1988 was neither the first conference to be held on sociolinguistic issues in Hong Kong, nor the first to be held in the region. Regional seminars and colloquia have been regularly held on such issues over the years both in Hong Kong itself and in other Asian countries, notably Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. Many of these previous conferences, however, have either been predominantly regional in focus, or been overwhelmingly concerned with language in education and 'educational linguistics' (e.g. the Regional Language Centre conferences in

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Singapore, and the Institute of Language in Education conferences in Hong Kong, which are both held on an annual basis).

The Hong Kong Conference on Language and Society, then, was a 'first' in two senses. It was the first conference (to the best of one's knowledge) held in the territory *solely* on the broad range of issues associated with the whole gamut of studies known today as 'sociolinguistics'; and it was also the first conference of its kind in Hong Kong which explicitly set out to attract a large number of international contributors in the attempt to establish a forum for both western and Asian sociolinguistics.

Hong Kong – tension and change

It was also particularly appropriate that a major international conference of this kind was held where it was. Hong Kong has long enjoyed the status (albeit clichéd) as 'a meeting-place of east and west'. It is a unique society, where western culture, politics and business mix and merge with the cultures of the Chinese from mainland China, and the 'overseas' Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as with the other Asian cultures – including Indian, Japanese, Korean and Philippine – that are represented here.

As the headlines of world media testify, Hong Kong is currently going through a period of rapid political and social change. In 1984, the Joint Declaration of the PRC and British governments set out the guidelines for the political future of the territory. After what will be 155 years of British colonial rule, sovereignty over Hong Kong will revert to the Chinese government on 1 July 1997. Hong Kong, it is proposed, will then become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China, but will enjoy 'a high degree of autonomy' in a system of 'one country, two systems'. Under the terms of the Joint Declaration, specific guarantees were also set out to ensure 'the preservation of Hong Kong's economic, legal and social systems, and the way of life of its people for 50 years beyond 1997' (Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, Report, 1989).

The confidence of Hong Kong people in the terms of the Draft Agreement (particularly after the events of June 1989 in Beijing and what many perceive to be a subsequent 'hardening' of the attitudes of the Chinese leadership) and their confidence in the future 'stability and prosperity' of the territory, have fluctuated wildly since 1984. At the time of writing, confidence in the future has rarely been lower. Uncertainties relating to the increasing exodus of local talent in the form of emigration (currently running at around 50,000 people per annum), the right-of-abode issue in relation to the United Kingdom, and the question of representative government and the 'democratization' of Hong Kong's political structure all remain to be resolved.

Sociolinguistic issues in Hong Kong

The rapid changes and resultant uncertainties in the political and social life of Hong Kong are paralleled by changes and uncertainties in the linguistic profile of the society. Since the Second World War, the sociolinguistic situation in the territory has been most clearly characterized by a tension between English, the *de jure* language of government, law and education, and the dominant language of technology, commerce and international trade, and Cantonese, which is the vernacular lingua franca of the vast majority of Hong Kong Chinese. The prospect of social and political changes is mirrored by the prospect of changes in the sociolinguistic balance in the community, and many local linguists (see Pierson, 1988) currently suggest that it is inevitable that Putonghua (the national language of the PRC) will gain importance dramatically in the near future and may eventually surpass both English and Cantonese in some domains of society. The prospect, then, is one of 'a polyglossic situation with two high and one low language [with] Putonghua the language of politics and administration, English the language of technology and trade, and Cantonese the language of the family' (Pierson, 1988).

Issues of a sociolinguistic nature, inextricably linked as they are to the crucial political issues of the day, are therefore of acute interest in the Hong Kong community. Such concerns, moreover, are not limited to sociolinguistic researchers and academics in the two universities or the two polytechnics, they are also the very stuff of daily newspaper reports and television and radio programmes. They are the substance of daily conversations and discussions by interested 'lay people' from all walks of life and all strata of society; to a much greater extent perhaps than is typically the case in many western societies, where issues that might be described as 'sociolinguistic' in character are far less likely to make a dramatic impact on the general population.

In this context, conferences like the Hong Kong conference potentially have a crucial role to play. Not only can such gatherings inform and strengthen academic work, both in Hong Kong and in the Asian region generally, but they may also produce results in other areas as well, including language planning, language policies and work on language in education. It is therefore hoped that the two universities in the territory will continue to hold regular conferences well into the foreseeable future.

In the following sections, this chapter proceeds to discuss sociolinguistics as a field of study in terms of its development in the west, and to attempt to provide a brief overview of current sociolinguistic theory and research (in particular in Europe and the USA). It then goes on to present a survey of current sociolinguistic work in a number of Asian societies. Finally, the chapter provides a short guide to the contributions included in the following sections (Parts II–V), and attempts to draw some preliminary conclusions about the issues discussed in this, the first chapter of the volume.

SOCIOLINGUISTICS TODAY

'Sociolinguistics' has been broadly defined) as 'a branch of LINGUISTICS which studies all aspects of the relationship between LANGUAGE and society' (Crystal, 1985). Whereas many sociolinguists might accept such a formulation as a starting-point, they might also, however, contend that such a definition is misleading. Some would argue that, whatever else, sociolinguists are certainly not concerned with *all* aspects of language and society (Trudgill, 1978a). Others might opt for an alternative gloss, one that focuses more precisely on the linguistics of the equation, such as 'the study of language in its social context' (Labov, 1972a), or 'the study of language in its socio-cultural context' (Lavandera, 1988). Others, too, would challenge the subordination of sociolinguistics to 'linguistics proper' and argue for the recognition of sociolinguistics as a discipline in its own right (Ammon, Dittmar and Mattheier, 1987).

'Sociolinguistics', since its beginnings, has regularly faced a range of issues related to the adequate definition of its terms, and there have been frequent debates about its status as a field of study. Some see it as a 'discipline' in its own right, others as an 'interdisciplinary' endeavour; others view it as a part (or 'field' or 'sub-field') of general linguistics; while others see it as the central focus of *all* linguistics, and argue, as Robert Le Page does, that, in some senses, 'all sociolinguistics is linguistics and all linguistics is sociolinguistics' (Trans., 1988).

The development of sociolinguistics

Whereas sociolinguistics is a notoriously young field of inquiry, the study of language in relation to social life is not, and a number of accounts of the history of sociolinguistics take due note of this. Hymes, for example, pays tribute to such diverse influences as de Saussure, Hymes, Durkheim, Meillet, Malinowski, Firth, Boas, Bloomfield, Sapir, Whorf, Jakobson and Wittgenstein (see Hymes, 1972).

To some extent then, the work of linguists earlier in the century, and specific examples would include Sapir (1921), Malinowski (1923), Jespersen (1925), Firth (1937), Weinreich (1953) and Haugen (1956), helped pave the way for the emergence, in the last twenty-five years or so, of this new field. This earlier work, however, hardly anticipated the sudden growth of sociolinguistics in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, as witnessed by the publication of specialist academic journals in the field (notably *Language in Society* and the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*), together with the rapid appearance of a large body of published work on the study of language and society (e.g. Hertzler, 1965; Bright, 1966; Fishman, 1972a; Giglioli, 1972; Pride and Holmes, 1972; Labov, 1972a; Hymes, 1974; and Trudgill, 1974a). The reasons for the sudden explosion of interest at this time were varied and interrelated.

First, in the USA and Europe (Ammon, Dittmar and Mattheier, 1987), the growing interest in the area reflected the concerns of educationalists and sociologists in western industrialized countries about the relationship between language and social disadvantage (and, for example, issues related to language and social class in Britain, language and race in the USA, and language and immigration policies in West Germany and other European societies).

Second, there was the growing interest in sociology itself, both in the USA, where consensus paradigms such as structural-functionalism were predominant, and in Europe, where sociology was influenced by a variety of 'conflict theories' derived from the traditions of Marx and Weber (Giddens, 1988). Sociology as an academic discipline experienced a rapid growth in the 1960s and early 1970s and interest in the subject spilled over not only into the wider community (for example, through a growing awareness in the mass media of issues related to social class and feminism) but also into adjacent academic fields as well, of which linguistics was one. Thus, in some senses, the growth of sociology legitimized the interests of linguists in socially important questions, such as language and social class, language and sex, language and race, and language and immigration.

Third, among many linguists themselves in the 1960s dissatisfaction with the ascendancy of Chomskyan linguistics was increasing significantly. The central dichotomy in the Chomskyan approach between 'competence' and 'performance' (with its similarity to Saussure's earlier distinction between '*langue*' and '*parole*'), together with his focus on the closed-system features of syntax, precipitated a strong reaction to the generativist orthodoxy of the day. As Lavandera puts it, 'a sizeable number of linguists struck out on their own, as it were, and devoted themselves to building alternative conceptions of language, in which its social function was regarded as paramount' (Lavandera, 1988). At the same time, such linguists also began to question the Chomskyan conception of linguistic competence, and to posit alternative theoretical constructs, most significant of which was Hymes's (1970) model of 'communicative competence' (see also Hymes, 1987).

Fourth, another major influence was the redefinition and reformulation of dialectology during this period; a process which was crucially connected with the work of William Labov. During the late 1960s and early 1970s Labov carried out ground-breaking work in 'urban dialectology' (Labov, 1966, 1972a, 1972b) which redefined the scope and methodology of dialectologists (and anthropologists). Thus the new 'urban' or 'social' dialectology of Labov and others (including Trudgill, 1974b) arose as a reaction, in part, against 'traditional dialectology'. Traditional dialectologists in Europe and the USA, such as Orton and Kurath, had been concerned to map out the regional speech-forms of typically rural populations with largely no attention paid to social variation of any kind.

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The new dialectologists were crucially concerned with the speech of city dwellers, and a focus on the study of the co-variation of language with social and sociological factors (e.g. social class, age, sex) was placed at the core of such work (Labov, 1966, 1972a, 1972b; Trudgill, 1974b, etc). Dialectology in this period underwent a modernization, as it were, and the new urban dialectologists began to redefine such work within the emergent field of sociolinguistics (Chambers and Trudgill, 1980; Milroy, 1980; Romaine, 1982b) sharing objectives derived from a 'secular linguistics' (Labov, 1972c), which 'aimed ultimately at improving linguistic theory and at developing our understanding of the nature of language' (Trudgill, 1983a; cited in Walters, 1988).

The scope of sociolinguistics

From the beginning, sociolinguists were involved in a good deal of debate and argumentation concerning both the goals and the scope of the new field of study. Dell Hymes (1974) set out three important goals for sociolinguists: (1) *the social as well as the linguistic*; that is, socially oriented work with practical goals (e.g. in education, with minority groups, and language policies); (2) *socially realistic linguistics*, by which was meant work (e.g. that of Labov and his colleagues) concerned with socially oriented approaches to 'mainstream' linguistic issues such as linguistic rules, sound change, etc.; and (3) *socially constituted linguistics*, the most important feature of which was that it would aim at a 'theory of language' not a 'theory of grammar', by which was meant a wide-ranging theory of language in use, of the type favoured by Hymes himself.

In both the work cited above (Hymes, 1974) and in an earlier article (Hymes, 1972), Hymes argued in favour of a sociolinguistics that was as broad and as 'interdisciplinary', or 'multidisciplinary', as possible:

We find on every hand that if the goal of sociolinguistic research is to understand language as part of social life, its approach must be integrative. . . . It cannot be solely correlative of linguistic and social features, as separately identified within the present frames of reference of linguistics and other branches of the human sciences. . . . The greatest challenge for sociolinguistic research is to develop the methods, concepts and findings that will enable one ultimately to approach language from the linguistic side, not only as grammar, but also as language organized in use; from the social side, to approach social structure, cultural pattern, values, and the like, in terms of their realization in verbal and symbolic action. (Hymes, 1972).

Almost at the other end of the spectrum was the position taken by William Labov. In the preface to the influential chapter on 'The study of language in its social context' (1972a), Labov noted that the kind of work he was concerned to do covered the area generally referred to as 'general

linguistics', and that his concerns centred on 'the forms of linguistic rules, their combination into systems, the co-existence of several systems, the evolution of these rules and systems with time'. Labov concluded his preface with the assertion, by way of emphasis, that: 'If there were no need to contrast this work with the study of language out of its social context, I would prefer to say that this was simply *linguistics*'.

The 'sociology of language' and 'sociolinguistics'

Debates concerning the goals and scope of the field were mirrored by early arguments about names. Joshua Fishman, in particular, was concerned to promote the use of the term 'sociology of language' (Fishman, 1971, 1972a, 1972b, 1972c, etc.), although the work most easily identified with this term comprised studies of 'macro' issues, such as survey work, language policies and language planning, and the 'sociolinguistics of society' (Fasold, 1984). Discussions and debate about the interdisciplinary nature of sociolinguistics have continued up to the present day. Significantly, however, Grimshaw (1987a) notes that up to the 1970s, if not to the present, the cross-fertilization of sociology with linguistics has been far more noticeable in linguistics than in the field of sociology.

Certainly, there can be little doubt of at least a uni-directional impact if one considers the ways in which the investigative strategies and techniques of social-scientific inquiry, e.g. methods of data collection, including survey and questionnaire data, observation, ethnographies, data recording, etc.; and methods of data analysis, using both quantitative (typically statistical) techniques, or, less commonly, qualitative techniques of analysis, have come to influence the study of language and society. The impact of such methods and techniques on sociolinguistics has been dramatic and far-reaching.

By the late 1970s, moreover, the term 'sociology of language' had come to be seen, especially in Britain, as referring to a sub-field of 'sociolinguistics', which was increasingly recognized as the superordinate term to refer to the wide range of studies concerned with the relationship of language and society.

'Macro' and 'micro' sociolinguistics

Another dichotomy, overlapping yet not isomorphic with that of 'the sociology of language' versus 'sociolinguistics', also developed with reference to the classification of studies in terms of 'macro' versus 'micro' sociolinguistics (Fishman, 1972a).

Today, this opposition is discussed in a number of ways amongst sociolinguists and sociologists. Within sociolinguistics, the 'macro' label is normally attached to 'large-scale' studies of language use (such as language surveys) which are concerned to describe languages in terms of