

PETER TRUDGILL



# SOCIOLINGUISTICS

AN INTRODUCTION  
TO LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

NEW EDITION

**Sociolinguistics:  
An Introduction to Language  
and Society**

Peter Trudgill



Penguin Books

## PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England

Penguin Books USA Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

First published in Pelican Books 1974

Revised edition 1983

Reprinted in Penguin Books 1990

Revised edition 1995

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Copyright © Peter Trudgill, 1974, 1983, 1995

All rights reserved

Printed in England by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Filmset in 10/12 Monophoto Times by Datix International Ltd, Bungay, Suffolk

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

PENGUIN BOOKS

**SOCIOLINGUISTICS: AN INTRODUCTION  
TO LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY**

*Advisory Editor: David Crystal*

Peter Trudgill was born in Norwich in 1943, and attended the City of Norwich School. After studying Modern Languages at King's College, Cambridge, he obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh in 1971. He taught in the Department of Linguistic Science at the University of Reading from 1970 to 1986, and from 1986 to 1992 at the University of Essex. He is currently Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Lausanne. He has carried out linguistic field-work in Britain, Greece and Norway, and has lectured in most European countries, Canada, the United States, Colombia, Australia, New Zealand, India, Thailand, Hong Kong, Malawi and Japan. Peter Trudgill is the author of: *Accent, Dialect and the School*; *English Accents and Dialects* (with Arthur Hughes); *International English* (with Jean Hannah); *Applied Sociolinguistics*; *Dialects in Contact*; *On Dialect*; *Language in the British Isles*; *Dialectology* (with J.K. Chambers); *The Dialects of England*; *Bad Language* (with Lars Andersson); and other books and articles on sociolinguistics and dialectology.

## Acknowledgements

A book of this type necessarily draws rather heavily on the work of others. I have made use of the publications of the following scholars without acknowledgement in the text: P. van den Berghe, C. Geertz, J. Gibbons, T. Hill, K. Kazazis, R. Keller, A. Hooper, W. Lockwood, S. Martin, W. McCormack, J. Ornstein, E. Polomé, J. Rubin and W. Stewart. I would like also to acknowledge the help I have had with translations from Ron Brasington, Arne Kjell Foldvik, Viviane Schumacher, and Spanish students at the University of Reading, as well as the invaluable information I have received from Malcolm Petyt, Dubravka Lazić Yarwood, Greek friends, and many other colleagues, students and friends in Reading and elsewhere. I am especially grateful to David Crystal for his help and advice with the book as a whole, and to Jill Tozer for typing it. Thanks are also due to Viv Edwards, Paul Fletcher and Mike Garman for help with the proofs, and to Jean Hannah for her valuable help with the second and third editions. The third edition has also benefited from help and advice from Ian Hancock and David Shaul.

## Phonetic Symbols

č	<i>chew</i>
ç	German <i>ich</i> , Scots <i>nicht</i> , RP* <i>huge</i>
ɖ	retroflex† d
ð	<i>this</i>
g	<i>guy</i>
j	<i>you</i>
ʝ	<i>just</i>
ɭ	retroflex l
ɽ	retroflex flap, as in some Indian languages and some types of Swedish and Norwegian
ɳ	retroflex n
ɲ	syllabic nasal
ŋ	<i>sing</i>
ɹ	RP <i>row</i>
R	French <i>rose</i>
ʃ	<i>she</i>
θ	<i>thing</i>
x	German <i>nach</i> , Scots <i>loch</i> , Spanish <i>bajo</i>
ʒ	<i>vision</i>
ʔ	a glottal stop, e.g. 'cockney' <i>better</i> 'be'er'
ʕ	pharyngeal fricative, as in Arabic
ɑ	French <i>patte</i> , North of England <i>pat</i> , Australian <i>part</i>
ɑ	RP <i>path</i> , <i>part</i>
æ	RP <i>pat</i>

\* For the term *RP*, see p. 7.

† For the term *retroflex*, see p. 153.

e	Scots <i>ate</i> , French <i>et</i>
ɛ	RP <i>bed</i>
ə	<i>about</i>
ɜ	RP <i>bird</i> (Note: no [r])
i	RP <i>eat</i> , French <i>il</i>
ɪ	RP <i>it</i>
ɪ	close, central unrounded vowel
o	French <i>eau</i> , Scots <i>no</i>
ɔ	RP <i>law</i>
ø	a central vowel between ø and o
ɒ	RP <i>on</i>
ø	French <i>eux</i> , German <i>böse</i>
u	RP <i>fool</i> , French <i>ou</i>
ʊ	RP <i>pull</i>
ʉ	a central vowel between [y] and [u], cf. Scots 'hoose'
ʌ	RP <i>up</i>
y	French <i>tu</i> , German <i>über</i>
~	vowel nasalized, e.g. õ
+	vowel fronted, e.g. ɸ
.	vowel raised, e.g. ɹ
:	long vowel, e.g. o:

Brackets [ ] indicate phonetic transcription; oblique dashes / /, phonemic transcription.

# Contents

List of Figures, Maps and Tables	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Phonetic Symbols	xi
<b>1</b> Sociolinguistics – Language and Society	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b> Language and Social Class	<b>22</b>
<b>3</b> Language and Ethnic Group	<b>39</b>
<b>4</b> Language and Sex	<b>62</b>
<b>5</b> Language and Context	<b>84</b>
<b>6</b> Language and Social Interaction	<b>107</b>
<b>7</b> Language and Nation	<b>121</b>
<b>8</b> Language and Geography	<b>146</b>
<b>9</b> Language and Humanity	<b>174</b>
Annotated Bibliography and Further Reading	189
Index	195



## Figures, Maps and Tables

### *Figures*

- 1 Social and regional dialect variation 29
- 2 Social and regional accent variation 30
- 3 Sex differentiation in Darkhat Mongolian 67
- 4 Social-class and style differentiation of non-prevocalic /r/ in New York City (after Labov) 95

### *Maps*

- 1 Non-prevocalic /r/ in *yard* and *farm* in conservative rural dialects in England 148
- 2 Uvular r in Europe 152

### *Tables*

- 1 Attitudes towards and use of non-prevocalic /r/: upper middle class in New York City 11
- 2 Regional and caste differences in Kanarese 24
- 3 RP and local-accent pronunciation of *home* 31
- 4 Verbs without -s in Norwich and Detroit 32
- 5 Non-RP forms for three consonants in Norwich 36
- 6 New York vowels in *bad* 37
- 7 Self-evaluation of *tune* in Norwich 75
- 8 Over- and under-reporting of *tune* in Norwich 75
- 9 Over- and under-reporting of *ear* in Norwich 76
- 10 -in' forms used in four contextual styles in Norwich 94

## 1. Sociolinguistics – Language and Society

Everyone knows what is supposed to happen when two English people who have never met before come face to face in a train – they start talking about the weather. In some cases this may simply be because they happen to find the subject interesting. Most people, though, are not particularly interested in analyses of climatic conditions, so there must be other reasons for conversations of this kind. One explanation is that it can often be quite embarrassing to be alone in the company of someone you are not acquainted with and *not* speak to them. If no conversation takes place the atmosphere can become rather strained. However, by talking to the other person about some neutral topic like the weather, it is possible to strike up a relationship without actually having to say very much. Train conversations of this kind – and they do happen, although not of course as often as the popular myth supposes – are a good example of the sort of important social function that is often fulfilled by language. Language is not simply a means of communicating information – about the weather or any other subject. It is also a very important means of establishing and maintaining relationships with other people. Probably the most important thing about the conversation between our two English people is not the words they are using, but the fact that they are talking at all.

There is also a second explanation. It is quite possible that the first English person, probably subconsciously, would like to get to know certain things about the second – for instance what sort of job they do and what social status they have. Without this kind of information he or she will not be sure exactly how to behave towards them. The first person can, of course, make intelligent guesses about the second from their

clothes, and other visual clues, but can hardly ask direct questions about their social background, at least not at this stage of the relationship. What he or she *can* do – and any reasoning along these lines is again usually subconscious – is to engage them in conversation. The first person is then likely to find out certain things about the other person quite easily. These things will be learnt not so much from what the other person says as from *how it is said*, for whenever we speak we cannot avoid giving our listeners clues about our origins and the sort of person we are. Our accent and our speech generally show where we come from, and what sort of background we have. We may even give some indication of certain of our ideas and attitudes, and all of this information can be used by the people we are speaking with to help them formulate an opinion about us.

These two aspects of language behaviour are very important from a social point of view: first, the function of language in establishing social relationships; and, second, the role played by language in conveying information about the speaker. We shall concentrate for the moment on the second, ‘clue-bearing’ role, but it is clear that both these aspects of linguistic behaviour are reflections of the fact that there is a close inter-relationship between language and society.

The first English person, in seeking clues about the second, is making use of the way in which people from different social and geographical backgrounds use different kinds of language. If the second English person comes from Norfolk, for example, he or she will probably use the kind of language spoken by people from that part of the country. If the second person is also a middle-class businessman, he will use the kind of language associated with men of this type. ‘Kinds of language’ of this sort are often referred to as *dialects*, the first type in this case being a regional dialect and the second a social dialect. The term *dialect* is a familiar one and most people will think that they have a good idea of what it means. In fact, though, it is not a particularly easy term to define – and this also goes for the two other commonly used terms which we have already mentioned, *language* and *accent*.

Let us confine our attention for the moment to the terms *dialect* and *language*. Neither represents a particularly clear-cut or watertight concept. As far as *dialect* is concerned, for example, it is possible, in England, to speak of 'the Norfolk dialect' or 'the Suffolk dialect'. On the other hand, one can also talk of more than one 'Norfolk dialect' – 'East Norfolk' or 'South Norfolk', for instance. Nor is the distinction between 'Norfolk dialect' and 'Suffolk dialect' so straightforward as one might think. If you travel from Norfolk into Suffolk, investigating conservative rural dialects as you go, you will find, at least at some points, that the linguistic characteristics of these dialects change *gradually* from place to place. There is no clear *linguistic* break between Norfolk and Suffolk dialects. It is not possible to state in linguistic terms where people stop speaking Norfolk dialect and start speaking Suffolk dialect. There is, that is, a geographical dialect continuum. If we choose to place the dividing line between the two at the county boundary, then we are basing our decision on *social* (in this case local-government-political) rather than on linguistic facts.

The same sort of problem arises with the term *language*. For example, Dutch and German are known to be two distinct languages. However, at some 'places along the Dutch–German frontier the dialects spoken on either side of the border are extremely similar. If we choose to say that people on one side of the border speak German and those on the other Dutch, our choice is again based on social and political rather than linguistic factors. This point is further emphasized by the fact that the ability of speakers from either side of the border to understand each other will often be considerably greater than that of German speakers from this area to understand speakers of other German dialects from distant parts of Austria or Switzerland. Now, in attempting to decide which language someone is speaking, we *could* say that if two speakers cannot understand one another, then they are speaking different languages. Similarly, if they *can* understand each other, we could say that they are speaking dialects of the *same* language. Clearly, however, this would

lead to some rather strange results in the case of Dutch and German, and indeed in many other cases.

The criterion of 'mutual intelligibility', and other purely linguistic criteria, are, therefore, of less importance in the use of the terms *language* and *dialect* than are political and cultural factors, of which the two most important are *autonomy* (independence) and *heteronomy* (dependence). We can say that Dutch and German are *autonomous*, since both are independent, standardized varieties of language with, as it were, a life of their own. On the other hand, the nonstandard dialects of Germany, Austria and German-speaking Switzerland are all *heteronomous* with respect to standard German, in spite of the fact that they may be very unlike each other and that some of them may be very like Dutch dialects. This is because speakers of these German dialects look to German as their standard language, read and write in German, and listen to German on radio and television. Speakers of dialects on the Dutch side of the border, in the same way, will read newspapers and write letters in Dutch, and any standardizing changes that occur in their dialects will take place in the direction of Standard Dutch, not Standard German.

A more extreme case which illustrates the sociopolitical nature of these two terms can be taken from Scandinavia. Norwegian, Swedish and Danish are all autonomous, standard languages, corresponding to three distinct nation states. Educated speakers of all three, however, can communicate freely with each other. But in spite of this mutual intelligibility, it would not make sense to say that Norwegian, Swedish and Danish are really the same language. This would constitute a direct contradiction of the political and cultural facts.

This discussion of the difficulty of using purely linguistic criteria to divide up varieties of language into distinct languages or dialects is our first encounter with a problem very common in the study of language and society – the problem of *discreteness* and *continuity*, of whether the division of linguistic and social phenomena into separate entities has any basis in reality, or is merely a convenient fiction. It is as well to point out that this is a problem since terms like 'cockney',

'Brooklynese', 'Yorkshire accent', 'Black dialect' are frequently used as if they were self-evident, self-contained discrete varieties with well-defined, obvious characteristics. It is often convenient to talk as if this were the case, but it should always be borne in mind that the true picture may very well be considerably more complex than this. We can talk, for example, about 'Canadian English' and 'American English' as if they were two clearly distinct entities, but it is in fact very difficult to find any single linguistic feature which is common to all varieties of Canadian English and not present in any variety of American English.

If at this point we return to purely linguistic facts, a further distinction now needs to be made. The term *dialect* refers, strictly speaking, to differences between kinds of language which are differences of vocabulary and grammar as well as pronunciation. The term *accent*, on the other hand, refers solely to differences of pronunciation, and it is often important to distinguish clearly between the two. This is particularly true, in the context of English, in the case of the dialect known as *Standard English*. In many important respects this dialect is different from other English dialects, and some people may find it surprising to see it referred to as a dialect at all. However, in so far as it differs grammatically and lexically from other varieties of English, it is legitimate to consider it a dialect: the term *dialect* can be used to apply to all varieties, not just to nonstandard varieties. (Note that we shall be employing *variety* as a neutral term to apply to any 'kind of language' we wish to talk about without being specific.)

Standard English is that variety of English which is usually used in print, and which is normally taught in schools and to non-native speakers learning the language. It is also the variety which is normally spoken by educated people and used in news broadcasts and other similar situations. The difference between standard and nonstandard, it should be noted, has nothing in principle to do with differences between formal and colloquial language, or with concepts such as 'bad language'. Standard English has colloquial as well as

formal variants, and Standard English speakers swear as much as others. (It is worth pointing this out because many people appear to believe that if someone uses slang expressions or informal turns of phrase this means that they are not speaking Standard English.) Historically speaking, the standard language developed out of the English dialects used in and around London as these were modified through the centuries by speakers at the court, by scholars from the universities and other writers, and, later on, by the Public Schools. As time passed, the English used in the upper classes of society in the capital city came to diverge quite markedly from that used by other social groups and came to be regarded as the model for all those who wished to speak and write 'well'. When printing became widespread, it was the form of English most widely used in books, and, although it has undergone many changes, it has always retained its character as the form of the English language with the highest profile.

Within Standard English there are a number of regional differences which tend to attract attention. Standard Scottish English is by no means exactly the same as Standard English, for example, and Standard American English is somewhat different again. The differences include large numbers of well-known vocabulary items, such as British *lift*, American *elevator*, and some grammatical details:

British: *I have got.*

American: *I have gotten.*

English: *It needs washing.*

Scottish: *It needs washed.*

There are also a number of other variations associated with smaller regions such as, say, parts of the North and Midlands of England as opposed to the South:

North: *You need your hair cutting.*

South: *You need your hair cut.*

Generally speaking, however, Standard English has a widely accepted and codified grammar. There is a general consensus among educated people, and in particular among those who

hold powerful and influential positions, as to what is Standard English and what is not – Standard English is, as it were, imposed from above over the range of regional dialects – the dialect continuum – and for this reason can be called a *superposed variety* of language.

This general consensus, however, does not apply to pronunciation. There is no universally acknowledged standard accent for English, and it is, at least in theory, possible to speak Standard English with any regional or social accent. (In practice there are some accents, generally very localized accents associated with groups who have had relatively little education, which do not frequently occur together with Standard English, but there is no necessary connection between Standard English and any particular accent or accents.) There is also one accent which *only* occurs together with Standard English. This is the British English accent, or more properly the English English accent, which is known to linguists as RP ('received pronunciation'). This is the accent which developed largely in the English Public Schools, and which was until recently required of all BBC announcers. It is known colloquially under various names such as 'Oxford English' and 'BBC English', and is still the accent taught to non-native speakers learning British pronunciation.

RP is unusual in that the relatively very small numbers of speakers who use it do not identify themselves as coming from any particular geographical region. RP is largely confined to England, although it also has prestige in the rest of the British Isles (and, to a decreasing extent, in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa). As far as England is concerned, though, RP is a *non-localized* accent. It is, however, not necessary to speak RP to speak Standard English. Standard English can be spoken with any regional accent, and in the vast majority of cases normally is.

Because language as a social phenomenon is closely tied up with the social structure and value systems of society, different dialects and accents are evaluated in different ways. Standard English, for example, has much more status and prestige than any other English dialect. It is a dialect that is highly valued



by many people, and certain economic, social and political benefits tend to accrue to those who speak and write it. The RP accent also has very high prestige, as do certain American accents. In fact the 'conventional wisdom' of most English-speaking communities goes further than this. So statusful are Standard English and the prestige accents that they are widely considered to be 'correct', 'beautiful', 'nice', 'pure' and so on. Other nonstandard, non-prestige varieties are often held to be 'wrong', 'ugly', 'corrupt' or 'lazy'. Standard English, moreover, is frequently considered to be *the* English language, which inevitably leads to the view that other varieties of English are some kind of deviation from a norm, the deviation being due to laziness, ignorance or lack of intelligence. In this way millions of people who have English as their mother-tongue are persuaded that they 'can't speak English'.

The fact is, however, that Standard English is only one variety among many, although a peculiarly important one. Linguistically speaking, it cannot even legitimately be considered better than other varieties. The scientific study of language has convinced scholars that *all* languages, and correspondingly *all* dialects, are equally 'good' as linguistic systems. All varieties of a language are structured, complex, rule-governed systems which are wholly adequate for the needs of their speakers. It follows that value judgements concerning the correctness and purity of linguistic varieties are *social* rather than linguistic. There is nothing at all inherent in nonstandard varieties which makes them inferior. Any apparent inferiority is due only to their association with speakers from under-privileged, low-status groups. In other words, attitudes towards non-standard dialects are attitudes which reflect the social structure of society. In the same way, societal *values* may also be reflected in judgements concerning linguistic varieties. For example, it is quite common in heavily urbanized Britain for rural accents, such as those of Devonshire, Northumberland or the Scottish Highlands, to be considered pleasant, charming, quaint or amusing. Urban accents, on the other hand, such as those of Birmingham, Newcastle or London, are often thought to be ugly, careless or unpleas-