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SOCIOLINGUISTICS

The Study of Speakers' Choices

Second edition

Why do we speak the way we do? What are the social factors that influence our choices of expression? This best-selling introduction to the study of language and society encourages students to think about these fundamental questions, asking how and why we select from the vast range of different words, accents, varieties and languages available to us.

In this new and updated edition, students are taken step-by-step through the analysis of linguistic expressions, speech varieties and languages in complex settings. Enriched with recent findings from different languages and speech communities around the world, this comprehensive textbook equips students with knowledge of the main concepts and gives them a coherent view of the complex interaction of language and society.

- 'Questions for discussion' help students understand how speakers' choices are conditioned by the society in which they live.
- New to this edition are lists of further reading and a repertoire of online resources, including 100 flashcards, enabling students to investigate more deeply and advance their learning.
- Includes a topical new chapter on research ethics, guiding students on the ethical questions involved in sociolinguistic research.

FLORIAN COULMAS is Director of the German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo. His previous books include *Literacy and Linguistic Minorities* (1984), *Language Adaptation* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), *Language and Economy* (1992), *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (1997), *Writing Systems* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Writing and Society (Cambridge University Press 2013).

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Florian Coulmas
Frontmatter
More information

Contents

List of figures *page* vii
List of tables ix
Preface to the second edition xi

1 Introduction: notions of language 1

Part I Micro-choices **17**

2 Standard and dialect: social stratification as a factor of linguistic choice 19
3 Gendered speech: sex as a factor of linguistic choice 42
4 Communicating across generations: age as a factor of linguistic choice 61
5 Choice and change 79
6 Politeness: cultural dimensions of linguistic choice 99

Part II Macro-choices **119**

7 Code-switching: linguistic choices across language boundaries 121
8 Diglossia and bilingualism: functional restrictions on language choice 141
9 Language spread, shift and maintenance: how groups choose their language 163
10 Language and identity: individual, social, national 189
11 Language planning: communication demands, public choice, utility 203
12 Select letters: a major divide 225

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978-1-107-03764-9 - Sociolinguistics: The Study of Speakers' Choices: Second Edition
Florian Coulmas
Frontmatter
More information

13 The language of choice 244
14 Research ethics 261

Glossary of terms 273
References 276
Index 299

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-03764-9 - Sociolinguistics: The Study of Speakers' Choices: Second Edition
Florian Coulmas
Frontmatter
More information

Figures

2.1 Language and dialect *page* 24
2.2 Variable affiliation of dialects 25
2.3 Low Franconian dialect spoken in the German–Dutch border region 26
2.4 Chinese 'dialects' (*fāngyán*) 27
2.5 'Trudgill's triangle' (after Trudgill 1984: 42) 33
2.6 Inoue's triangle: Common Japanese and Tokyo 'New Dialect' 34
3.1 Distribution of *-in* pronunciation across social groups and broken down for speaker-sex (after Trudgill 1984) 49
3.2 Independent social variables and speech behaviour (after Brouwer and van Hout 1992) 51
3.3 The interaction of speaker-sex, employment and the presence of children in the Amsterdam survey (Brouwer and van Hout 1992) 52
3.4 Gender-specific frequencies of Japanese sentence-final particles (Ide and Yoshida 1999: 464) 55
4.1 Dynamic model of age-grading of speakers and temporal dimension of language. $\{E_1\}$ is a set of expressions first used by members of the young generation who continue using it as they grow old. 63
4.2 The language of three successive generations, G_n– G_{n+2} 63
4.3 Age and standard speech (adapted from Downes 1984: 191) 71
4.4 The competence level of a declining language diminishes from elder to younger age cohorts (Abbi et al. 2007: 335, with permission) 74
5.1 *Ch*-lenition in Panama, from [č] to [š] (adapted from Cedergren 1973) 84
5.2 The Tsuruoka study of language standardization in Japan: percentage of standard speech responses with respect to phonetic quality for different age groups (adapted from Nomoto 1975) 86
5.3 Non-labialization of the dialect form: from [ɸiŋɛ] to [çiŋɛ] 'beard' (adapted from Nomoto 1975) 88

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CAMBRIDGE

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978-1-107-03764-9 - Sociolinguistics: The Study of Speakers' Choices: Second Edition
Florian Coulmas
Frontmatter
More information

5.4 Devoicing: dialectal form [d, ɬ], standard form [t], [hatɔ] 'pigeon' (adapted from Nomoto 1975) 89
5.5 Non-nasalization: dialectal form [~b], standard form [b], [ɔbi] 'sash' (adapted from Nomoto 1975) 90
5.6 Uganda's population composition 2010 (Data: UN Population Division) 94
5.7 Italy's population composition 2010 (Data: UN Population Division) 95
6.1 The hierarchy of Thai society (Kummer 1992: 330) 108
6.2 Choice of Korean address terms (Hwang 1990: 45) 111
7.1 Twelve categories of code-switching (Haust and Dittmar 1998: 83) 133
8.1 Relationships between the languages and dialects of Morocco (adapted from Youssi 1995: 31) 151
8.2 Ordered dimensions in the choice of language: Guarani and Spanish in Paraguay (after Rubin 1985: 119) 154
8.3 Three types of contact between language groups 158
9.1 The ten most frequently used languages on the internet. Online language populations, total: 1,966 million (June 2010) (Internet World Stats: www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm) 168
9.2 Few languages with many speakers, many languages with few speakers: the linguistic diversity of the world 168
12.1 Sign in the Latin and Gurmukhī scripts on the Southall (ਸਾਊਥਹਾਲ) train station in London. (Creative Commons 2.5 Generic) 229
12.2 Sign in Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Latin scripts on the Denenchofu train station in Tokyo 230
12.3 Table of contents of an official guide to the public services of Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo, published by the Ward Office. 232
12.4 The language panel of an Indian 1,000 rupee note 233
13.1 Chinese city-dwellers see English as 'the key to success' (adapted from *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 November 2003) 249
13.2 The decline of Scottish Gaelic (after Abrams and Strogatz 2003) 253

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-03764-9 - Sociolinguistics: The Study of Speakers' Choices: Second Edition
Florian Coulmas
Frontmatter
More information

Tables

2.1 A simple class division model for Western societies (after Chambers 1995: 37) *page* 31
3.1 Seven phonetic variables in Amsterdam speech; (1) is the standard variant, (5) the most localized variant (Brouwer and van Hout 1992) 51
4.1 *Kogyaru kotoba*, the language of Japanese high-school girls 69
6.1 Pronominal address 103
6.2 Vietnamese terms of self-reference and address 104
6.3 Plain and honorific Korean words (adapted from Hwang 1990: 46) 110
6.4 Korean speech levels classified by sentence-concluding endings (adapted from Wang 1990: 28) 110
7.1 Lexical correspondences in English: verbs of Anglo-Saxon and French origin 122
8.1 Complementary functional distribution of varieties in Bengali (adapted from Chatterjee 1986: 298) 143
8.2 Common characteristics of diglossia 143
8.3 Differences between Katharevousa and Demotic Greek 146
8.4 Four types of conventional domain separation 150
8.5 Four categories of languages in multilingual societies (Srivastava 1984: 101) 153
9.1 Chinese demographic development 166
9.2 Immigrant language maintenance in Australia by generation (Clyne 1991: 66f.) 177
11.1 Alphabetical list of countries with constitutional provisions related to language 210
11.2 Alphabetical list of countries without constitutional provisions related to linguistic rights 212
11.3 Language most frequently spoken at home for Primary One Chinese pupils (%), quoted from Kwan-Terry (2000: 98) 213
11.4 Lexical diversity of Arabic (from Fassi Fehri 2002) 217
12.1 Shona alphabets, 1932 and 1967 237

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Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-03764-9 - Sociolinguistics: The Study of Speakers' Choices: Second Edition
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More information

Preface to the second edition

Preparing the second edition of a textbook is a great pleasure. While making new mistakes is perhaps more exciting than correcting past ones, being given the chance to revise, augment, update and, hopefully, improve a text written several years ago is a great privilege. Not only does it imply that the original edition has found its readers, which is, of course, a matter of satisfaction; it also shows that the field continues to thrive and evolve. I have been intrigued by the multifarious interconnections between language and society for many years. Knowing that they are subject to coordinated and ever more sophisticated research that has a place in university curricula makes it a rewarding task to introduce new generations of students to sociolinguistics.

Revisiting one's own writing is an interesting experience that makes you reflect not just on the book at hand, but on the accumulation of knowledge, the many factors that have an influence on how an academic field develops and on progress of scholarship in general. A critical view that takes nothing for granted and tries to look beyond the confines of our own preconceptions is essential for the scientific enterprise. Every research paper and every book could always be better, but many never will be. We all have erudite friends who took the notion that further improvement is still possible too seriously – and thus never finished their PhD theses. Lest excessive perfectionism forever stops us in our tracks, we publish despite some uncertainties and shortcomings and, therefore, happily seize upon the opportunity to make up for some of the inadequacies.

Working on the second edition of *Sociolinguistics* was pleasant enough. It allowed me to take stock and assess new research that has been undertaken since I first planned this textbook. I reworked it cover to cover and in the process weeded out some misprints and other minor mistakes; not many though, thanks to Jo Breeze who was the Production Editor for the original edition. There were no big blunders that called for correction, and in the meantime no major discovery or theoretical breakthrough has fundamentally changed the way research about language and society is done. Hence, the substance of the book is unchanged; but I brought it up to date by incorporating many references to recent research, adding examples and reinforcing arguments by supplying latest data. Sociolinguistics is an empirical science, and data are accordingly very important. Data collection,

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processing and storage is, perhaps, what has changed most in sociolinguistic research these past couple of decades. This is largely due to advances in technology. Recording devices have been miniaturized, and specialized computer software has been developed to create digital transcriptions from digital audio or video recordings. Large corpora of print, speech data and transcriptions can be shared easily and subjected to statistical analyses on a scale that was hard to imagine just a few years ago. The exponential growth of the Internet has also changed our reading behaviour and the way we come by the information we need for our research. This edition does justice to these developments by including a new list of useful online resources at the end of each chapter.

Rather than objectifying languages, dialects and other varieties by treating them as closed and in that sense invariant systems, sociolinguistics should take a speaker-centred approach focusing on communities and their linguistic resources. The pivotal question uniting the chapters of this book, in this edition as in the original one, is what it is that speakers do with their language(s); how they pass them on to following generations; how they allow them to be influenced by other languages; how they adjust their speech to that of their interlocutors; and how they interact with speakers of other idioms. Empirical research adopting such an approach necessarily has to do with people and, like other research involving human subjects, must conform to certain widely accepted principles. Although sociolinguistic investigations are usually of low risk to informants and research partners, more attention has been paid in recent years to problems of research ethics. I have therefore added a chapter at the end of the book discussing the conditions that must be met for planning and executing ethically sound research that does not exploit informants or in other ways violate their rights. This new chapter not only takes into account evolving sensitivities in the social sciences, but is also a logical consequence of the central position assigned to speakers in sociolinguistics.

Questions and suggestions by students of Chuo University and Tokyo University where I occasionally taught this book as well as critical comments by colleagues helped me to improve it for its present edition. Andrew Winnard of Cambridge University Press suggested the revision and encouraged me to see it through. My gratitude is due to him, Jo Breeze and other members of the editorial department.

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