

Language and Social Psychology

Edited by

HOWARD GILES and
ROBERT N. ST CLAIR

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mark on this field, social psychology is conspicuous by its absence. This book is directed to this omission, and shows that social psychology can increase the explanatory power of sociolinguistics. It argues that if we are to understand how and why individuals acquire, use and react to language and its dynamics, we need a greater understanding of human attitudes, motivations, identities and intentions. Social psychological theories (and methods) can guide us towards a greater appreciation of at least two, perhaps fundamental, issues: why are speech variables important in evaluating others? Why do people speak differently in different situations? This book shows that multidisciplinary work is not only valuable, but at this stage of the development of sociolinguistics and the social psychology of language, essential.

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Language in Society

This series is addressed to linguists, social scientists and all those concerned with the operation of language in society. It will consider language and communication, anthropological linguistics, ethnomethodology, secular linguistics, the sociology of language and discourse analysis, and their applications. Though specialists from many disciplines will contribute to the series, none of the books will be technical.

Language in Society is edited by Peter Trudgill, William Labov and Ralph Fasold.



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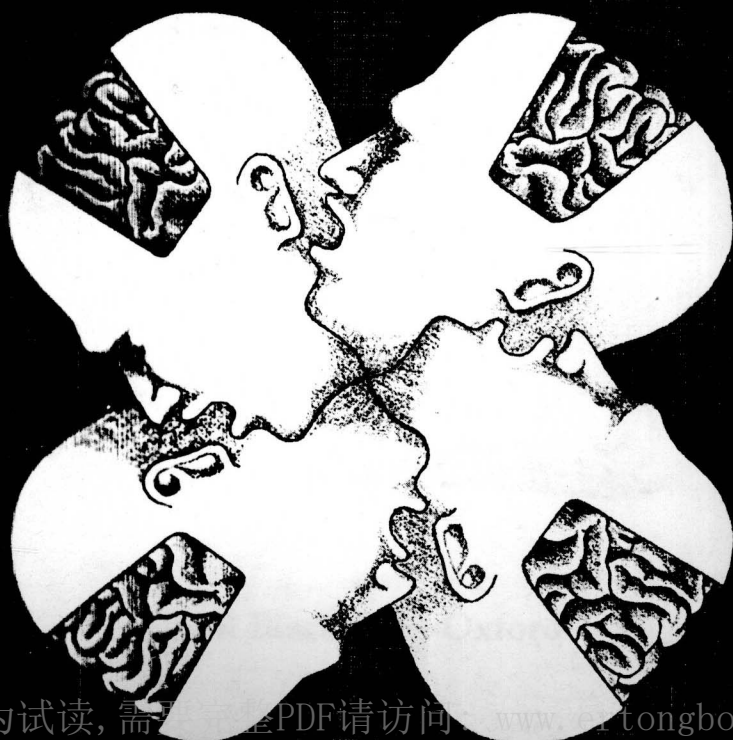
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Language in
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LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Howard Giles and
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Language in Society

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Editors' Preface: Language in Society Series

For some, the title of this series will imply principally the relationships that obtain *between* language and society. For others, the emphasis will lie on the role language plays *in* society. But whatever the interpretation, it is clear that there are many reasons for the growing interest in the field of language and society. Language for instance can be the medium through which a society may be influenced, conditioned or manipulated: studies of oratory and rhetoric have a long and respectable history, but more recently attention has also been focused on the language of advertising, the language of diplomatic euphemism, the language of political obfuscation.

Conversely, a language may also reflect in some degree certain aspects of the society in which it is spoken, and therefore may constitute a profitable area of investigation for social scientists. It is not merely that the vocabulary of a language may reflect the interests, needs, experiences and environment of the people who speak it. (It comes, after all, as no great surprise that Eskimo has a more extensive 'snow' vocabulary than English does, or that Jamaicans have a large number of words for yams.) A language may also indicate something about the way in which a society is structured, as conveyed, perhaps, through its kinship terms, or its beliefs, norms and values—illustrated, for example, through linguistic taboo, descriptive labels for social and ethnic groups, or in terms for men and for women. The study of conversation, too, may be informative. An analysis of what speakers say and more particularly, what they do not say, can be indicative of the unstated, shared assumptions of particular social groups.

Linguists, too, have a very considerable interest in language and society. Language as it is used by people in their everyday lives must, ultimately, be what linguists describe and explain, and the study of language in its social context provides an essential counterbalance to studies in the laboratory and to researches that concentrate on the

linguist's knowledge of his own language. Indeed, it is more than this, since there are many aspects of language, such as the mechanisms involved in linguistic change, which can only be studied in this way. Empirical studies of language in society have produced some of the most interesting work in linguistics of the past several years.

Some work in this field, then, is of especial interest to social scientist, and some to linguists. But there are also many aspects of the study of language and society which are of equal interest to both. Linguists and social scientists have much to learn from studies that ask questions such as what languages, dialects or styles are employed in different situations; what are the social norms for using language in different communities; what social meanings and connotations do different varieties of language acquire, and how may these be manipulated in social interaction? And there are also many ways in which work of this nature can be applied to the solution of practical problems—in second and foreign language teaching; in mother tongue education; in language planning and standardization.

This series *Language and Society* is concerned with all these areas—language and communication, anthropological linguistics, ethnomethodology, secular linguistics, the sociology of language, the ethnography of speaking, discourse analysis, the social psychology of language—and with their applications. Publications in the series will therefore be of interest to linguists and to social scientists, and are intended to provide sound coverage of particular areas of the field while at the same time incorporating up-to-date and original thinking and findings. Language and society as a field of study is no longer in its infancy, but it is becoming increasingly obvious that there is a very great deal that we do not know. This is both chastening and challenging. It is also exciting. This series will, we hope, face up to the challenge and reflect the excitement.

One consequence of the close relationship which obtains between language and society is the extent to which linguists and social psychologists can derive mutual benefit from studies of each other's work. Linguistic forms of every level, and linguistic behaviour of many types, can act as markers of personal and social characteristics, and may provoke different reactions and responses in social interaction. Social psychologists concerned with language may therefore turn to linguists for assistance in the analysis of linguistic forms. Correspondingly, linguistic attitudes and stereotypes can be a powerful force in influencing linguistic behaviour and, ultimately,

linguistic forms themselves. Linguists must therefore look to social psychologists for explanatory analyses and concepts in their examination of the social psychological factors at work in, for example, linguistic change. In fact, however, the amount of mutual benefit that has been derived remains as yet relatively small. Social psychologists have only infrequently resorted to linguistic analyses. And, while psychology has had a considerable influence on the study of foreign language learning and teaching, social psychology has had comparatively little influence on sociolinguistics. It is to this latter omission that this book is primarily directed. Written in the main by social psychologists, it is also directed at linguists and sociologists. It shows that multidisciplinary work of this nature is not only valuable but at this stage in the development of sociolinguistics and the social psychology of language, essential.

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*Sociolinguistics and Social Psychology: an Introductory Essay*¹

HOWARD GILES

When we examine the field of language in its social context, sociolinguistics, we find it far from unified in its goals and approaches; many commentators agree upon this (Ferguson, 1970; Hymes, 1972). Nevertheless, a reasonable definition of its scope is provided by Fishman (1970:3). He states that

it is the study of the characteristics of language varieties, the characteristics of their functions, and the characteristics of their speakers as these three constantly interact, change, and change one another within a speech community.

A number of writers consider the area to be a sub-branch of linguistics (e.g., Trudgill, 1974) and not as a truly multidisciplinary endeavour. However, we do find that disciplines such as sociology, social anthropology, and education have made their marks on the field of sociolinguistics and often are labelled as having independent status as the 'sociology of language' and 'anthropological linguistics'.

One discipline conspicuous perhaps by its absence from the above is that of social psychology. However, if textbooks and readings in sociolinguistics are examined (Fishman, 1968; Gumperz and Hymes, 1972), we find that social psychological theory has rarely permeated it. There are workers such as Roger Brown and Wallace Lambert who have made important contributions, but overall social psychology has had little impact to date in this sphere. Thus, one of the prime aims of this book generally, and the present chapter more specifically, is to show that social psychological theory and methodology have important implications for the development of sociolinguistics.

If we return to Fishman's definition of sociolinguistics, we see that the discipline is imbued heavily with notions of description and

taxonomy. Such activities are of course a high priority, particularly in an embryonic field, and it would be foolish to decry them, as they are an essential foundation for any reasonable theory of language behaviour. Nevertheless, one begins to feel a little uneasy when few attempts have been made to move us from the what, when and where to the why of socio-linguistic phenomena. Hence, if we are going to understand why individuals acquire, use and react to language and its varieties in the way they do, we require a greater understanding of the dynamics of attitudes, motivations, identities and intentions, that is, social psychological phenomena. It would seem, despite the fact that sociolinguists (Labov, 1963; 1966; 1970) have far from ignored these notions, that social psychological theory (and methods) may be able to guide us towards a greater appreciation of at least two, perhaps fundamental, issues: why are speech variables important in evaluating others, and why do people speak the way they do in different social contexts? This book, then, is divided, as our questions are, into two overlapping sections.² The first deals with decoding processes of language behaviour, while the second considers encoding issues in a manner that highlights not only what happens, but why. In short, then, social psychology may be able to increase the explanatory power of sociolinguistics.

Before overviewing the contributions to this volume, let us briefly examine the field of social psychology itself. Social psychology is the study of an individual's behaviour in his or her social context. Nevertheless, if one looks at definitions of the field in introductory textbooks and elsewhere, we see that workers have often been somewhat loathe to commit themselves to a consensual framework. Moreover, some writers have construed social psychology as a conglomeration of separate topics (e.g. attitude change, attraction, conformity and prejudice) exceeding the grasp of experimental psychology and having a reliance on the social sciences (Brown, 1965; Insko and Schopler, 1972). In this sense, social psychology has been as lacking in a unified sense of goals and approaches as has sociolinguistics and is constantly undergoing harsh reappraisals (Strickland, Aboud and Gergen, 1976).³

For the present purposes, we, as so many other writers have, will consider the field of social psychology mainly in terms of the social influence process (e.g. Hollander, 1972; Aronson, 1972). For instance, Allport (1968:3) states that social psychology is 'an attempt to understand how the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of

individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others'. More recently, however, some social psychologists are explicitly extending this approach to a consideration of how society and its structure, that is, as reflected along such dimensions as power and control, affect the individual's social behaviour (Tajfel and Israel, 1972). Another feature of social psychology which workers have agreed on is its characteristic methodology. Traditionally, the most appropriate method for collecting socio-psychological data has been to record and revise scientifically the subjective and objective behaviour of individuals in a controlled manner. Again, however, methodology within social psychology has not been without its critics (Harré and Secord, 1972; Agyris, 1975).

As we shall see throughout this volume, social psychologists have many theories about how individuals search for understanding of the behaviour of others and the situation they are in, and about how this mediates to guide their subsequent behaviour in an interactive sense. One of the important ways in which we can influence others, and be influenced by them, is through language behaviour. In other words, much of individual social behaviour is concerned with the decoding and encoding of verbal and nonverbal language variables. It may be then of some surprise (if not concern) to learn that language processes have not been at the core or even periphery of social psychological interests; admittedly, however, such processes have assumed more salience in European and Canadian quarters. Yet if one examines introductory texts and readings in social psychology, few chapters (if any) are afforded language processes. Naturally enough, exceptions can be found (Brown, 1965; Wrightsman, 1972; Tajfel and Fraser, 1978), and important reviews and books have occasionally emerged on social psychological aspects of language (Ervin-Tripp, 1969; Moscovici, 1967; 1972; Carswell and Rommetweit, 1972; Robinson, 1972; Argyle, 1975), but as such, these processes have not played a prominent role in social psychological theory and certainly no current field of 'sociopsycholinguistics' has convincingly emerged.⁴ Hence, it is a secondary aim of this book to make explicit the importance of understanding language processes for any worthwhile theory of social behaviour. It is not inconceivable, then, that social psychology and sociolinguistics could profit from a symbiotic relationship.

Let us now overview the main features of the chapters in two sections of the book, underlining the links between them and the

story they tell. Needless to say, much of the inherent richness and theoretical scope of each contribution will be lost in this review in order to meet the demands of a concise integrative approach. We shall subsequently highlight the value of this work for sociolinguistics on the one hand, and for social psychology on the other. Finally, we shall conclude this chapter with a consideration of the apparent deficiencies of these research approaches, the need for a fuller multidisciplinary orientation and some potential goals and priorities for the future.

The first section of the book is concerned with the judgemental aspects of the listeners' decoding processes of language. Work in the past has shown that speech style can influence impression formation (Giles and Powesland, 1975). In this context, 'speech style' refers to linguistic features which determine *how* a message is said rather than *what* is said in terms of verbal content. Most of the results, however, were obtained in the artificial context of the laboratory and involved ratings of anonymous speakers. An important feature of this section of the book is that chapters were included which investigated the social significance of language behaviour in a couple of *applied* contexts, namely, the classroom and the courtroom. It will also be seen that a wide range of language variables such as accent, speech rate, pitch variety, voice loudness, interruptions, etc., can have important influences not only on people's general impressions of others, but also with regard to potential decisions they may make about them.

The opening chapter by Edwards concerns the role of childrens' speech, in this case, reading style, as a cue to their teachers' impressions of them and as a potential determinant of their scholastic success. He shows that Dublin children from so-called disadvantaged areas have speech characteristics perceived as different from those coming from non-disadvantaged environments. Moreover, the perception of the former's speech characteristics (poor vocabulary, fluency and pronunciation) led teachers to make negative inferences about their social backgrounds and unfavourable evaluations of their personalities. The data showed that the attribution of disadvantage from speech cues has the effect of inducing teachers towards a *holistic* stereotyped downgrading of the children concerned.

Most of the chapters remaining in this section involve listeners' ratings of taped speech. Edwards's chapter is an important opener to this work as his careful methodology provides evidence that suggests

that people find the judgemental task a realistic one, and even admit in an interview afterwards to forming such impressions of speakers on the basis of their language behaviour in everyday life.

The next chapter, by Giles and Smith, continues the educational perspective, but from the other side of the coin: students' evaluations of a teacher's speech styles. This study empirically highlights features of the judgemental process other than direct attribution of a speaker's background and personality. First, the experimental design acknowledges that listeners make judgements about the appropriateness of message characteristics provided them in that particular context. Second, the study demonstrates that listeners can assess how the speaker views *them* from these message characteristics. From the viewpoint of a new theory of speech diversity, these authors were concerned with determining listeners' reactions to the various ways a lecturer from abroad could make an effort to take account of (or accommodate to) the particular features of his audience. It was found that the speaker (a Canadian) was rated more favourably, up to a certain optimal level, the more linguistic features he adapted to his English audience. In general, student teachers appreciated the speaker slowing down his speech rate more so than his attempts to attenuate his distinctive foreign accent and make his peculiar Canadian phrases more intelligible. In fact, convergent accent shifts had little effect on listeners' evaluations of the speaker in this context.

Although the speech variables manipulated in the first two chapters have been shown to have an influential effect on listeners' impressions, without wishing in any way to diminish their obvious importance, we have no means of telling how salient or frequently they occur in the social contexts studied. However, in Chapter 4, Lind and O'Barr are concerned with legal encounters and used speech variables in their stimulus tapes only after discovering their prominence in a prior linguistic analysis of real courtroom interactions. The authors found that law students reacted less favourably to a witness who spoke to a supposed lawyer on tape with linguistic intensifiers, hyper-correct grammar, hedges and rising intonation (a so-called 'powerless speech style') than those who did not incorporate such linguistic features into the very same testimony. Other studies showed that witnesses' patterns of answering the lawyer's questions (narrative versus fragmentary), and their initiation of, and reaction to, simultaneous speech with him (persevering versus

acquiescent), affected in a complex fashion listeners' reactions to the witnesses and their statements. An important feature of Lind and O'Barr's research was that they showed listener's *expectations* of how the interaction should proceed for different types of witnesses with the lawyer had an effect on attribution about the witnesses' behaviour. Moreover, it was suggested that when listening to a dyad and being asked to make evaluations of one of the participants as a target person, we assess their interlocutor's speech style in an attempt to determine how he or she may be reacting to them. Such inferences can then, of course, be used by listeners in formulating their own beliefs and opinions about the target speaker.

Chapter 5 by Scherer proceeds one step further in tapping the social significance of speech variables by investigating their impact in ongoing semi-natural situations. The author videotaped different six-man groups in the United States and Germany who were asked to role-play a jury making a decision about a legal case of manslaughter with which they had just been presented. After the discussion they were asked to make certain assessments of themselves and of the other group members, including their perceived influentiaity during discussion. Analysis showed that people agreed more or less amongst themselves about who was the most influential person in their groups, and as such, these people were perceived as being more competent and dominant. Speech analyses of the group interaction showed that the influential speakers were quite different from other members of the groups and also varied cross-culturally. In Germany, the speaker perceived to be most influential was found to speak at great length and to use many more filled pauses and agreement expressions, together with a higher rate of articulation and a wider loudness range. In the United States, the influential speaker was also shown to be verbally productive but used many more repetitions, interruptions and a wider pitch of variation. It was also found that the perceived influencer had a different self-reported personality than other members of his group, and that this also varied cross-culturally.

Given that evidence is presented which suggests that certain social processes are marked by speech differently in diverse cultures, the possibilities of communicational breakdowns emerging at different phases of an interaction when decoding a speaker from another cultural background are quite large. In a recent paper, von Raffler-Engel (1977) has highlighted the role of *kinetic* behaviour in such