

Introducing Sociolinguistics

Miriam Meyerhoff

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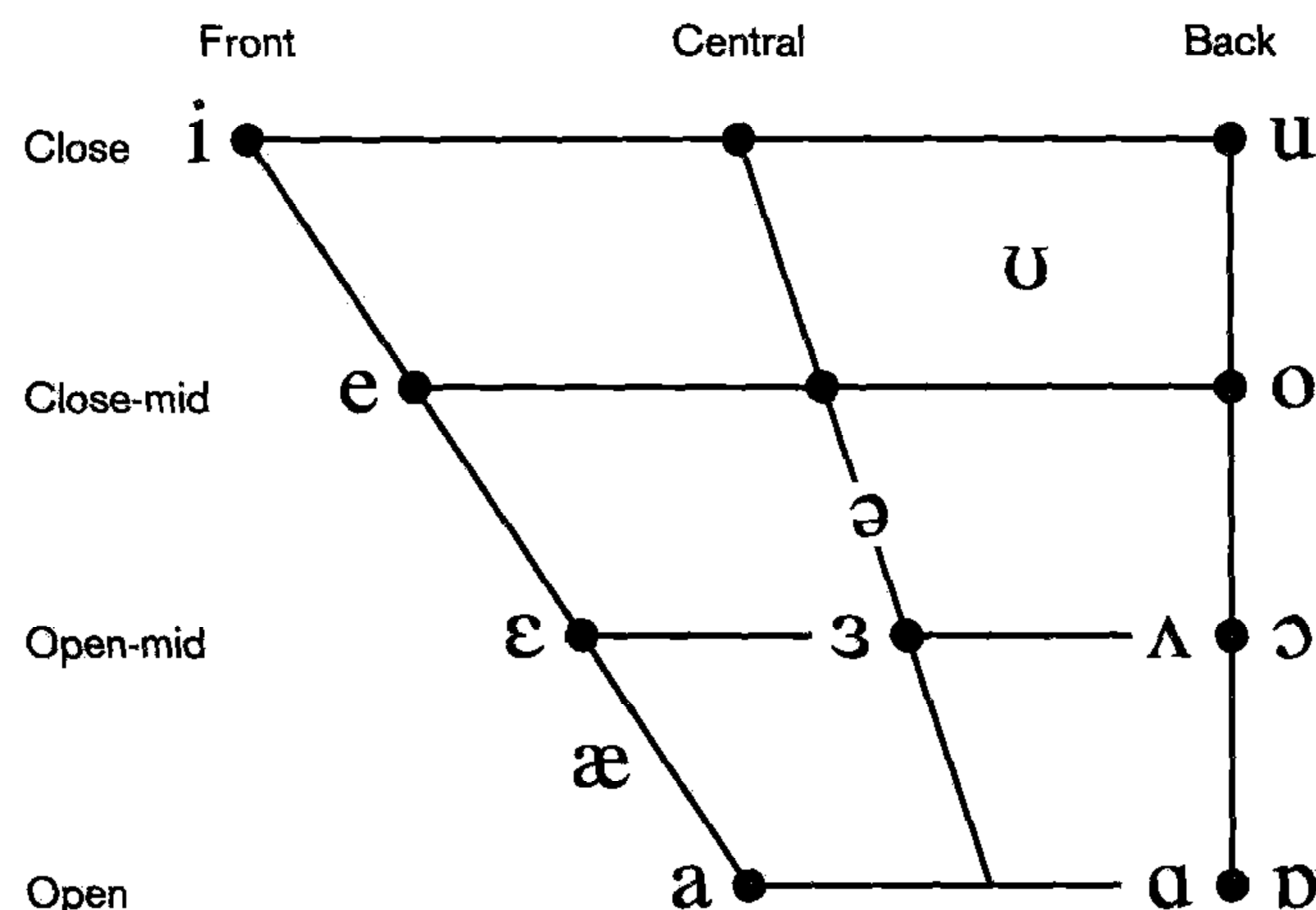
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Sounds and symbols used in the text

The symbols that are used to represent speech sounds in this text are generally the symbols used in the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet). The main vowel symbols used in this text are shown in the vowel chart over. The main consonant symbols are as follows:

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Example</i>
p	pen
b	bit
t	tell
d	die
k	<u>c</u> ake
g	goat
ʔ	[glottal stops, replaces final stops in many varieties of English, e.g. <i>hat</i> as [hæʔ]
tʃ	<u>ch</u> urch
dʒ	j <u>u</u> dge
f	fan
v	view
θ	<u>th</u> irteenth
ð	<u>th</u> en
s	sick
z	zoo
ʃ	<u>sh</u> ip
ʒ	mea <u>s</u> ure
h	hat
m	moon
n	nine
ŋ	si <u>ng</u>
l	love
r	run
j	y <u>e</u> llow
w	wine

VOWELS



Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a rounded vowel

Sometimes the text uses the keywords from Wells's (1982) lexical sets to identify sounds in English. Wells's lexical sets are quite useful for identifying sounds across varieties of English. They were chosen so as to be able to refer concisely to groups of words that generally share the same vowel in varieties of southern British English and what is known as General American. The phonetic realisation of the vowel may be rather different in Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GenAm), but the set of words identified by the keyword generally will be the same. A list of Wells's keywords and the phonetic realisation of the vowel in those words in RP and GenAm follows:

RP	GenAm	Keyword	Examples
ɪ	ɪ	1 KIT	ship, sick, bridge, milk, myth, <u>busy</u>
e	ɛ	2 DRESS	step, neck, edge, shelf, friend, ready
æ	æ	3 TRAP	tap, back, badge, scalp, hand, <u>cancel</u>
ɒ	ɑ	4 LOT	stop, sock, dodge, romp, <u>possible</u> , <u>quality</u>
ʌ	ʌ	5 STRUT	cup, suck, budge, pulse, trunk, blood
ʊ	ʊ	6 FOOT	put, bush, full, good, look, wolf
ɑ:	æ	7 BATH	staff, brass, ask, dance, <u>sample</u> , calf
ɒ	ɔ	8 CLOTH	cough, broth, cross, long, <u>Boston</u>
ɜ:	ɜr	9 NURSE	hurt, lurk, urge, burst, jerk, term
i:	i	10 FLEECE	creep, speak, leave, feel, key, <u>people</u>
eɪ	eɪ	11 FACE	tape, cake, raid, veil, steak, day
ɑ:	ɑ	12 PALM	psalm, <u>father</u> , bra, spa, <u>lager</u>
ɔ:	ɔ	13 THOUGHT	taught, sauce, hawk, jaw, broad
əʊ	o	14 GOAT	soap, joke, home, know, so, roll
u:	u	15 GOOSE	loop, shoot, tomb, mute, huge, view
aɪ	aɪ	16 PRICE	ripe, write, <u>arrive</u> , high, try, buy
ɔɪ	ɔɪ	17 CHOICE	noise, join, toy, <u>royal</u>
aʊ	aʊ	18 MOUTH	out, house, loud, count, crowd, cow

ɪə	ɪ(r	19 NEAR	beer, <u>sincere</u> , fear, beard, <u>serum</u>
ɛə	ɛ(r	20 SQUARE	care, fair, pear, where, scarce, <u>vary</u>
ɑː	ɑ(r	21 START	far, sharp, bark, carve, farm, heart
ɔː	ɔ(r	22 NORTH	for, war, short, scorch, born, warm
ɔː	o(r	23 FORCE	four, wore, sport, porch, borne, <u>story</u>
ʊə	ʊ(r	24 CURE	poor, <u>tourist</u> , pure, <u>plural</u> , <u>jury</u>

In some varieties of English Wells's keywords are not unique sets (e.g. many speakers of English do not distinguish FOOT and STRUT), or there may be splits within a set (e.g. the BATH set may subdivide, and speakers may have different vowels for *dance* and *grass*). So the keyword system is in no way a substitute for the detail of the IPA. Nevertheless, it is a very useful system, especially for readers who may not be 100 per cent fluent in the IPA.

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The map in Figure 4.3 is courtesy of Land Information New Zealand/Toitu te Whenua, free download available from <www.linz.govt.nz/rcs/linz/pub/web/root/core/Topography/TopographicMaps/mapdownloads/juliuspetroterrainmap/index.jsp>, sampled 29 May 2003. The Vanuatu and South African Constitutions (Chapter 4) can be viewed online at <<http://www.vanuatu.gov.vu/government/library/constitution.html>> (sampled August 2004, June 2005) and the Constitutional Court of South Africa <<http://www.concourt.gov.za/constitution/>> (sampled May 2005).

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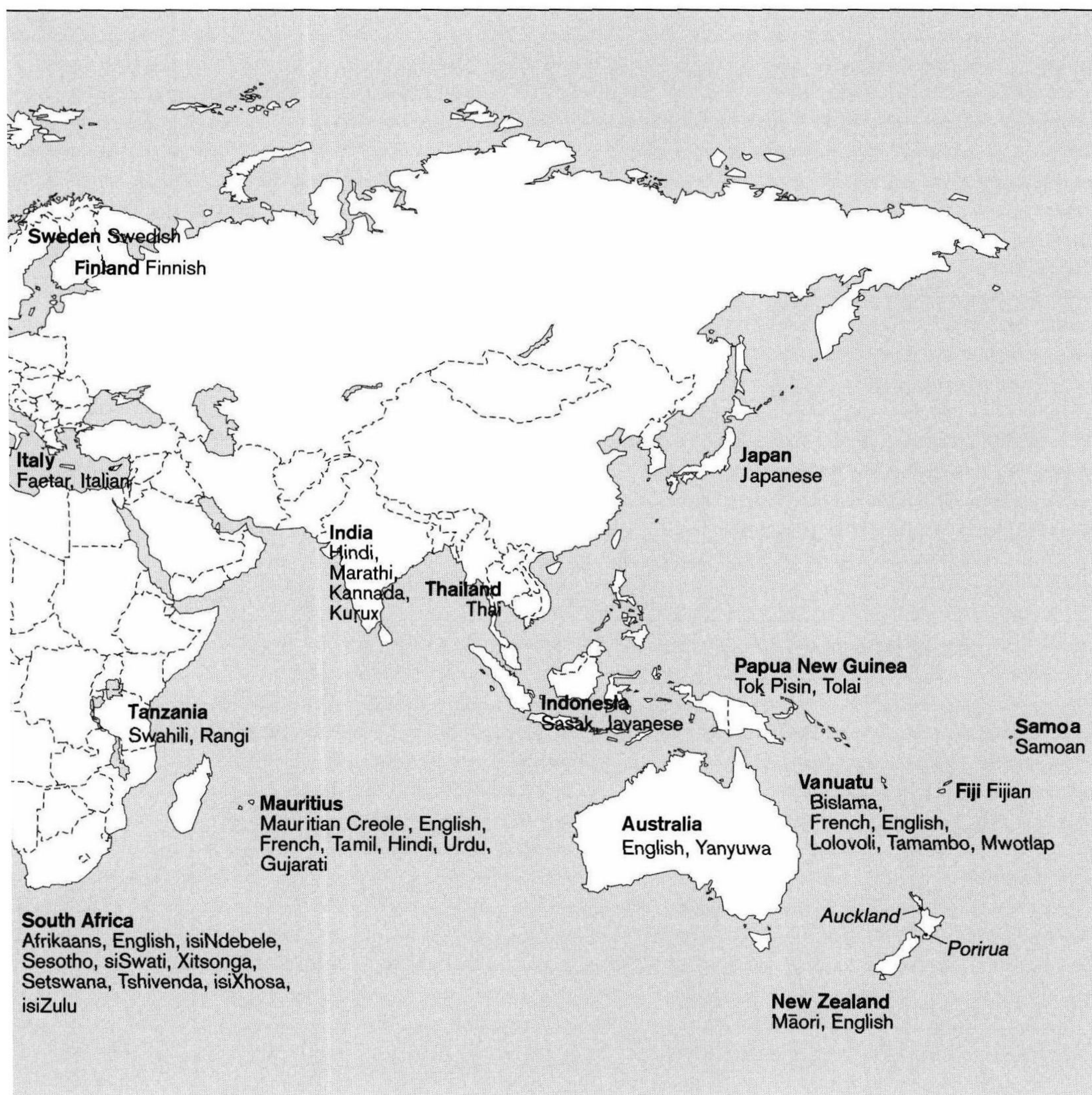
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Maps





This textbook draws its examples from many languages and many different countries or locales. Some of them you will be familiar with; some of them you may not. This map shows where the languages mentioned in the text are spoken. Note that there are more languages spoken and used on a daily basis, in every country identified here. Also note that some of the language labels (such as *Fijian*) lump together a number of different varieties.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

WHAT IS SOCIOLINGUISTICS?

If I had a penny for every time I have tried to answer the question, 'So what *is* sociolinguistics?', I would be writing this book in the comfort of an early retirement. And if there was a way of defining it in one simple, yet comprehensive, sentence, there might not be a need for weighty introductory textbooks.

Sociolinguistics is a very broad field, and it can be used to describe many different ways of studying language. A lot of linguists might describe themselves as sociolinguists, but the people who call themselves sociolinguists may have rather different interests from each other and they may use very different methods for collecting and analysing data. This can be confusing if you are coming new to the field. Is sociolinguistics about how individual speakers use language? Is it about how people use language differently in different towns or regions? Is it about how a nation decides what languages will be recognised in courts or education?

The answer is: yes, yes, and yes. Sociolinguists conduct research on any of those topics. For example, if a speaker describes a funny or amusing situation as 'kicksin', I know they are from, or have spent a good deal of time in, the English-speaking Caribbean. I am drawing on sociolinguistic (social and linguistic) knowledge to draw this inference.

Or take the case of Jennifer, who grew up in a small traditionally fishing village in the north-east of Scotland, but spent many years teaching English in Greece. Jennifer can draw on a number of different styles or ways of speaking, depending on who she is talking to. If her interlocutor is a member of her family, she still uses a variety of Scots which is virtually incomprehensible to other native speakers of English. She says 'fit' instead of 'what'; 'na' instead of 'don't'; 'doon' instead of 'down'; 'be'er' instead of 'better', and so forth. But in Greece she quickly learnt that she needed to adopt a less regionally marked way of speaking if her students were going to understand her, and when she later began attending professional conferences with an international audience, she had the same experience. Everyone can modify the way they speak depending on who they are with or what the situation is. When they do this, they are drawing on their sociolinguistic knowledge. And every time they change the way they speak, depending on their interlocutor or situation, they provide more sociolinguistic information that builds up the sociolinguistic knowledge in the community.

HOW DO SOCIOLINGUISTS STUDY SOCIOLINGUISTICS?

Sociolinguists use a range of methods to analyse patterns of language in use and attitudes towards language in use. Some sociolinguistic patterns can only be observed systematically