

Mustansiriyah University

College of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature

3<sup>rd</sup> Year Linguistics

Textbook: Linguistics (Aichison, 2010)

Lecture 5: Language and Society

- The aim of this lecture is concerned with sociolinguistics with a focus on language variation.
- Sociolinguistics is often defined as the study of language and society and the study of language use in social context.
- Whereas many linguists concentrate on discovering unity beneath the diversity of human languages, sociolinguists try to analyze the social factors which lead to this diversity. Sociolinguists are interested in language differences, and especially in variation within a particular language.
- Owing to the difficulty of defining a 'language', sociolinguists prefer to start with the notion of a speech community rather than a 'language'. They define a speech community as any group of people who consider that they speak the same language.
- Within a speech community, there is considerable language variation. The most obvious type of variety in a speech community is the use of different dialects. A dialect is usually associated with a particular geographical area.
- In everyday usage, the term dialect is often confused with the word accent. An accent refers only to a difference in pronunciation.
- Not all types of linguistic variation are geographically motivated; non geographical linguistics variations are called registers. Registers varies according to the topic under discussion, the formality of the occasion, and the medium used (speech, writing or sign).
- Native speakers know what register to use in certain social context because they possess grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use language appropriately. This grammatical and social knowledge is called "communicative competence".
- The formality - informality scale overlaps with other stylistic considerations, in particular the medium used. Utterances range from a high or formal style, down to a low or informal one - and the choice of a high or low style is partly a matter of politeness.
- The variation in formality is often linked to the different features associated with and written language.
- Speech and writing differ in a number of ways. The difference between spoken and written language can be summed up in the following table:

Spoken Language	Written Language
Than one participant	Single writer
Implicit	Explicit
Repetitive	Non-repetitive
Fragments	Full sentences
Simple structure	Elaborate structure
Concrete and common vocabulary	Abstract and less common vocabulary

- Several of these features overlap with the formality - informality scale, with speech containing informal features, and written language formal ones. Consequently, formal speech has quite a lot in common with informal writing.