

# WHAT ARE SOCIOLINGUISTICS?

Sociolinguists are professional eavesdroppers – not on what people say, but on how they are saying it:

I am on a train heading out of London and I can overhear a young family of four sitting a few rows ahead. When I heard them boarding the train, I thought they were speaking French, but now I am sure I hear German, and then English.

It turns out the father is speaking mostly English to his partner and their two young boys. He is obviously a native English speaker, but occasionally he switches into – fluent – French, and he uses some German to the older boy. The mother is speaking mainly French to her partner and especially to the younger boy. But she is also using a good deal of German, and a little English, although with a non-native accent. The older boy talks to his father largely in English but with a lot of German, and rather less French. His English accent has audible traces from both his father and mother.

Then, to keep the children amused, the parents begin a song, the round *Frère Jacques*. But the next verse is *Bruder Jakob*, and finally *Brother John*. The trilingual switching is remarkable to me, the overhearer, partly because it seems utterly ordinary to the participants themselves.

This book is about the profusion of voices in society. It is about language as social fact and as identity bearer; language as interaction, as communication, as a bridge between self and other; language as expresser; language as delight. We are immersed in languages, dialects, varieties, genres, accents, jargons, styles, codes, speech acts. They eddy and swirl round us in an always-changing current of linguistic reproduction and creation. Each voice has its time and its place, its desire to be heard, its timbre. This is the linguistic profusion of Babel, that ancient story that I believe champions rather than condemns language diversity (see Chapter 12 for a re-reading).

Language is also implicated in the shape of society. As well as a truth-teller, language can be a deceiver. Social inequities produce linguistic inequities, and language reproduces inequity in many areas of society: structures, demographics, power, gender, ethnicity, interaction, globalization. Not all voices are equally or easily heard. The founding theorist of sociolinguistics, Dell Hymes (1974: 195), distinguished three ways in which sociolinguistics may view the relationship between the social and the linguistic:

- 1 **the social as well as the linguistic:** addressing social issues which have a language component
- 2 **socially realistic linguistics:** basing linguistic investigation on real-society data
- 3 **socially constituted linguistics:** affirming that language is inherently social and society is inherently linguistic.

In opting for a socially constituted linguistics Hymes emphasized a concern for equity and how that is evidenced and substantiated in the voices of society – who speaks, who is listened to, who is valued, who is disregarded. ‘One way to think of the society in which one would like to live is to think of the kinds of voices it would have’, he wrote (1996: 64). In such a Sociolinguistics of Voice, linguistic equity is something that is not a given but needs to be achieved in society. It invites engagement. These are the two core ideas which run through this book: the profusion that is language, and the drive to a sociolinguistics of equity. I will return particularly to the second of these issues in the book’s concluding chapter.

## 1.1 WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

Sociolinguists probably don’t spend enough time pondering this most basic question. Sociolinguistics began in a time and place when most linguists treated language as if it occurred in a vacuum. In American linguistics of the 1960s the transformational-generative theory of Noam Chomsky was in the ascendant. This reduced language competence to an abstract ability to judge whether sentences were grammatical, and sidelined all other aspects of language behaviour as mere ‘performance’. The focus on ‘an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community’ (Chomsky 1965: 3) was at odds with any kind of interest in examining how language was actually used when people talked.

In this intellectual climate that was inhospitable to bringing the social into linguistics, Hymes became the leading early advocate of sociolinguistics. He took over Chomsky’s narrow notion of linguistic competence and broadened it to encompass much of what Chomsky had treated as performance, coining the term **communicative competence**. Hymes’s focus on ‘the competence that enables members of a community to conduct and interpret speech’ (1972: 52) shifts the interest away from the purely grammatical and on to native speakers’ ability to use language in a range of social situations. Any learner of a second language knows that even if you can speak totally grammatically, unless you also know the right ways to use those grammatical sentences, you will sound nothing like a native speaker. Worse, you may offend or insult those who are native speakers. You have to know when and how to use the language as well as what language to produce.

Communicative competence involves not just linguistic knowledge, but cultural knowledge and interactional skills. How speakers and hearers function linguistically with each other in social context is a central concern of sociolinguistics.

I offer four characteristics of what language is to a sociolinguist. They follow one from the other:

### *1 Language is social*

The stuff – the matter – of language is to be found not in mental judgements on sentences but in the **utterance** – the minimal unit in which speakers say things. And beyond that, in the **discourses** and **conversations** in which utterances gather. Language is situated, it has a context. There are speakers and hearers, a time and a place, a topic and a purpose.

Some of the best statements about this sociolinguistic view of language come from non-sociolinguists, although the terms they use may be different such as ‘speech’, ‘discourse’, ‘message’ or even ‘the word’. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur argued against the view that language was a disembodied, de-social matter. The social life of speech and discourse does not bracket out the profusion of language in order to get at the formality of the code:

Whereas structural linguistics simply places speech and use in parentheses, the theory of discourse removes the parentheses. (Ricoeur 1981: 133)

### *2 Language is dialogue*

Language happens between people and is shaped by them. It involves listeners as well as speakers, with all the consequent messiness of verbal interaction, where turn follows turn with interruptions, overlaps, utterances completed by someone else. Such real-world complexity is both the delight and the challenge of the sociolinguist. We are interested in hearers, in the audience. We should no more conceive of language without hearers than of a language that has no speakers. Language is co-created, in the words of another non-sociolinguist:

*Word is a two-sided act.* It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee.* Each and every word expresses the ‘one’ in relation to the ‘other’ ... A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor. (Voloshinov 1973: 86)

### *3 Language is profusion*

The fruit of dialogue is **heteroglossia** – linguistic variety. Language cannot be tamed to an idealized standard. It is always and everywhere variegated, according to a collaborator of Voloshinov:

At any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. (Bakhtin 1981: 291)

### Exercise 1.1 Language myths

The book *Language Myths*, edited by Laurie Bauer and Peter Trudgill (1998), deals with 21 frequently expressed folk ideologies about language. Here are some of the chapter titles:

French is a logical language  
 Some languages have no grammar  
 Italian is beautiful, German is ugly  
 They speak really bad English down south and in New York City  
 Aborigines speak a primitive language  
 Black children are verbally deprived

- 1 These are language ideologies. Examine one or more of them. What sort of linguistic arguments can be advanced as evidence for it? How much do these justify the myth?
- 2 Are there linguistic counter-arguments to the myth? Specify them.
- 3 What are the social foundations of the myth? For example, what are the perceived characteristics of the people with whom a named language or variety is associated? How have these perceptions come about?
- 4 Where did the myth come from? Is there any truth in it?

#### 4 *Language is ideology*

Language is not only – perhaps not even primarily – about communication of content. Rather it is about social meaning. That is, all language use ‘indexes’ social meanings, evokes places, periods, groups, classes, genders. It carries ideology, it serves power. Language ‘tastes’ of its former uses. Our hearers place us against the backdrop of all their prior experience of language. We cannot talk without giving ourselves away socially, ethnically, geographically. The indexing of social meaning is deeply embedded in language and its use. As George Bernard Shaw wrote in the preface to *Pygmalion*, words later paraphrased into one of the songs of *My Fair Lady*:

An Englishman’s way of speaking absolutely classifies him,  
 The moment he talks he makes some other Englishman despise him.

Exercise 1.1 debates some other language myths.

## 1.2 WHAT IS A LANGUAGE?

When I begin teaching a class in sociolinguistics, during the first session I will ask the members of the class what languages they speak. A typical list – for a New Zealand university graduate-level class – will include English, Mandarin, Cantonese and Japanese. Often also German, French, Bahasa Malaysia, Afrikaans or Korean. Sometimes there is Khmer, Samoan, Māori, Italian, Spanish or Russian. Most students in the class will be

speakers of two languages, several speak three or four. Occasionally someone claims to speak five or more languages – and usually there are one or two monolingual English speakers, from various dialect backgrounds. One student claims a language that is not spoken. New Zealand Sign Language is the native language of several thousand deaf New Zealanders. It was legislated as an official language in 2006. Sign languages have been recognized as full languages in a number of countries, but still struggle for recognition in many parts of the world.

This multilingualism offers a rich ground to examine and illustrate the social workings of language. A class with a dozen languages is a gift, because many of the topics and issues in the course are manifested in the experiences of the class itself.

### Naming languages

But these acts of language naming are more problematic than they look. China regards Mandarin and Cantonese as dialects of the same national language, although many linguistic criteria – including mutual intelligibility – would differentiate them as distinct languages rather than ‘Chinese’. The cluster of Romance languages (French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and so on) is arguably less linguistically diverse than ‘Chinese’. The character system in which the language is written does not represent pronunciation so it enables the fiction of a single Chinese language.

We have the puzzle, then, that there are in the world languages that have different names but are linguistically very similar – Hindi/Urdu, Swedish/Danish/Norwegian, Serbian/Croatian. And there are other sets of codes that are linguistically very diverse but bear a single name such as Arabic or English. In addition, such definitions may run in one direction but not the other: Bulgarians may see Macedonian as a dialect of Bulgarian, but Macedonians do not regard Bulgarian as a dialect of Macedonian. Languages can also be qualified by various adjectives. What does it mean to call Tamil a ‘minor’ language when it has 70 million speakers? And Piedmontese a ‘failed’ language because it has never been adequately standardized (Tosco 2008)?

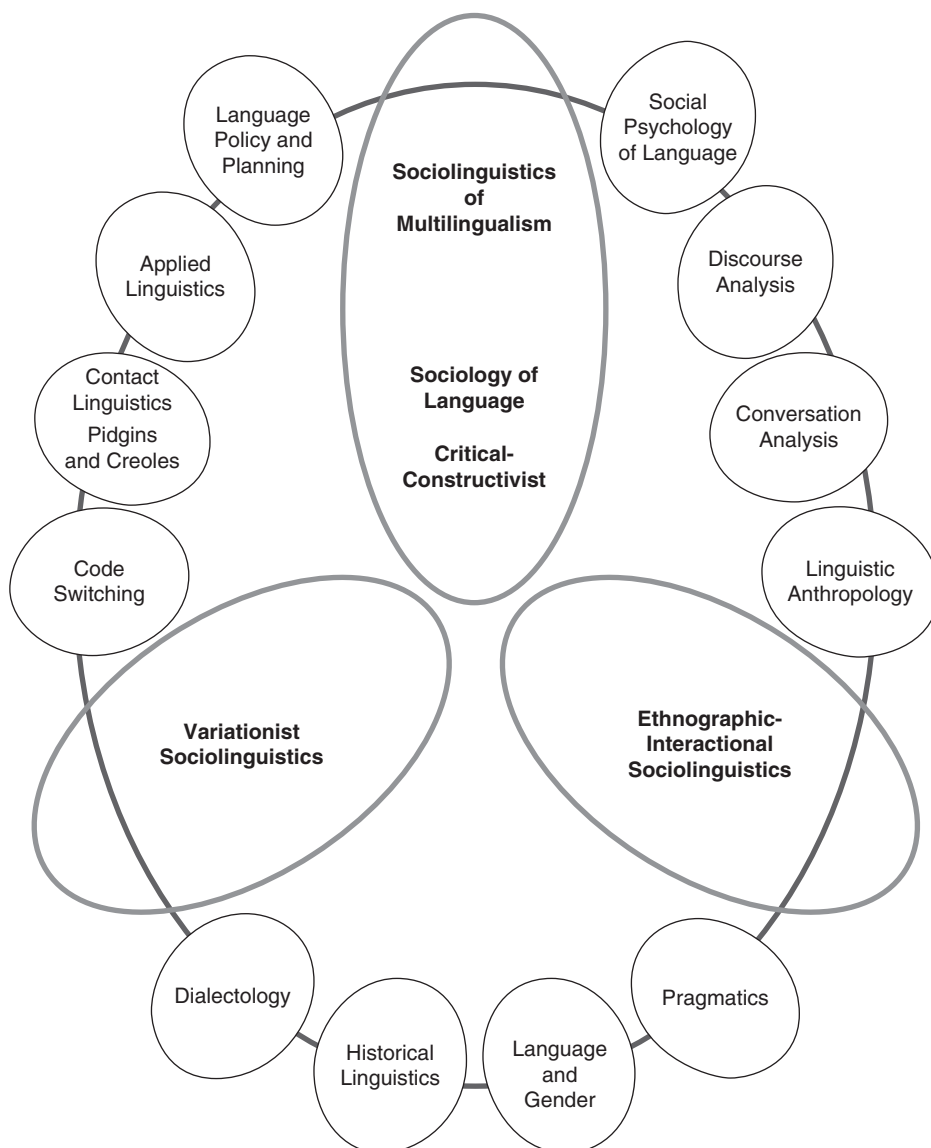
Naming a language, then, is a very social, very political matter. This is not surprising. The linguistic anthropologist Susan Gal writes (2006: 14):

It may seem odd to say so, but ‘language’ was invented in Europe. Speaking is a universal feature of our species, but ‘language’ ... is not equivalent to the capacity to speak ... Languages in this limited sense are assumed to be nameable (English, Hungarian, Greek), countable property (one can ‘have’ several), bounded and differing from each other.

The notion of a language, and its identification with a nation, is an eighteenth-century European construct – but one that was imposed on the rest of the world through European colonization, which enthusiastically distinguished, defined and named ‘languages’ wherever it went. To avoid such judgements, sociolinguists may choose to use the more neutral term **code**. And they may prefer **variety** over **dialect** to avoid the latter’s baggage of implied inadequacy and marginalization.

### 1.3 WHAT THEN ARE SOCIOLINGUISTICS?

The easiest way to begin grasping a field is to visualize it. Figure 1.1 tries to map the components, traditions, strands that have gone to make up sociolinguistics, and Table 1.1 schematizes some detail on the main elements. The large oval in Figure 1.1 represents the notion of what sociolinguistics encompasses. The three mid-sized ovals show the main approaches as they have developed from the mid-twentieth century. Most of the



**Figure 1.1** The shape of sociolinguistics

**Table 1.1** Strands of sociolinguistics

	Sociolinguistics of Multilingualism		Ethnographic-Interactional Sociolinguistics	Variationist Sociolinguistics
	Sociology of Language	Critical-Constructivist		
<i>Focus</i>	How languages operate in a society	How language operates as social practice	How individuals and small groups use language	How linguistic features vary with social factors
<i>Orientation</i>	Towards society	Language, society, politics	Both society and language	Towards language
<i>Discipline</i>	Sociology	Anthropology, education, linguistics	Sociology, linguistics, anthropology	Linguistics
<i>Premises</i>	Empiricist	Constructivist	Interpretive	Empiricist
<i>Scale</i>	Macro	Macro and micro	Micro	Micro
<i>Founders/leaders</i>	Joshua Fishman	Monica Heller, Peter Auer	Dell Hymes, John Gumperz	William Labov
<i>Typical research question</i>	What language is used?	What linguistic resources are drawn on?	What language is used in particular situations?	What variety of a language is used?
<i>Typical method</i>	Survey	Discourse analysis	Participant observation	Recorded interviews
<i>Typical findings</i>	Language shift: from one language to another by different age groups	Language mix: multiple codes in globalized situations	Language use: different language codes used to different interlocutors	Language change: different linguistic features used by different age groups
<i>Example study</i>	Paraguay Joan Rubin	Corsica Alexandra Jaffe	British/Indian Englishes John Gumperz	New York City William Labov

areas of these three main ovals lie within the sociolinguistic circumference, but part is shown as beyond. The small ovals represent other areas which have varying levels of commonality with sociolinguistics but also have more or less purchase in other fields. The diagram comes with due warning: this kind of display has to be a severe idealization. It draws hard lines to show boundaries that are ragged, fuzzy and porous. It cannot show the subtleties of fields and sub-fields (that both columns 2 and 4 in Table 1.1, for example, may deal with multilingualism, though at different scales). But such idealizations will help me to map the terrain for this book.

We turn to what I categorize as the three main approaches in sociolinguistics: multilingualism, ethnographic–interactional and variationist. Table 1.1 lists some characteristics of each of these (which are of course subject to the same warning about reductionism as the diagram). The sociolinguistics of multilingualism divides into two. While historically the study of multilingualism was dominated by the sociology of language (column 2), that has shifted in the past couple of decades. Now more recent critical–constructivist takes (column 3) are increasingly important. Columns 2, 4 and 5 of Table 1.1 represent the three historical strands of sociolinguistics as it originated from the 1960s, while the second column shows what multilingualism research is becoming in the twenty-first century.

## Sociology of language

The sociology of language arose in the 1950/60s and its interests were those of the American structuralist sociology of that time. Its orientation is to the large scale – it is sometimes called ‘macro-sociolinguistics’. It concerns itself with whole languages and their distribution and usage within society and not, for example, with language features or structures or with more micro-social processes. Typically the focus is on the use of languages by particular groups. The usual research method is a survey asking who speaks what language – including that mega-survey of social information, the national census, which routinely includes a language question. The focus has often been on what languages a particular ethnic group speak, especially if their language preference is changing. Example 1.1 gives the flavour of a typical early study.

The sociology of language was founded by Joshua Fishman, its longtime chief advocate and theorist, and especially influential as an editor. He started the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* and embarked on an editing and publishing programme. His *Readings in the Sociology of Language* (1968) and *Advances in the Sociology of Language* (1971, 1972) remain indispensable sources of early sociolinguistic work which ranged widely across the field. Fishman wanted to corral as much of sociolinguistics as possible into the sociology of language, and these early publications were very broad. But as work developed the label came to denote the specifically sociological strand. This approach still retains a role, as research instruments such as the survey remain arguably the best way to get rapid baseline information about languages in society. Chapters 2 and 3 major on this strand. With Chapter 4 on contact languages, they make up the first section of this book.

**Example 1.1**

### Sociology of language Choosing languages in Paraguay

Paraguay has two national languages – Spanish, as in many other Latin American countries, but also the indigenous Guaraní. So which language do people use and when? In the 1960s the American sociologist of language, Joan Rubin, conducted a survey asking what language speakers would use with a whole range of different people – their spouse, servant, godmother, boss.

Guaraní proved to be the language of intimacy, while Spanish is for acquaintances. Guaraní is the language of the country, Spanish is more likely in town. So what language do you speak with a barefoot woman? – Guaraní, of course. ‘With your sweetheart making love’? – surprisingly, Spanish. With ‘an unknown man wearing a suit’ – Spanish. And with ‘a woman wearing a long skirt and smoking a big black cigar’? – 89 out of 91 people said Guaraní (Rubin 1968: 519). Spanish was also used always and everywhere with a schoolteacher. In the capital Asunción more Spanish was used, and more Guaraní in the country. Spanish was favoured for formal occasions, but Guaraní for non-serious discourse.

It would be interesting to know whether and how these patterns have shifted over the intervening 50 years.

### Critical-constructivist sociolinguistics

As sociolinguistics has been increasingly influenced by shifts in social theory, research into multilingualism has changed radically. Language has come to be seen as a social practice, with speakers drawing on all kinds of linguistic resources for their own purposes. Such research still focuses on macro issues of language in society – including the most macro of all, globalization. It may look at how minority languages are commodified and take on commercial value in the linguistic ‘marketplace’ of the nation. The work of scholars such as Jan Blommaert and Monica Heller has taken a leading role over two decades in reshaping the way in which we see languages as constructing society as well as being constructed in society (e.g. Heller 2011). Example 1.2 shows the sociopolitical nuances of one language situation.

To some extent the critical-constructivist stream has overtaken the sociology of language and increasingly predominates in the conduct and theorization of multilingual research. It offers both new questions, and new answers to old questions. The shift is well illustrated in the differences between the available handbooks of bi- and multilingualism. Where Bhatia and Ritchie’s 2004 volume reflects the original paradigm, the handbook edited by Martin-Jones, Blackledge and Creese (2012) intentionally represents more recent critical and constructivist work. While some of the critical-constructivist work surfaces in my Chapters 2 and 3, it is more influential in Chapters 5, 6, 8, 9 and especially 10.

## Example 1.2

### Critical-constructivist sociolinguistics Language politics on Corsica

Philippe owns *U Carminu* 'The Fireplace', a tiny shop in the town of Bastia on the Mediterranean island of Corsica. He specializes in traditional Corsican products.

But Corsica is part of France, and Corsican is a minority language in retreat as the community shifts to the dominant language, French. Philippe speaks fluent Corsican and identifies deeply with the language. He won a prize in a recent Corsican-language short story competition. He filled out the researcher's questionnaire about the language with enthusiastic detail.

Philippe has also been in prison for nationalistic activity. His public identification with Corsican excludes Frenchness. He spoke only Corsican till he was 4 or 5, and still speaks it both naturally and intentionally.

But his personal life does not match his ideology, linguistic anthropologist Alexandra Jaffe found in the course of a year's participant observation (1999: 13). His wife comes from Tunisia and can speak no Corsican. His children bear French names and are growing up not just in a French-dominated society but in a home where French in fact also predominates. Philippe keeps the languages separate in public but cannot do so in private. Although speaking Corsican is closely bound to his linguistic and nationalistic identity, this is in unresolved conflict with his home life.

### Ethnographic-interactional sociolinguistics

Ethnography is an approach to social research which concentrates on how individuals and small groups behave and interact (Table 1.1). It has a strongly anthropological character, combined with the skills of linguistic analysis. The founding figures were John Gumperz and Dell Hymes, whose names are closely linked through their editing of one of the foundational collections of sociolinguistic articles (1972). Hymes's research concerned Native American languages and cultures, and in the 1960s he was the lead advocate for and theorist of emergent sociolinguistics, especially the 'ethnography of speaking'. In 1972 he founded the original sociolinguistics journal, *Language in Society*, which he edited for 20 years, exercising an enormous influence on the shape of the field. Hymes (1974) is a key collection of his writings.

Gumperz's and Hymes's approaches were broadly consonant with each other, but with very different working scales and methods. The 'interactional sociolinguistics' that Gumperz founded emphasizes research on the minutiae of language code choice in specific interactions. His fieldwork covered several countries. Two 1982 books bring together his own approach and contributions by his students. Example 1.3 is drawn from Gumperz's research.

## Example 1.3

### Interactional-ethnographic sociolinguistics Interethnic miscommunication

Mr A is a fluent speaker of Indian English, a teacher of mathematics who has not been able to get a permanent job in England because he 'lacks communication skills'. He has been referred for an interview with Ms B at a centre which deals with interethnic communication problems in British industry.

The interview does not go well, running for a full hour on parallel tracks which never converge into understanding (Gumperz 1982a: 185). What has gone wrong? Early in the interview the teacher requests an introduction from the interviewer. She takes this to mean an exchange of names, and gives hers. The teacher responds: 'Would it be enough introduction?' (How odd!) As the interview progresses, he says 'I want to waive that condition.' (What condition and why?) Gumperz teases apart the tissue of pauses, intonations, false starts and interruptions to reach an interpretation of what the communicative trouble is.

The teacher's problem remains unclear even in Gumperz's exposition. Mr A tries to explain himself in the course of a half-hour narrative, which the interviewer punctuates with attempts to divert him to the point of the interview as **she** sees it – to identify what training he still needs. The exchanges are thick with misunderstandings of fact and misreadings of intent. The two speakers fail utterly to find common ground or to agree what is at issue. Although both parties' language is grammatical English, their different sociocultural conventions affect their speech production and interpretation at all levels, resulting in comprehensive and sustained miscommunication.

The turn to the critical-constructivist that has radically changed multilingualism research has come very naturally to ethnographic-interactional sociolinguistics, and there is a lot of commonality now between the approaches in columns 3 and 4 of Table 1.1. The second section of this book, Chapters 5–6, majors on ethnographic-interactional approaches.

### Variationist sociolinguistics

This is the dominant paradigm in the United States, whose academy tends to set the trend for the rest of the West, but it is also widely adopted elsewhere. Its focus is on linguistic issues and its founder, William Labov, originally opposed the concept and label of 'sociolinguistics' because he believed this approach should be seen as the best way just to do linguistics. Variationism has focused on researching how particular linguistic features vary with different social factors such as age or gender.

Variationism works at the micro level linguistically, although its social dimension has been derived from traditional sociology. Most of the analysis is of the phonology of the

## Example 1.4

## Variationist sociolinguistics: the deviant case of Nathan B.

Nathan B. was a middle-aged man of the Upper Middle Class recorded by Labov in his study of New York English. He held a PhD in political science and had published several books.

But he pronounced his /th/ and /dh/ sounds with stops not fricatives: *dese* for 'these', *dose* for 'those'. His pronunciations were consistent with those of the lower class, not his own (Labov 2006: 158).

He had captained a debating team at university, but another student delivered the speech he wrote. He had been advised to take remedial speech lessons so he could get an academic appointment, but refused: there was no job, and he worked freelance. Even when striving to produce fricatives when reading aloud, he could not do so.

Nathan B.'s pronunciation difficulty was paralleled in perception. To a question about the operation of *fate* in people's lives, he responded: 'I'm very proud of my Judaic heritage, and when you mentioned the word *fate*, to me this means Judaism.' A non-plussed Labov eventually caught on when Nathan B. spelled out: F-A-I-T-H. Labov counter-spelled: F-A-T-E, and the interview came back on track.

language, looking at where different speakers use different vowel or consonant pronunciations. The field has been dominated by Labov, whose interest has been more in language change than in sociolinguistic variation itself. His major work is contained in the three volumes of *Principles of Linguistic Change*, produced across 20 years. More recently, critical-constructivist approaches have become increasingly influential here also, as variation research deepens and diversifies.

The founding study was Labov's *Social Stratification of English in New York City* – see Example 1.4. Labov followed this with a project on the language of adolescent gangs, and the fruits of both studies were collected in two 1972 books, *Sociolinguistic Patterns* and *Language in the Inner City*. With colleagues, Labov founded the journal *Language Variation and Change*. Variationism has its own North American conference (NWA), which has met annually for over 40 years. Chapters 7–9 of this book deal with language variation and change.

## 1.4 NEIGHBOURING AND OVERLAPPING FIELDS

So much for the major strands of the field of sociolinguistics. The dozen areas graphed in the small ovals in Figure 1.1 are a diverse set which more or less overlap with sociolinguistics. Some of each neighbouring field's interests are sociolinguistic, other interests fall elsewhere. I sketch these briefly, moving anti-clockwise round the largest oval, especially indicating those areas which I have been able to cover in this book and those which I have decided to omit.

**Language policy and planning** grew out of the sociology of language, with an interest in the configuration of languages within and beyond nations, and an applied outworking in policies for areas such as language education, maintenance and standardization. Here, I will not deal with policy and planning as such, but aspects of it surface in Chapter 3 on language maintenance, and Chapter 10, language ideologies.

**Applied linguistics** is a huge field in its own right with many links into and overlaps with sociolinguistics. Traditional applied linguistics is concerned with language teaching and learning, but 'linguistics applied' can cover many things that have a strong social emphasis, such as language and the law. I regard the social applicability of knowledge as important, particularly in its impact on equity. So, although I will not attempt to deal with specific topics, I return to principles of the applications of sociolinguistics briefly in the concluding Chapter 12.

**Contact linguistics** is mainly focused on the study of pidgins and creoles, languages that have resulted from contact. Much of the research takes account of the social context of these languages: their histories involve radical social injustice which their present situations still reflect. Chapter 3 introduces contact linguistics, and Chapter 4 both new-born languages and language death.

**Code switching** is when multilingual speakers mix their languages as they talk. Some code switching research involves a purely formal linguistic description of the ways in which the two languages intertwine structurally. However most approaches take the social context and shaping into account (Chapter 5).

**Dialectology** is a direct ancestor of sociolinguistics. Its traditional focus since the nineteenth century was on rural dialects, but Labov took it into urban areas and revolutionized its methods. Dialectology has been reconfigured and revived through its crossing with sociolinguistics (Chapter 9).

**Historical linguistics** studies how languages have changed in the past, often with little regard for the society in which the changes took place. Labov devised methods to investigate and explain language change in the present and in its social context (Chapter 8).

**Language and gender** interact throughout society. With the rise of twentieth-century feminism, gender discrimination through language became a target for both research and activism. Some of the most innovative work in sociolinguistics has focused on gender/language issues and made them central to much sociolinguistic theorizing. See Chapters 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11.

**Pragmatics** examines language use in its immediate interactional context. It can involve just formalistic descriptions, but usually there is a necessary social dimension. Pragmatic research overlaps a good deal with sociolinguistic accounts of syntactic and discourse variation (Chapter 6).

**Linguistic Anthropology** (or anthropological linguistics) also overlaps significantly with sociolinguistics, involving particular methods rather than different subject matter. Early sociolinguistics was partly nurtured under the wing of anthropology in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Anthropological approaches have always been influential on both sociolinguistic theory and method, starting with Hymes and Gumperz and continuing today through the critical-constructivist turn. Most of the book's chapters touch on linguistic anthropological matters, but see especially 5, 6 and 10.

**Conversation Analysis (CA)** is interested in the detailed investigation of verbal interaction, the rules by which conversation operates, and the way in which the participants

understand what is going on between them. Traditionally it sidelines social forces and motivations and operates as a formalistic description of language use. Although it is increasingly open to the role of the social in conversation, Conversation Analysis will not be covered in this book.

**Discourse Analysis** is a field closely linked to sociolinguistics by its interest in the social and political significance of language. For Critical Discourse Analysis, this lies particularly in the implication of language in social inequity. Many sociolinguists work with discourse data, for example in language ideology research, and there are major sociolinguistic implications in discourse patterns. Although discourse surfaces especially in Chapters 6 and 8–11, discourse analysis is the overlapping field that I most regret lacking space or time to include in this book.

The **social psychology of language** studies language attitudes, the role of language in group behaviour and relations, and language and ethnicity. Its interests overlap considerably with sociolinguistics, to which it brings a different disciplinary take and methodology that can feel either alien or stimulating to the sociolinguist. It appears in Chapters 2, 3 and 10.

## 1.5 A GUIDE TO THE GUIDEBOOK

### The book's trajectory

Twin principles of linguistic profusion and social engagement underlie this book. On this basis the book aims to attune you to the sociolinguistic life that is about you, to:

- give you a sense of the shape of sociolinguistics, its content, concepts and terms
- give you an understanding of sociolinguistic research – its goals, its methods, its findings
- introduce you to the methods and skills of doing sociolinguistic research, and offer hands-on experience of doing it
- present you with the opportunity to reflect on your own sociolinguistic situation – the profusion of languages and voices which are part of your life
- offer you the chance to engage with how language affects and constitutes society, in particular where that produces inequity.

The book proceeds from the macro to the micro – the order in which I have expounded the strands of sociolinguistics in this chapter. This enables me to ease the narrative towards those areas of sociolinguistics that demand more linguistic terminology and skills rather than beginning with them. The core chapters of the book (2–11) effectively fall into four parts of two or three chapters each. The first three of these parts deal with the historical strands of sociolinguistics as shown in columns 2, 4 and 5 of Table 1.1. I begin with languages and their configuration in society at large, so Chapters 2–4 cover largely multilingualism and its issues. The second section moves on to the more micro choices that speakers make in using language on the ground, in Chapters 5 and 6 – the ethnographic-interactional strand. Refining the linguistic focus further, Chapters 7–9 cover language variation, change and contact between dialects. Finally, the book rounds up with two chapters which bring together many of its underlying themes and interests: language

ideology (10) and style and identity (11). The critical-constructivist strand surfaces as a major trend in all chapters from 5 onwards.

Each chapter offers some 15–20 exercises, examples, tables and figures (the Preface provides notes on these for teachers). And all of the core chapters end with a standard sequence of the following four sections:

- **Case study:** a particular issue, person or piece of research, which is addressed in some depth. These range from recent work to classic studies of 50 years ago, from theoretical issues to practice, from Brazil to Vanuatu, from Marlene Dietrich to M. M. Bakhtin.
- **Research activity:** a range of tasks, methods and issues which complement the exposition throughout the book. These deal with areas such as bilingual surveys, linguistic landscape, internet language, ethnography. In particular three of the activities teach the conduct of a sociolinguistic project, of any scale, in nine steps. These are spelled out in the activity sections of Chapters 3, 7 and 10.
- **Summary:** a list of bullet points which précis the sections of the chapter.
- **Further reading:** guidance on articles, books, readers and journals which offer more detail on the matter of the chapter.

## General reading

While the further reading at the end of each chapter recommends references specific to that chapter's topics, there are general publications which encompass a wide swathe of sociolinguistics. These are the readers, handbooks, multi-volume collections and journals (and of course, other introductory textbooks ...). Some of these I have found invaluable aids in my own research for this book. Here are my recommendations:

- **Handbooks:** The Cambridge (Mesthrie 2011), Sage (Wodak, Johnstone and Kerswill 2011) and Oxford (Bayley, Cameron and Lucas 2013) *Handbooks of Sociolinguistics* contain newly commissioned articles, with some excellent content. They are major publications and with remarkably different strengths. There are also handbooks in specific areas (such as language policy, Spolsky 2012) or in overlapping fields (e.g. linguistic anthropology, Duranti 2004).
- **Readers:** Two readers – collections of existing articles – are Coupland and Jaworski (2009b) and Meyerhoff and Schlee (2010), although the latter makes a lot of cuts within articles.
- **Collections:** Routledge publishes a wonderful series of collections, each between four and six volumes, which bring together up to a hundred of the key contributions – historical and recent – to a part of the field. For this textbook I have found these a great resource on areas of sociolinguistics that I have not known so well. They are also an ideal place to find hard-to-locate articles – including many cited in this book's references – on *Sociolinguistics* (edited by Coupland and Jaworski 2009a), *Anthropological Linguistics* (Schieffelin and Garrett 2011), *Language and Gender* (Ehrlich 2008), *Bilingualism and Multilingualism* (Li Wei 2010), *Contact Languages* (Holm and Michaelis 2009) and *World Englishes* (Bolton and Kachru 2006).
- **Journals:** *Language in Society* and the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* are the field's general journals, the former with a 40-year-plus history. The *International Journal of the*

*Sociology of Language* carries mainly theme issues on languages or regions. *Language, Language & Communication*, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* and *American Speech* all publish quite widely across sociolinguistics. More specialist – in accord with their titles – are *Language Variation and Change*, *English World-Wide*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* and *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*.

## Doing sociolinguistics

My belief is that the best way to learn sociolinguistics – including at the most introductory level – is to **do** sociolinguistics. So in this book I talk about how sociolinguists do their work as well as what they have found. And I anticipate that – regardless of whether you are a first-

### Exercise 1.2 The Guidebook Quiz

Sociolinguistics abounds in the eccentric stuff of human nature and endeavour. You will find the answers to the following questions (and many more ...) in this book. In my class the first student to come back with all the answers – *and* the number of the page where they found them – will be rewarded with a chocolate fish.

- 1 What national language is named after an aphrodisiac?
- 2 Why was the sociolinguist looking for the fourth floor?
- 3 Who said this, and about whom?  
*If she had nothing more than her voice she could break your heart with it.*
- 4 What language classifies 'women, fire and dangerous things' together?
- 5 The American from another state thought the man from Michigan said:  
*Belle's body just caught the fit gnat.*  
But what had the Michigander really said?
- 6 What sociolinguistic theorist smoked away the last remaining copy of one of his own book manuscripts, and why?
- 7 Where will you find a shop called *No socks, no panties*?
- 8 Who said this, where and why?  
*High tide on the sound side, last night the water fire, tonight the moon shine. No fish. What do you suppose the matter, Uncle Woods?*
- 9 Who was James Murray and how many languages did he know?
- 10 One man complimented another: *I like that shirt on you.*  
The other responded: *Thanks, I like your face.*  
Why?
- 11 Who wears dark eyeliner, tight jeans, fringed rawhide boots – and tense front vowels?
- 12 Who spent the last five years of the nineteenth century cycling round France interviewing 700 people, and why?
- 13 And why a chocolate fish?!

year or a postgraduate – you, the student, will do research. The nature and the level of research will differ widely, ranging from a limited, joint, in-class undertaking to significant months-long individual projects which you design and carry out yourself under guidance. I also expect that you will find this prospect daunting – but it is my experience that nearly every student who is challenged to undertake a piece of research in this way will bring it off. The research activity in Chapter 3.6 will introduce you to how to start a project.

The next chapter begins our discussion of multilingualism. But before you begin that, test yourself on the Guidebook Quiz on quirky facts in sociolinguistics (Exercise 1.2). Then as you move through the book, return to the unanswered questions until you complete it.

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