

Introducing Language and Society

This accessible and entertaining textbook introduces students to both traditional and more contemporary approaches to sociolinguistics in a real-world context, addressing current social problems that students are likely to care about, such as racism, inequality, political conflict, belonging, and issues around gender and sexuality. Each chapter includes exercises, case studies and ideas for small-scale research projects, encouraging students to think critically about the different theories and approaches to language and society, and to interrogate their own beliefs about language and communication. The book gives students a grounding in the traditional concepts and techniques upon which sociolinguistics is built, while also introducing new developments from the last decade, such as translanguaging, multimodality, superdiversity, linguistic landscapes, and language and digital media. Students will also have online access to more detailed examples, links to video and audio files, and more challenging exercises to strengthen their skills and confidence as sociolinguists.

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Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-49892-0 — Introducing Language and Society
Rodney H. Jones , Christiana Themistocleous
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978-1-108-49892-0 — Introducing Language and Society
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/highereducation/isbn/9781108498920

DOI: 10.1017/9781108689922

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First published 2022

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ Books Limited, Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Jones, Rodney H., author. | Themistocleous, Christiana, 1979- author.

Title: Introducing language and society / Rodney H. Jones, University of Reading ; Christiana Themistocleous, University of Reading.

Description: Cambridge ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2022. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021038899 | ISBN 9781108498920 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108712859 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Sociolinguistics.

Classification: LCC P40 .J66 2022 | DDC 306.44—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021038899>

ISBN 978-1-108-49892-0 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-71285-9 Paperback

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Preface

This book is intended as an introductory text in sociolinguistics for students living in a world in which many of our traditional assumptions about languages and their speakers, about social categories such as class, gender, race, and ‘nation’, and about communication and ‘meaning’ themselves are being questioned. It is a generation that is witnessing unprecedented disruptions to their lives brought on by pandemic diseases, environmental threats, increasing inequality, and a resurgence of nationalism and authoritarianism around the globe. And it is a generation faced with important questions about the relationship between language and ‘truth’, and the relationship between individuals and the societies in which they live.

The fields of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis have long aimed to demonstrate the relevance of language studies for tackling the important social, political, and economic problems facing us. Along the way, it has developed a host of useful tools to understand how the way people use language affects their status, their social identities, and their opportunities in life, and the way language often serves as a tool for some groups of people to exercise power over other groups. In the last decade, however, in response to increasing globalisation and the increasing integration of digital technologies into nearly every aspect of our lives, a range of new concepts have been developed by scholars, concepts such as multimodality, superdiversity, and translanguaging. The methods that sociolinguists use to study the relationship between language and society are also changing, with traditional sociolinguistic interviews now being supplemented with approaches such as digital ethnography and the study of linguistic and semiotic landscapes.

This book is intended to give students a grounding in the traditional concepts and techniques upon which sociolinguistics has been

built since the 1970s while at the same time introducing them to some of the newer concepts and techniques that have been developed to address more contemporary issues. One of its goals is to get students to think more critically about the traditional ways we conceive of language and society – not necessarily to dismiss these traditional approaches, but to interrogate them. But its most important goal is to help students understand the relevance of the study of language and society to confronting real problems in the real world.

Who This Book Is For

This book is really for anyone who is interested in the relationship between language and society and how that relationship impacts on people’s lives. It’s written in a way that is intended to make the ideas in it accessible to people without a strong background in linguistics or sociology or other social sciences. For this reason, it would be an ideal choice for introductory courses in sociolinguistics or ‘language in society’ at universities. But it is also suitable for more advanced students and even scholars who desire an easy-to-understand introduction to more recent intellectual developments in the study of language and society. The book draws upon examples from a wide range of national contexts, making it relevant to students and scholars all over the world.

How This Book Is Structured

The book begins with a short introductory chapter, which is followed by nine full chapters, each focusing on a different topic in sociolinguistics. Each of these chapters will introduce a number of key ideas and demonstrate how those ideas can be applied to understanding various aspects of language

in society. Discussions of these ideas are punctuated by short activities that give readers a chance to think about and apply the ideas themselves.

Each chapter also includes a *Focal Topic* section in which some kind of real-world problem or phenomenon related to language and communication is discussed. In each of these *Focal Topic* sections we provide two case studies of how sociolinguists have used the ideas introduced in the chapter to try to understand these problems and to try to contribute to solving them. These case studies take the form of summaries of research articles that can be used to scaffold students' readings of the articles themselves.

Finally, each chapter ends with a list of suggested projects that involve students in actually collecting and analysing data using the concepts they have mastered by working through the chapters. At the end of the book there is a short section called *A Sociolinguist's Toolkit* in which we briefly review some of the main methods for doing sociolinguistic research that have been encountered in the book and offer advice about the practical issues students might encounter in carrying out their projects.

Teaching and Learning with This Book

Each of the chapters in this book builds upon the previous chapters, so it's strongly suggested that students work through the material in the order that it's presented. At the beginning of each chapter there is a list of the key terms covered in the chapter along with a short summary of what the chapter is about. When readers encounter these key terms (marked in **bold**) in the chapter itself, they can always consult the glossary at the end of the book if they

need to, for a concise definition of the terms. The activities in each of the chapters can be done individually, but they are particularly useful when done in a classroom setting in which students can discuss and compare their answers with other students. The projects suggested at the end of each chapter can be done either individually or in groups. Some teachers might want to turn some of these project ideas into assessed assignments for their courses.

What's Special about This Book?

The main thing that makes this book different from other coursebooks on sociolinguistics is that it attempts to engage students in critically evaluating some of the basic assumptions about language and society that have driven much of the work in sociolinguistics over the years and to make accessible to them more contemporary perspectives in the field. For this reason, it foregrounds concepts such as mobility, multimodality, and mediation, which may be less salient in other coursebooks.

Another important feature of the book is that it focuses on making students aware of the role of sociolinguistics in their everyday lives and of the relevance of sociolinguistic concepts to important social issues like racism, migration, political polarisation, and conflict.

The book includes plenty of material designed to support students and teachers, including activities in every chapter, a glossary of key terms, and guidelines for conducting research projects. There is also a companion website for this book (www.cambridge.org/jones-themistocleous), where students and teachers can go to find supplementary activities, explore the topics covered in the book more deeply, and get help carrying out their projects.