

# **A Glossary of Sociolinguistics**

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gullah  
heteronormy  
restricted code  
urban dialectology  
creole  
ratification  
phatic communion



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Edinburgh University Press

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Edinburgh University Press Ltd  
22 George Square, Edinburgh

Typeset in Sabon  
by Hewer Text Ltd, Edinburgh, and  
printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Cox & Wyman, Reading

A CIP record for this book is  
available from the British Library

ISBN 0 7486 1623 3 (paperback)

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# Introduction

The aim of this book is to provide an introductory guide to the central concepts and most frequently used technical terms used in sociolinguistics. The focus is not only on the various branches of sociolinguistics itself, but also on dialectology, both traditional and modern, and on varieties of the English language, particularly those which have been of especial interest to people working in sociolinguistics. Classic studies in sociolinguistics are also cited. There is, too, a particular emphasis on individual languages of types which tend to be of special interest to sociolinguists, such as minority languages, and pidgin and creole languages.

The entries are written in normal prose, but are presented alphabetically to facilitate research, and with numerous cross-references. The book is a revised, updated and much expanded version of the author's *Introducing language and society* (Penguin, 1992).

# Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the following for their help and advice in the preparation of this book: Jenny Cheshire, David Crystal, Yvonne Dröschel, Mercedes Durham, Jan Terje Faarlund, Jean Hannah, Daniel Long, Didier Maillat, James Milroy and Lesley Milroy.

**A**

**Aasen, Ivar** see **Ausbau language, Nynorsk**

**AAVE** see **African American Vernacular English**

**Abstand language** (German /'apʃtant/) A concept developed by the German sociolinguist Heinz Kloss. A variety of language which is regarded as a **language** in its own right, rather than a **dialect**, by virtue of being very different in its linguistic characteristics from all other languages. The degree of linguistic distance (German 'Abstand') between this variety and other languages is such that, unlike **Ausbau languages**, there can be no dispute as to its language status. Basque, the language spoken in northern Spain and southwestern France, is a good example of an **Abstand language**. It is clearly a single language, because its dialects are similar. And it is clearly a language rather than a dialect because, since it is not related historically to any other European language, it is completely different in its grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation from the neighbouring languages, French and Spanish – compare the numerals from *one* to *five*.

French	Spanish	Basque
<i>un</i>	<i>uno</i>	<i>bat</i>

<i>deux</i>	<i>dos</i>	<i>bi</i>
<i>trois</i>	<i>tres</i>	<i>hiru</i>
<i>quatre</i>	<i>cuatro</i>	<i>lau</i>
<i>cinq</i>	<i>cinco</i>	<i>bost</i>



The Basque-speaking area

There is no widely used English equivalent for this term, but 'language by distance' is sometimes employed.

**accent** The way in which people pronounce when they speak. Since everybody pronounces when they speak – everyone has phonetics and phonology – everybody speaks with an accent. A speaker's accent may relate to where they are from geographically (for example a London accent, an American accent – see also **Geordie**, **Scouse**, **Cockney**). It may relate to their social background (for example an upper-class accent, or, in England, an **RP** accent) or it may relate to whether they are a

native speaker or not (for example a French accent, a foreign accent). Accent and **dialect** normally go together (Yorkshire dialect is spoken with a Yorkshire accent) but British sociolinguists distinguish between the two because the **RP** accent and the **Standard English** dialect are not always combined.

**accommodation** The process whereby participants in a conversation adjust their **accent**, **dialect** or other language characteristics according to the language of the other participant(s). Accommodation theory, as developed by the British social psychologist of language, Howard Giles, stresses that accommodation can take one of two major forms: convergence, when speakers modify their accent or dialect, etc. to make them resemble more closely those of the people they are speaking to; and, less usually, divergence, when, in order to signal social distance or disapproval, speakers make their language more unlike that of their interlocutors. Accommodation normally takes place during **face-to-face interaction**.

**accountability, principle of** A principle propounded by William Labov which states that reports of the occurrence of a variant of a **linguistic variable** must be accompanied by reports of its non-occurrence.

**acrolect** A variety or lect which is socially the highest, most prestigious variety in a social **dialect continuum**. Other varieties lower down the social dialect continuum in terms of social status are known as **mesolects** and **basilects**. This terminology is particularly common in the discussion of the sociolinguistic situation in **post-creole continuum** communities such as Jamaica, where **Standard English** is the acrolect, Jamaican Creole the basilect, and linguistically intermediate varieties the mesolects.



**act of identity** According to the British sociolinguist Robert LePage, any **speech act** performed by an individual is an act of identity. In any given situation, speakers will select from the range of **varieties** available to them in their **verbal repertoires** depending on which personal and social identity they wish to project. By selecting a pronunciation or grammatical form or word associated with and symbolic of a particular group in society, they will be projecting their identity as a member of that social group rather than some other identity. **Accommodation** of both the convergence and divergence types can be interpreted as constituting an act of identity.

**actuation problem** One of a number of problems pointed to by the American sociolinguist William Labov in connection with the study of linguistic change within the field of **secular linguistics**. The actuation problem is the problem which linguists have of explaining why a particular linguistic change is set in motion in the first place. Historical linguists may be quite good at accounting for particular sound changes or grammatical changes, but why do changes start where and when they do, and not at some other place or time? A related problem, as discussed by Labov, is the **embedding problem**.

**address forms** Words and phrases used to address other people in conversations, meetings, letters, etc. Address forms may include pronouns such as *you*, titles such as *Sir* and *Madam*, names such as *John* and *Mr Smith*, and endearments and expressions such as *mate*, *buddy*, *dear*, *honey*. In all communities, there are norms concerning who uses which form to who, what the social implications are of using one form or another, and on which occasions particular forms may be used. In Britain, it would be unusual to address a friend by title plus surname, for

example *Mr Smith*, and more usual to address them by their first name, for example *John*. In many languages, speakers also have to select second-person pronouns, corresponding to English *you*, according to sociolinguistically appropriate norms. Selection usually involves a choice of T and V pronouns.

**adjacency pair** In conversation analysis, a sequence of two utterances by two different speakers in which the second is related to the first in a specific way. For example, a question will normally be followed by an answer, and a summons by a response, as in:

A: Mum!

B: Coming!

**admixture** The mixing of elements from one language or dialect into another. This typically happens when speakers are using a variety that is not their native tongue and interference, such as the use of a foreign accent or the transfer of grammatical patterns from one language to another, takes place. Admixture is an important notion in the study of **pidgin** languages and is one of the major elements in the process of **pidginisation**. Admixture can also involve the **borrowing** of words from one language to another.

**adstratum** see **substratum**

**African American Vernacular English (AAVE)** The name used by American sociolinguists to refer to the **dialect** of English spoken, with relatively little regional variation, by lower-class anglophone (i.e. not Louisiana French Creole-speaking) African Americans in the United States. In its phonological and, especially, grammatical charac-

teristics (such as **copula deletion**), this **variety** differs from White dialects of English in such a way that many linguists have argued that it represents a late stage historically in a **decreolisation** process of an earlier **creole** that formerly resembled the creoles of the Caribbean and **Gullah**. Other linguists, sometimes known as 'anglicists', argue that the linguistic features of AAVE can be entirely accounted for by an origin in the British Isles. William Labov has argued, in research published in the 1980s, that African American Vernacular English is currently diverging from White dialects. This research has led to the **divergence controversy** in American sociolinguistics. AAVE has also been called 'Ebonics'.

**Afro-Seminole** see **Gullah**

**age-grading** A phenomenon in which speakers in a community gradually alter their speech habits as they get older, and where this change is repeated in every generation. It has been shown, for example, that in some speech communities it is normal for speakers to modify their language in the direction of the **acrolect** as they approach middle-age, and then to revert to less prestigious speech patterns after they reach retirement age. Age-grading is something that has to be checked for in **apparent-time studies** of linguistic change to ensure that false conclusions are not being drawn from linguistic differences between generations.

**Americana** At the end of the American Civil War in 1865, thousands of Americans from the defeated South left the United States and about 40,000 of them went to Brazil where they founded a number of settlements. The best known of these is called Americana, which is about 100 miles northwest of Sao Paulo. The language of the com-

munity was for many decades a Southern variety of American English, and there are many hundreds of older people today who still speak a conservative form of English which has its roots in Georgia and Alabama. Gradually the community have become bilingual in English and Portuguese, and **language shift** to Portuguese is now taking place.

**anglicists** see **African American Vernacular English**

**Angloromany** The ethnic language of the Rom (Gypsies) is Romani, an originally North Indian language related to Hindi and Panjabi. As a result of **language shift**, however, Gypsies in England no longer speak the language. Many of them, though, are still able to speak a variety known as Angloromany or Anglo-Romany. This is a variety in which, as described by the British Gypsy linguist Ian Hancock, many of the nouns, verbs and adjectives are of Romany origin, while the articles, numerals, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions and grammatical endings, as well as the phonetics and phonology, are English. Angloromany may function as an **antilanguage** and it has provided important input in the development of English **slang**. Here is an example:

Jesus pukkered them this parable. 'Suppose tutti's got a hundred bokros and yek of them's nasherdi. Is there a mush among the lot of you as would not muk the ninety-nine in the bokro-puv and jel after the nasherdi bokro till he latches it? Karna he's latched it he riggers it on his dummer, well-pleased he is. Karna he jels home he pukkers his friends and all the foki around "Be happy with mandi, because I've found my nasherdi bokro".'

*Jesus told them this parable. 'Suppose you've got a hundred sheep and one of them's lost. Is there a man among the lot of you who would not leave the ninety-nine in the sheepfold and go after the lost sheep till he finds it? When he's found it he lays it on his shoulder, well-pleased he is. When he gets home he tells his friends and all the neighbours around "Be happy with me, because I've found my lost sheep".'*

**Ann Arbor case** A court case in the town of Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, in 1979, in which African American parents argued that insufficient provision had been made in the education system for children who were native speakers of **African American Vernacular English** rather than **Standard English**. William Labov presented evidence showing that African American Vernacular English was a systematic, rule-governed linguistic variety. The court ruled that the education system should take account of the fact that children came to school speaking a structured language variety which is linguistically different from Standard English. See **linguistic gratuity**, **principle of**.

**anthrolinguistics** see **anthropological linguistics**

**anthropological linguistics** A branch of the study of language and society, sometimes known as **anthrolinguistics**, in which the objectives of the study are in part identical to those of anthropologists – to find out more about the social structure of particular communities (especially but not exclusively in smaller non-European societies) – but where the methodology involves analysis of languages and of norms for language use. Areas studied in anthropological linguistics include **kinship terminology**, the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** and **linguistic taboo**. There are also

strong connections between anthropological linguistics and the **ethnography of speaking**.

**antilanguage** A term coined by Michael Halliday to refer to a variety of a language, usually spoken on particular occasions by members of certain relatively powerless or marginal groups in a society, which is intended to be incomprehensible to other speakers of the language or otherwise to exclude them. Examples of groups employing forms of antilanguage include criminals, drug-users, schoolchildren, homosexuals and Gypsies. Exclusivity is maintained through the use of **slang** vocabulary, sometimes known as **argot**, not known to other groups, including vocabulary derived from other languages. European examples include the antilanguages **Polari** and **Angloromany**. Some of these varieties rely on phonological or other distortion processes to make them incomprehensible – see **back slang**, **Pig Latin**, **rhyming slang** and also **gayspeak**.

**Appalachians, the** A hilly area of the eastern United States which has been much studied by American dialectologists because of its **traditional dialects**. The areas of most interest to dialectologists have been in West Virginia.

**apparent-time studies** Studies of linguistic change which attempt to investigate language changes as they happen, not in real time (see **real-time studies**), but by comparing the speech of older speakers with that of younger speakers in a given community, and assuming that differences between them are due to changes currently taking place within the dialect of that community, with older speakers using older forms and younger speakers using newer forms. As pointed out by William Labov, who introduced both the term and the technique, it is important to be able

to distinguish in this comparison of age-groups between ongoing language changes and differences that are due to age-grading.

**applied linguistics** The application of the findings of linguistics to the solution of real-world problems. The term is most often used in connection with the application of linguistics to the teaching of foreign and second languages.

**applied sociolinguistics** The application of the findings of sociolinguistics to the solution of real-world problems. See *Ann Arbor case*, *cross-cultural communication*, *interactional sociolinguistics*, *language conflict*, *language cultivation*, *language planning*, *language revival*, *verbal deprivation*.

**areal linguistics** see *geographical linguistics*

**argot** /argou/ A term sometimes used to refer to the kinds of *antilanguage* whose *slang* vocabulary is typically associated with criminal groups.

**artificial languages** see *historicity*

**Arumanian** see *Vlach*

**Arvanitika** The name given in Greece to the language of the indigenous Albanian-speaking linguistic minority in that country. This minority has been in Greece since medieval times, and the biggest concentration today is found in Attica, Biotia and much of the Peloponnese. Many of the suburbs of Athens are, or were until recently, Albanian-speaking. The number of speakers is difficult to determine but there may be as many as 50,000. There is no doubt

that Arvanitika is a variety of Albanian – the degree of linguistic **Abstand** between it and the dialects of southern Albania is so small that mutual intelligibility is not difficult. However, the practice of referring to the language by a different name has the effect of implying that Arvanitika is an autonomous language rather than a dialect of Albanian, the national language of a neighbouring country.

**audience design** A notion developed by Allan Bell to account for **stylistic variation** in language in terms of speakers' responses to audience members i.e. to people who are listening to them. Bell's model derives in part from **accommodation** theory.

**augmentative** The opposite of **diminutive**. A form, usually of a noun, with the added meaning of 'big'. In European languages this is usually signalled by a suffix, as in Greek *pedharos* 'big boy' from *pedhi* 'child'. There is frequently an additional association of admiration, such that *pedharos* most often means 'big, good-looking lad'.

**Ausbau language** (German /'ausbau/) A concept due to the German sociolinguist Heinz Kloss. A **variety** which derives its status as a **language**, rather than a **dialect**, not so much from its linguistic characteristics, like an **Abstand language**, but from its social, cultural and political characteristics. These characteristics will normally involve **autonomy** and **standardisation**. Norwegian and Swedish are regarded as distinct languages, not because they are linguistically very different from one another – there is clear **mutual intelligibility** – but because they are associated with two separate, independent nation states, and because they have traditions involving different writing systems, grammar books and dictionaries. **Ausbau** is the



German word for 'extension' or 'building up'. Note that when new Ausbau languages are being developed through **language planning**, planners will often make the most of what Abstand is available. For example, Ivar Aasen, the developer of the form of Standard Norwegian now known as **Nynorsk** deliberately modelled it on those (western) dialects which were least like Danish, which had hitherto been the standard language of Norway. There is no widely used English equivalent for this term, but 'language by extension' is sometimes employed.

**Austin, J. L.** see **speech act theory**

**autonomy** A term, associated with the work of the Norwegian-American linguist Einar Haugen, which means independence and is thus the opposite of **heteronomy**. Autonomy is a characteristic of a **variety** of a language that has been subject to **standardisation** and **codification**, and is therefore regarded as having an independent existence. An autonomous variety is one whose speakers and writers are not socially, culturally or educationally dependent on any other variety of that language, and is normally the variety which is used in writing in the community in question. **Standard English** is a **dialect** which has the characteristic of autonomy, whereas **Cockney** does not have this feature.

**avoidance language** A linguistic variety which is used to permit social interaction between people who would otherwise be prevented from communicating with one another by strong social **taboos**. In many Australian aboriginal communities there are taboos concerning communication between a man and his mother-in-law. In some such communities they are permitted to talk to one another only if they employ a special language vari-