

Chapter Twelve: Language in Society

1. DIALECT

Idiolect has been devised to describe the speech of a particular individual

Dialects are mutually intelligible forms of a language that differ in systematic ways → *grammar / vocabulary / pronunciation*

- ⇒ **Accent** → *phonological or phonetic* distinctions
- ⇒ **Intercommunication:**
 - (a) the number of speakers involved, (b) geographical or natural features, and (c) social barriers.
 - (a) population mobility, (b) mass communication, and (c) ease of travel.

1.1. Regional Dialect

When enough linguistic differences accumulate in a particular region, the language spoken has its own character

- ⇒ **NORMS**
- ⇒ A line which separates two areas → **isogloss**
- ⇒ A number of isoglosses coincide → **dialect boundary**

1.2. Social Dialect

Dialect differences that seem to come about because of social factors → socioeconomic status, ethnic or racial differences, education, occupation, religion, gender and age

- ⇒ What distinguishes people as belonging to one group or another is the use of **social markers**.

2. LANGUAGE IN USE

2.1. Register

A conventional way of using language that is appropriate in a specific context. Differences of register may be thought of as based upon three important non-linguistic factors:

Tenor, i.e., the relationship of speakers or familiarity with one another;

Setting, i.e., the relative formality of the occasion;

Field, i.e., subject matter and functions/purposes of communication;

Mode, i.e., the means by which communication takes place – notably, by speech or writing

Channel, i.e., the technical means (e.g., phone, radio, face-to-face)

2.2. Speech Styles

variations in formality:

- ⇒ A change from one style to the other style → **style-shifting**
- ⇒ **Speech accommodation** → ability to modify speech style toward (**convergence**) or away from (**divergence**) the perceived style of the person(s) we're talking to.

2.3. Jargon

One of the defining features of a register is the use of **jargon** – the special words peculiar to the members of a profession or group.

2.4. Epithet

An offensive word or phrase used to refer to a person or group, nationality, race, etc.

2.5. Obscenity

Words and phrases that people avoid for reasons related to religion, politeness and prohibited behavior

2.6. Euphemism

A word or phrase that replaces a taboo word or serves to avoid frightening or unpleasant subjects

- ➔ Euphemism reveals that words have a *connotative meaning*.

3. LANGUAGES IN CONTACT

3.1. Lingua Franca

In populated areas, where groups desire social or commercial communication, one language is often used by common agreement.

3.2. Pidgin

Traders and missionaries who visited and attempted to communicate with peoples residing in another distant part, created a simple rule-governed language based on the language of communicators

The dominant language is called the **lexifier language** and the other language(s) is called the **substrate language(s)**.

Characteristics:

- Although pidgins are in some sense rudimentary, they are not devoid of rules.
- Pidgins have fewer grammatical words such as auxiliary verbs, prepositions, and articles, and inflectional morphology, including tense and case endings.

The set of pronouns is often simpler in pidgins.

	English	Kamtak
he	him his	i i i

Pidgins may have fewer prepositions. In Kamtok, for example, *fɔ* means ‘to,’ ‘at,’ ‘in,’ ‘for,’ and ‘from.’

- Other morphological processes are more productive in pidgins, e.g., *big-big* means ‘enormous.’

3.3. Creole

When children are exposed to a pidgin as their linguistic input, they develop a language that is more complicated.

- ➔ The most prominent difference between pidgin and creole is that the pidgin doesn't have native speakers but the creole does.

3.4. Bilingualism

Situation in nations in which two (or more) languages are spoken and recognized as official or national languages

One of these is typically dominant in more important contexts of use → **subordinate bilingualism**, as in Ethiopia where the language of the school and nation are the same (Amharic), which tends to render the other languages (Tigrinya, Sidamo, Oromo) subordinate

Both languages are generally used for all purposes as the relatively coordinate roles of French and German in Switzerland → **coordinate bilingualism**

3.5. Diglossia

A rather special situation involving two distinct varieties of a language: there is a 'Low' variety (demotic), and a 'High' variety

4. SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS

The claim that the structure of a language influences how its speakers perceive the world around them is most closely associated with **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**. This hypothesis has two versions.

- **Linguistic determinism** (language determines thought) → the language we speak determines how we perceive and think about the world.
- **Linguistic relativism** → different languages encode different categories and that speakers of different languages therefore think about the world in different ways.