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How Languages Work

An Introduction to Language and Linguistics

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11

Language in the Social World

KEY TERMS

- Identity
- Language ideology
- Linguistic repertoire
- Linguistic variety
- Sociolinguistic justice
- Sociolinguistic variable
- Style
- Translanguaging
- Identity
- Language ideology

CHAPTER PREVIEW

This chapter focuses on language as a fundamentally social activity. All of the structural features of language discussed in previous chapters can be used for important social functions. Because language is the basis of human communication, it always occurs in a social context, and the use of language both shapes and is shaped by social relationships, activities, structures, and processes.

The chapter begins by considering differences within a single language as well as differences between languages. We then consider two different social aspects of language: the creative social positions that can be taken through language, and the rigid ideologies that circulate regarding language and its users, which reproduce stereotypes and social inequality. The chapter also discusses the role of linguistic activism in supporting social justice in and through language.

LIST OF AIMS

At the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- characterize some of the ways that identity is created through language;
- refute language ideologies that value some linguistic varieties or practices over others;
- describe the principle and practices of language variation;
- describe the principle and practices of linguistic diversity;

- explain the relationship between language variation and language change;
- characterize communities of practice;
- distinguish between correlationist and constructionist views of language and identity;
- identify some of the challenges involved in studying gender differences in language use;
- identify the forms and social functions of specific linguistic features in language data;
- describe some of the ways that linguistic activism can promote sociolinguistic justice.

11.1 Introduction

SIDEBAR 11.1

You can find definitions for key terms and bolded terms throughout this chapter in the Glossary (at the back of this book or on the student resources website). Additional online resources for this chapter include a study guide, review quiz, and vocabulary quizzes.

Hello. Hi.

G'day.

Good afternoon.

Hi there!

Hey.

Howdy!

How you doin'?

Whassup?

¡Hola!

Every day, in every encounter, from the very first moment you begin to speak, you indicate something about yourself, your addressee, and your current situation. In some sense, each of the utterances listed above “says the same thing”: each one functions as a greeting. But from another perspective, these utterances say very different things; they may be used by different kinds of speakers, to different kinds of addressees, and in different speech situations (see Stop and Reflect 11.1).



STOP AND REFLECT 11.1 THE SOCIAL MEANING OF GREETINGS

- Which of these greetings would you use? To whom would you use each one? In what situations?
- What other greetings do you use that do not appear in this list? When and to whom do you use each one?
- Which of the greetings would you never use? Who do you think uses them and in what situations?

You probably would not use all of the above greetings to all addressees, and you might use some of them only in special situations. For instance, you might say *Good afternoon* only in a formal context (depending on your age and geographic region), or perhaps you would say *Hi there!* only to a young child. Even *Hello*, which English speakers often think of as the most basic greeting, is likely to be something you use only to strangers or in formal settings (or perhaps on the telephone). You might use some of the above greetings every day, while you might never use others. And regardless of whether these greetings occur in your own speech, you probably have ideas about the sort of speakers who use them: perhaps, for example, you associate *G'day* with Australians and *Whassup?* with youth. Some of these forms may also take on different meanings depending on who uses them. A bilingual Mexican American student might use *¡Hola!* with her friends to signal their shared identity,

while a white American student who doesn't speak Spanish might use the same greeting with her friends to show that she's feeling light-hearted – although this sort of outgroup use might be offensive to her Mexican American classmate. In each case, the language that we use indicates to others how we want to be seen: as a member of various social groups based on such factors as age, gender, sexuality, region, race, ethnicity, and so on, and also as a particular kind of person within those groups. But of course listeners may or may not go along with our self-representations. The examples above indicate that language does not only convey information, nor does it only perform interactional functions such as greeting. Our language also indicates how we see others and our relationship with them: friendly or respectful, similar to us or different from us – imagine, for example, what would happen if you greeted a close friend with a polite *Good afternoon*. Moreover, the way we speak indicates how we understand our current social situation: formal or casual, serious or playful. At the same time, language also serves as a badge of **identity** – that is, the social positioning of self and other. With every utterance, we display our own identities and assign identities to other people, even when we're not talking about identity at all. In other words, language involves both semantic meaning (what our words refer to) and

social meaning (what the linguistic choices we make communicate about us or how they are perceived).

The discussion above also suggests that ***we have beliefs, impressions, and expectations about how we ourselves and others use language.*** We view certain linguistic forms as characteristic of or appropriately used by some social groups and not others (see Stop and Reflect 11.2).

SIDEBAR 11.2

Social meaning is part of the broader context that informs pragmatic interpretation, the subject of Chapter 8.



STOP AND REFLECT 11.2 GREETINGS AND SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

- What sorts of greetings might be socially expected more from women than men? What sorts of greetings might be seen as inappropriate for each gender?
- What sorts of greetings might be socially expected more from speakers from some racial or ethnic groups rather than others? What sorts of greetings might be seen as inappropriate from members of each group?

Such social expectations are rarely completely accurate and often are entirely wrong. In most cases, individual speakers' language use is far more complex than we might expect based on their group membership. For instance, many people think that women are more likely than men to use polite greetings, but it is easy to find counterexamples to challenge this notion. Our beliefs about language and language users are rarely neutral: we tend to perceive some forms of language as "better" – more correct, more pleasant, more intelligent-sounding – than others. For example, we might view greetings like *Howdy* or *How you doin'?* as less "correct" in some way than their counterparts *How do you do?* and *How are you doing?*, but we might also feel that they sound friendlier than a more formal greeting. Such beliefs are often strongly held and widely shared, and they have real-world consequences for how speakers are perceived, but they are based in prescriptive attitudes, not descriptive

linguistic facts. From the viewpoint of linguists, all **linguistic varieties** (a cover term that includes languages, dialects, and speech styles and registers) are equally grammatically correct, cognitively complex, and sufficient for their users' social purposes. In everyday life, however, some forms of language are typically highly prized, while others are devalued. Culturally shared ideas about language and its users that advantage some groups of speakers over others are known as **language ideologies**. These ideologies play an important role in reproducing social inequality in two interrelated ways. On the one hand, language ideologies encourage listeners to accept without question that some ways of using language are inferior to others; it is no coincidence that such ways of using language are mostly associated with groups that are marginalized socially and politically. On the other hand, language ideologies provide a kind of camouflage for discrimination against less powerful groups. Racism, xenophobia, classism, sexism and misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of social inequality are all supported by ideologies that use language as a stand-in for social differences. Those who espouse these ideologies may deny that they have any prejudice or bigotry toward the group itself – but linguistic discrimination is discrimination nonetheless.

While language ideologies work to perpetuate the status quo, competing language ideologies that explicitly value and support the language use of less powerful groups can offer

SIDEBAR 11.3

For an example of how language ideologies have shaped spelling reform, see the Indonesian Language Profile, Section 12.4.1.

a challenge to these dominant beliefs. For example, in the hypothetical case described at the beginning of this chapter, the Mexican American student may negatively react to her white classmate's playful use of a Spanish greeting because Spanish speakers in the United States have faced a long and ongoing history of language-based discrimination and harassment. Many speakers from oppressed groups may have an

ideology of **linguistic ownership**, which views certain ways of speaking (whether individual words and phrases or entire languages) as cultural property that should not be lightly used by outgroup members.

This chapter explores these two intertwined social aspects of language: language use as a resource for displaying identity, and language ideologies as a means for reproducing or resisting power. Both of these aspects of language crucially involve **indexicality**, or the association of a linguistic form with a context-specific meaning (*to index* literally means 'to point to'). The indexical meaning of any given linguistic form is not arbitrary or necessarily agreed upon, but depends heavily on competing language ideologies that variously protect and challenge the power of dominant groups.

11.2 Linguistic Diversity and Language Variation

The interdisciplinary field of **sociocultural linguistics** investigates the vast range of interactional, social, cultural, and political (i.e., power-based) uses and meanings of language (the term *sociolinguistics* is also sometimes used in this broad sense as well as to refer to a more specific set of approaches to the study of language and society). The possibility of endowing

language use with social meaning depends on having more than one way of “saying the same thing,” and this in turn relies on two fundamental principles of sociocultural linguistics:

1. The principle of linguistic diversity: In most places around the world, it is typical and unremarkable for multiple languages to be used within a single community, by a single individual, within a single interaction, and sometimes within a single utterance.
2. The principle of language variation: Variability is inherent in language; that is, it is normal and expected for speakers to speak in different ways due to social, situational, linguistic, and other factors.

As a result of these two principles, all speakers possess a wealth of linguistic resources for carrying out their social and interactional goals in a variety of cultural contexts. However, in some societies, dominant language ideologies reject these fundamental linguistic principles. Textbox 11.1 discusses one such ideology.

TEXTBOX 11.1 THE MONOLINGUAL IDEOLOGY

In some countries, there is strong ideological resistance to the principle of linguistic diversity, particularly among people who speak only the politically dominant language. The ability to speak only one language is known as **monolingualism**. Although monolingualism is relatively unusual around the world, in nations with a strong monolingual ideology, speakers of nondominant languages may face disapproval, discrimination, and even criminalization. For example, in the United States, people who publicly converse with friends or family members in a language other than English

may be scolded by monolinguals who overhear them, and workplaces may restrict employees' use of other languages among themselves, even when this enables them to perform their work better. In several cases, parents who speak languages other than English have had their children removed from their care. Such discriminatory policies and practices have been ruled violations of civil rights by US courts. However, monolinguals' hostility to other languages remains a serious social problem in the United States and some other countries.

Even when a speaker is using the dominant language of a society, they cannot escape language ideologies. Most obviously, the prescriptive ideology that many people encounter in schools and other institutional contexts demands that all language users adhere to a single standard variety, but this requirement violates the principle of language variation (see Stop and Reflect 11.3).



STOP AND REFLECT 11.3 LANGUAGE WITHOUT VARIATION?

Is it possible for everyone to speak exactly the same way? Is it possible for an individual to speak the same way at all times? Is it desirable to do so? Before answering these questions, reflect on the role of language variation in your own life.

- Think of someone with whom you regularly interact who speaks the same language very differently from you. How would this person react if you tried to speak the way they did? How would you react if they tried to speak the way you do?
- Think of two different situations in which the way you speak varies depending on where you are, what you're talking about, and/or who you're talking to. How would people react if you didn't vary your language use across these situations?

Obviously, speakers of different languages communicate in different ways, but even when speaking the same language, different kinds of people tend to speak differently, and speakers who may seem to be quite similar socially do not always speak alike. Additionally, all speakers vary their speech both across contexts and within the same context, for social as well as linguistic reasons. For example, even in the same conversation a speaker might pronounce the verbal suffix *-ing* sometimes as [ɪn] (as in *I'm doin' homework*) and sometimes as [ɪŋ] (as in *I'm formulating a hypothesis*). In other words, speakers can differ not only in their use of an entire language or dialect but in their use of individual **linguistic features**, or specific forms at any linguistic level. A linguistic feature might be the pronunciation of a specific vowel or consonant (such as the pronunciation of the vowel in words like *half* and *bath* with [ɑ:] versus [æ]), the use of a particular grammatical structure (such as *I'm not* versus *I am not* versus *I ain't*), a certain lexical choice (such as *soda* versus *pop* versus *coke*), or a particular interactional practice (such as allowing or avoiding overlap between speaker turns). A key task of sociocultural linguistics is to systematically document these different ways of speaking and to explain their interactional, social, cultural, and political functions and meanings.

11.2.1 Linguistic Repertoires

One of the primary ways that individuals differ from one another with regard to language is in their **linguistic repertoires**: the full range of linguistic varieties that they are able to use to any degree. While in some communities most people are **monolingual** (see Textbox 11.1 above), most people in the world are **multilingual** and many communities around the world involve multilingualism (that is, the use of two or more languages). It may seem that those who know more than one language necessarily have wider repertoires than those who do not, but even monolinguals have multiple ways of speaking (see Stop and Reflect 11.4).



STOP AND REFLECT 11.4 LINGUISTIC REPERTOIRES

- What linguistic varieties (languages, dialects, styles) are in your own linguistic repertoire? When do you use each one?
- How does your repertoire compare to that of other members of your family?
- How does your repertoire compare to that of other residents of your city or region?
- How has your repertoire changed over time? How is it currently changing?

There may not be a widely recognized term for some of the varieties in your repertoire, and you may have resorted to creative labels such as *Chinglish* (for a way of speaking that combines elements of Chinese and English) or *skater speak* (for the way some speakers use language when talking about skateboarding). Varieties that are associated with the specialized activities of particular groups are often termed **registers**. Some registers are primarily used in professional or other formal settings, such as legal or religious contexts. Others, like the skater register, are much more informal, but they also involve special ways of speaking – in this case, related to the activity of riding a skateboard. Extremely informal registers may include the extensive use of **slang**, a set of rapidly changing lexical items

often associated with youth and casual social contexts. Many nonlinguists incorrectly use the term *slang* to refer to what are correctly termed *dialects* (or better, *varieties*). This misuse frequently reflects a language ideology that devalues varieties associated with socially marginalized groups. It is important to recognize that unlike slang, which primarily involves the lexicon, all dialects also include phonology and grammar. Thus, to label a variety as “slang” denies its structural complexity and systematicity.

11.2.2 Dialects and Style Shifting

Varieties considered to belong to the same language are often divided into dialects. Traditionally, the term **dialect** refers to a variety of a language that is characteristic of a group defined on the basis of a factor like geography (e.g., Egyptian Arabic), race or ethnicity (e.g., Turkish German), or social class (e.g., Cockney, the working-class variety of English spoken in London). Dialects are usually considered forms of the same language because they are generally **mutually intelligible**. Linguists’ use of the terms *language* and *dialect* therefore differs from the political (i.e., governmental) use of these terms. For example, Hindi, spoken in India, and Urdu, spoken in Pakistan, are now considered separate languages for political reasons and are written with different writing systems, although the spoken languages are mutually intelligible. Conversely, many languages of China, including Mandarin, Cantonese, and others, are often called dialects despite being mutually unintelligible in their spoken form, because their speakers are politically unified under a single government and they share a writing system. In addition, mutual intelligibility may be asymmetrical due to such factors as status differences between varieties, greater media availability in one variety, and individuals’ motivation to communicate with the other group. Thus, the distinction between a language and a dialect may be based on political or social factors rather than on linguistic factors, and the linguistic criterion of mutual intelligibility is not absolute. You may have discovered this for yourself if you have ever tried to speak to someone with a very different dialect from your own.

Like *slang*, the label *dialect* is often misapplied in ways that reveal negative language ideologies. Nonlinguists often erroneously apply the term *dialect* to languages without writing systems, such as many indigenous languages of the Americas and Africa. This usage stems from a colonial ideology that positions such languages as inferior to those with a written tradition. The term *dialect* tends to be used for those varieties of a language that are less prestigious due to the social devaluation of their speakers. But in fact **everybody speaks a dialect**. You may think you do not speak a dialect because you perceive your way of speaking as simply “normal,” but if you visit an area where another dialect is spoken you’ll quickly discover that you’re the one perceived as speaking a dialect! Some speakers are **bidialectal** (or multidialectal) – that is, fluent in two (or more) dialects – but no one has mastery over every existing variety of a given language.

It is also important to distinguish dialects from accents. While a dialect is a complete linguistic system that includes phonological, grammatical, and lexical characteristics, an **accent** involves only the phonological characteristics of a given variety. Although we tend to pay special attention to unfamiliar accents, there is no such thing as accentless speech. **Everyone has an accent** – that is, everyone’s speech has a particular set of phonological

features. As with the issue of dialect, it is sometimes said that someone “has an accent” when what is really meant is that the speaker’s phonology is noticeably different from that of the observer or of the surrounding community. Thus, which dialects or accents count as “normal” is a matter of social perception, not linguistic facts.

Some languages have a particular dialect that enjoys special status: the standard. The standard is not simply one dialect among others but a different linguistic phenomenon altogether. The **standard is an artificial linguistic variety that has been deliberately engineered to function as the prestige variety** and typically also as a wider means

SIDEBAR 11.4

For a detailed discussion of how a standard language was implemented for the purposes of nation-building, see the Indonesian Language Profile (LP12).

of written and spoken communication across social groups that speak different dialects. Unlike most dialects, which emerge from their everyday use by speakers, the standard is governed by prescriptive rules that are codified in dictionaries and traditional grammar books and imposed by authorities through the educational system and other means, often as a way to create a national identity across different ethnic or cultural groupings.

The standard may be based on the speech of elites, or it may be constructed out of several existing dialects, but strictly speaking, **no one truly speaks the standard**, because it is more an idealization – or, more accurately, an ideological construct – than a living variety.

One purpose of a standard is to freeze the language in place, but given the principle of language variation, this is an unnatural and impossible goal. In any case, only a tiny minority of the world’s languages has established a standard variety. Each English-speaking country has developed its own unofficial standard, but if you compare the speech of elites across the nation (such as members of Congress in the United States or news announcers in Britain), you’ll find a wide range of variation, especially at the phonological and lexical level. There are governmental or other entities that monitor language use, establish stand-

SIDEBAR 11.5

For discussion of the French organization that monitors language use, l’Académie française, see Textbox 13.1.

ard orthography (spelling), support the use of the standard, and issue official pronouncements regarding which linguistic forms are acceptable in institutional contexts such as the media and education. Inevitably, however, in everyday speech these policies are often disregarded. Such organizations exist for a wide range of languages. Although most focus on national and world languages like Spanish, Turkish, and Mandarin Chinese, others

work to overcome a history of marginalization, as in the case of Haitian Creole, and/or to revitalize endangered languages like Maori and Yiddish.

Linguists sometimes distinguish the standard, or prestige dialect, from the vernacular, or nonstandard speech. For example, a great deal of sociolinguistic research has found that middle-class speakers primarily use a more standard-like variety, while working-class speakers use a more vernacular variety. In most situations, however, it is more useful to think of the vernacular and the standard as varieties that are associated not simply with particular social groups but also with particular social situations. This view focuses on the speaker’s linguistic repertoire within a given language. From this perspective, the **vernacular** is the variety of a language that a speaker uses for ordinary, everyday interaction, such as with

close family members and peers. One implication of this definition is that, as with dialects and accents, *every speaker has a vernacular*; for any given speaker, the vernacular may be relatively standard or relatively nonstandard. While the vernacular is used in casual situations, in more formal contexts, speakers usually adjust their speech so that it more closely approaches the standard. This phenomenon of alternating between different varieties or styles of the same language based on the social context is termed **style shifting**.

Although all speakers regularly style-shift without conscious awareness, style shifting can also be used more deliberately to achieve particular communicative effects. This use of style shifting can be seen in the speech of Barack Obama. Both as a candidate and as president, Obama demonstrated a high degree of linguistic flexibility, which enabled him to navigate a difficult path as a Black politician who also needed to appeal to white voters.

When Obama was president-elect, he displayed this flexibility in a much-discussed interaction at a diner in Washington, DC. After Obama placed his order and paid the African-American cashier twenty dollars, the cashier asked if he needed change. “Nah, we straight,” he replied. This comment was perceived as a radical departure from Obama’s usual standard English speech style not only because of the use of the slang term *straight* ‘even, square’ and the casual pronunciation of *No* as *Nah*, but also because it involved African-American

English grammar, specifically the **zero copula**, or the optional absence of a copula form within a clause (compare *We’re straight* in other varieties of English). For Obama to style-shift in this public context was likely not simply an automatic adjustment to his setting and addressee but a deliberate indexing of his identity to voters on the eve of his inauguration: both as a regular guy who paid for his own lunch and generously tipped hard-working

Americans, and as an African American who was about to assume the most powerful office in the world but had not forgotten his ties to the Black community.

SIDEBAR 11.6

The use of the zero copula is further discussed in the African-American English Language Profile, Section LP11.3.2.

11.2.3 Multilingualism and Codeswitching

In addition to variation within a single language, which is characteristic of all languages, most communities also feature diversity across languages, with two, three, or more languages in regular use. Typically, these languages are not isolated from one another; rather, speaking more than one language enables people to communicate with those around them. Despite the monolingual ideology of the United States and most other English-speaking nations, as well as Japan, Korea, France, and many others, multilingualism is far more typical than monolingualism around the world, and it is widespread even in supposedly monolingual nations. India is an example of a highly multilingual nation, with over 400 living languages representing four major language families. In addition to the two official languages, Hindi and English, India officially recognizes twenty-two regional languages. Most speakers know at least two languages, and often more.

Multilingualism introduces an additional set of resources into speakers’ linguistic repertoires. In monolingual communities, linguistic repertoires are largely a matter of variation within a single language. In multilingual communities, a speaker’s repertoire may include two or more languages, and people may also have facility in multiple varieties

within each of these languages. Some US Latinxs of Puerto Rican heritage, for example, use Standard Puerto Rican Spanish, Nonstandard Puerto Rican Spanish, Standard American English, Puerto Rican English, and sometimes other regional or ethnoracial dialects such as New York English or African–American English as well. (Although for analytic purposes linguists may distinguish all of these as separate varieties, they may not be neatly separated from one another in practice, as discussed further below.) These varieties are all in wide use in Puerto Rican communities in the mainland United States, but individual speakers may have access to some varieties and not others depending on their background; for example, Puerto Ricans educated in the mainland United States who experienced English-only education may not have had the opportunity to learn spoken and written Standard Puerto Rican Spanish.

In many multilingual communities, speakers use each language in a particular physical context (e.g., English at work, Hindi at home). The use of two different languages or dialects according to social domain is called **diglossia**. Unlike style shifting, which may occur in a

SIDEBAR 11.7

For more discussion and examples of diglossia, see Section 13.3.

single situation based on topic or addressee, in diglossia, different varieties are used in different situations. In reality, however, the boundaries between domains often blur, and only in a few situations is a language more or less fully circumscribed by a specific domain of use. For instance, languages such as Classical Arabic, Classical Hebrew, and Sanskrit are generally restricted to

religious or scholarly contexts. As these examples suggest, in addition to different languages or dialects, diglossic situations also often involve special registers specific to each domain.

Multilingual speakers in many communities may have the additional ability to combine the languages they speak through **codeswitching**, or the use of two or more languages within a single interaction or utterance while conforming to the phonological and grammatical system of each language. A negative language ideology held by monolingual and multilingual speakers alike views codeswitching as “impure” language use, or as a sign that the speaker is not fluent in either language. The truth is that **only speakers who are fluent in two or more languages are able to engage in codeswitching**. Example (1) presents two illustrations of codeswitching between Cantonese and English by young adults in Hong Kong. Because of Hong Kong’s history as a British colony, college graduates are typically bilingual in English and Cantonese, the primary language of Hong Kong. (Following the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China, Mandarin has gained in prominence, and like English it is spoken by about half the population.)

- (1) (Source: Chen 2008: 61; slightly modified transcripts; English is marked in boldface)

a. Frank

ze m hai ngo m hang gong, ji hai ze hou lou sat gong ze e mou di

‘Not that I don’t want to speak, that is, very honestly speaking, that is without some

moderate *zung sing di get yan ze dou wui gok dak ngo hai deoi si*

moderate neutral sort of people would all feel that I am speaking of the matter

m deoijan ze o: zi gei personally ze o jau hou siu tai pin le ze o m wui

and it is not personal. I myself personally I seldom get too biased. I will not’

b. Kelly

*It doesn't matter how you deal with them, it doesn't matter who you are,
kei sat the way that you present yourself by lei go language*

'actually your

ji ging bei zo jat zung arrogant ge gam gok bei keoi dei le
already gives people an arrogant impression'

Codeswitching is triggered by multiple interactional factors, including the language used by the previous speaker, the speaker's goals (e.g., emphasis, disagreement), and the topic. In addition, codeswitching is shaped by complex linguistic factors. Codeswitches are of three general types: **insertion** (switching a lexical item within a single clause), alternation (switching between entire clauses), and **tag switching** (switching at a **discourse**

marker, a lexical item that is independent of the grammar of the clause but performs discourse-level or interactional functions). Because so many factors play a role in codeswitching, it is difficult to predict when a switch will occur, but it is often possible to explain the function of a switch after the fact (see Stop and Reflect 11.5).

SIDEBAR 11.8

For examples of discourse markers in English, see Textbox 7.5.

**STOP AND REFLECT 11.5 TYPES OF CODESWITCHES**

Find an example of each of the following in the data in (1).

- insertion switching
- alternation switching
- tag switching

Tip: Bear in mind that codeswitching involves switching both from Language A to Language B and from Language B to Language A.

Codeswitching should not be confused with types of language mixing that do not require fluent bilingualism. One such phenomenon is **interlanguage**, a characteristic of nonfluent language learners' speech in which structural elements of the learner's first language and second language are combined due to the learner's incomplete mastery of the second language. As part of interlanguage, language learners may mix languages because they are unable to sustain speech in their target language. Both structurally and functionally, codeswitching is entirely different from interlanguage. At the structural level, interlanguage often co-occurs with nonnative features within the second language. At the functional level, language learners use interlanguage because they lack sufficient knowledge of the target language and must fall back on their first language. By contrast, bilingual speakers codeswitch

purposefully, if not fully consciously, to achieve a wide variety of communicative goals, including to convey particular nuances of meaning, to create social connection, and to structure their discourse. Bilingual speakers sometimes report that they code-switch because they can't think of the right word in one of their

SIDEBAR 11.9

For further discussion of interlanguage, see Section 15.2.3.

languages, but research demonstrates that this sort of codeswitching as a “crutch” is in fact quite rare in fluent bilingual speech.

Another phenomenon that must be distinguished from codeswitching is **lexical borrowing**, a process of adding new vocabulary to a language that does not require any ability in the source language at all (though bilinguals as well as monolinguals may engage in lexical borrowing). Whereas in codeswitching, the phonological and grammatical systems of both languages are kept separate as the speaker moves from one language to the other, in

lexical borrowing, the borrowed lexical item is fully integrated phonologically and grammatically into the borrowing language. For example, Spanish speakers in the United States often incorporate lexical borrowings or **loanwords** from English into their speech, like *lonche* ‘lunch,’ *parquear* ‘to park,’ and *yarda* ‘yard.’ Conversely, monolingual English speakers use numer-

ous Spanish borrowings with English phonology and grammar, such as *alligator* (from *el lagarto* ‘the lizard’) or *burrito* (literally, ‘little donkey’), pronounced in English as [bəˈɪrɪoʊ] instead of Spanish [buˈrito]. Borrowing is a common result of linguistic and cultural contact between groups, but unlike codeswitching it does not require fluent bilingualism or even any knowledge of the language that is the source of the borrowing. (To explore codeswitching and borrowing further, see Stop and Reflect 11.6.)

SIDEBAR 11.10

For more on borrowings, including lexical borrowing, see Section 13.2.



STOP AND REFLECT 11.6 CODESWITCH OR LOANWORD?

What would you want to know in order to determine whether the English lexical items in Example (1) above are insertional switches or loanwords? In answering this question, consider how you know that a word such as *alligator* or *burrito* in English is a loanword and not a switch.

When linguists analyze these phenomena, they consider criteria such as the following:

- whether the words are pronounced according to the phonology of the source language (here, English) or the target language (here, Cantonese);
- whether the words are adapted into the grammatical structures of the target language;
- whether the words are understood even by monolingual speakers of the target language;
- whether the words are considered by the speakers themselves to be part of the target language.

(As it turns out, according to these criteria, all of the English words in Example (1) are part of codeswitching rather than borrowing.)

Finally, it is important to realize that not all bilinguals are able to codeswitch, and not all speakers who codeswitch do so in the same way. In Example (1a) above, Frank, who was educated in Hong Kong and has a “local” identity, follows the insertional codeswitching style typical of most young Hong Kongers. In Example (1b), Kelly, who was educated in the United States during her teen years and then returned to Hong Kong, has a “returnee” identity and combines insertion switching with alternation switching and tag switching. This returnee style of codeswitching is widely disparaged by local Hong Kongers as pretentious and overly Western. In fact, in Example (1b) Kelly is describing the negative ideologies of her local peers toward her returnee speech style. Although she tries to adapt to the local codeswitching style in order to fit in and make friends, she is not always fully aware of her switching (as is typical with codeswitching in general). And there is another reason why it

is difficult for Kelly to abandon her codeswitching style: it indexes her identity as a “world citizen,” as she puts it.

As Kelly’s situation demonstrates, how we use language is intimately tied to our identities, yet the identity we seek to project through language may not be what others perceive, depending on their own language ideologies.

11.2.4 From Codeswitching to Translanguaging

Although sociocultural linguistics provides analytic tools for identifying the contributions of different languages to interactions like Example (1), most of the time speakers are not focused on linguistic boundaries. Instead, speakers draw on their full linguistic repertoires to the extent possible in a given social context in order to achieve their communicative goals. In the case of bilingual speakers who engage in complex codeswitching practices, it has been argued that rather than trying to account for the function of each individual switch or seeking to classify a given term as a switch or a borrowing, linguists should recognize codeswitching or code mixing itself as a separate linguistic variety. In fact, bilingual speakers often do just that by coining terms such as *Spanglish* (Spanish and English), *Franglais* (French and English), and *Portuñol* or *Portunhol* (Portuguese and Spanish).

Some researchers take this idea even further, pointing out that speakers’ linguistic repertoires are made up of specific linguistic features that may not necessarily coincide with the boundaries between recognized languages and dialects. In any case, it is often not possible

to draw sharp boundaries between linguistic varieties, as seen in the earlier discussion of languages and dialects. Thus some researchers have argued for conceptualizing blended language practices as **translanguaging**, or a speaker’s use of features from their linguistic repertoire as a unified whole, regardless of the source of these features from a linguistic standpoint. On the one hand, translanguaging may be seen as a broader concept that includes style shifting, codeswitching, lexical borrowing, interlanguage, and more. On the other hand, it offers an alternative to all of these concepts by examining language use from

SIDEBAR 11.11

Language contact, the study of how languages influence each other when their speakers are in contact, is the topic of Chapter 13; creoles, new languages which arise from language mixing, are discussed in Section 13.4.

a unitary perspective rather than focusing on linguistic boundaries. In this way, the concept of translanguaging challenges linguists’ own language identities by reminding us that ***what we call languages and dialects aren’t straightforward linguistic realities but are social and political constructs that may not reflect speakers’ own identities as language users.***

11.2.5 Linguistic Activism and Sociolinguistic Justice

As we have seen, language users from many different nondominant groups are frequent targets of negative language ideologies. One way that linguists combat these ideologies is by carrying out and sharing scientific research that corrects these widespread misperceptions. However, because language ideologies aren’t fundamentally about language but about struggles between powerful and subordinated social groups, simply doing good research isn’t enough. For this reason, a growing number of linguists – including many sociocultural

linguists – engage in **linguistic activism**, or direct action to challenge language-based social inequality. These linguists often work in partnership with – and frequently as members of – communities facing linguistic oppression, such as immigrant groups, indigenous communities, and groups with marginalized racial, ethnic, sexual, gender, or religious identities. Linguistic activism can involve advocating for more equitable institutional policies and practices, supporting speakers' use of their full linguistic repertoires, ensuring that language accurately reflects individual and group identities, and preserving varieties threatened by dominant languages (see Textbox 11.2). The goal of this activist work is **sociolinguistic justice**, or self-determination for linguistically subordinated individuals and groups in struggles over language. In the next section, we will further explore issues of identity, ideology, and social inequality in relation to language.

TEXTBOX 11.2 LEARNING MORE ABOUT LINGUISTIC ACTIVISM

The following blogs by sociocultural linguists provide more information about issues related to linguistic activism and sociolinguistic justice.

- The Educational Linguist, by Nelson Flores
<https://educationallinguist.wordpress.com>
Critiques the racial politics of language ideologies and the harm these ideologies inflict on students of color.
 - Language on the Move, by Ingrid Piller
www.languageonthemove.com
- Explores a wide range of issues of language and social inequality with a focus on linguistic diversity.
 - Trans Talk, by Lal Zimman
www.medium.com/TransTalk
Discusses the role of language in the experiences of transgender, non-binary, and gender-non-conforming people.

11.3 Variation, Ideology, and Identity

Unlike switching between languages, which is often very noticeable to others, most variability within an individual language is not noticed at all. It is impossible to produce a given utterance, word, or even phoneme in exactly the same way each time we speak, and this constant linguistic variability goes unremarked most of the time. Yet all speakers constantly use variation to position themselves as particular kinds of people, to take specific stances in interactions with others, and to establish certain kinds of relationships. As a result, a particular social meaning often comes to be attached to a particular linguistic form. A linguistic feature that varies either across speakers or in the speech of a single speaker is called a **sociolinguistic variable**, and the alternate forms that this variable takes in speech are called **sociolinguistic variants**. Over time, some variants may catch on while others disappear. Through this process, **variation is the source of language change**.

An illustration of the relationship between linguistic variation, language change, and social meaning can be seen in the case of the pronunciation of /r/ after a vowel, or **postvocalic /r/**, in the history of English, as described by researcher Thomas Paul Bonfiglio. The **rhotic** variant of postvocalic /r/ is pronounced as [ɹ], while the **nonrhotic** variant is pronounced as a vowel. In unstressed syllables this vowel is often [ə], as in *better* ['betə]

(or [ˈbetə], depending on the dialect), while in stressed syllables the vowel is an offglide or lengthening of the preceding vowel, as in *car* [kʰɑː]. In the eighteenth century the nonrhotic pronunciation emerged in Cockney, the variety of the London working class. This pronunciation, though initially stigmatized, eventually became trendy among the middle and upper classes of London and among American elites on the East Coast and in the South who emulated English fashions. Until the early twentieth century, the US Midwestern rhotic pronunciation was often seen by nonrhotic speakers as provincial and harsh or aggressive. But the indexicality of rhoticity in the United States changed with the arrival of Eastern and Southern European immigrants in East Coast cities and the northern migration of African Americans, all of whom used the nonrhotic pronunciation. Owing to racism, this form took on a new, negative meaning in the eyes of the middle-class white population. Consequently, the rhotic pronunciation associated with white Midwesterners gained status. The nonrhotic pronunciation continues to decline in the United States even among groups that have traditionally used it, despite remaining prestigious in much of the English-speaking world.

The example of postvocalic /r/ illustrates several important points regarding language variation:

1. The speech of non-elite groups, not the elite, drives linguistic innovation and change.
2. Linguistic variation leads to systematic changes in the language when certain sociolinguistic variants gain ground over alternatives.
3. Sociolinguistic variants often come to index particular social groups and their ideologically associated traits, enabling speakers to use those variants to stake out specific identities.
4. A sociolinguistic variant may have different indexicalities for different groups or in different contexts, and indexicalities also change over time.
5. Linguistic forms do not have any inherent social meaning or social value. Instead, their status is based on how the speakers who use them are socially perceived and evaluated.

Language variation and change, then, are closely connected to processes of social identity, cultural ideology, and power and inequality.

The relationship between language and identity has been understood in different ways within different strands of sociocultural linguistics. In the **correlationist** tradition, researchers have sought to discover the social meaning of linguistic structures by finding correlations between social categories and the use of particular sociolinguistic variants.

SIDEBAR 11.12

For more on the ways language variation and change are connected to processes of social identity and cultural ideology, see Chapter 13.

From this perspective, language reflects social identities: we speak as we do because of who we are. For example, linguists have long known that working-class speakers are more likely than middle-class speakers to use [ɪn] rather than [ɪŋ] in verb forms like *talking*, *running*, and *sleeping*. In this approach, speakers' social categories are used to predict which linguistic forms they will use and to explain why they made these choices. In

the correlationist view, language is seen as reflecting social identities: the starting point of linguistic analysis in this approach is speakers' social category membership, which is used to explain a given linguistic phenomenon.

However, many sociocultural linguists now see the relationship between language and identity from the reverse perspective. Rather than using social categories to explain language, we can look to language use to gain insight into how people want to be perceived by others. According to the **constructionist** view, *language creates social identities*. By speaking in particular ways (such as by saying *runnin'* more often than *running*), we index our identities as particular kinds of people (such as working-class rather than middle-class), and those who hear us speak make inferences about our background, our abilities, and even our personalities based on the linguistic forms we use.

These inferences may either support or undermine our own goals for how we wish to be seen, since both speakers and hearers are actively engaged in how language is used and socially interpreted. In addition, language is not understood simply as a mirror reflecting preexisting categories of identity to which the speaker passively belongs. Instead, language is a vehicle for social action, as speakers use linguistic structures to lay claim to a desired set of social characteristics and listeners accept or challenge these identity claims. In this process, speakers and hearers rely on culturally shared understandings of how various social groups speak.

11.3.1 Language, Gender, and Sexuality

The tension between identity and ideology in language use is especially evident in the linguistic study of gender and sexuality. Research in this area has been closely connected to the work of activists concerned with gender inequality in language. The feminist study of language and gender was established in the midst of the women's movements of the 1970s, and early research focused on critical analyses of androcentrism, a perspective that treats men as the default, unmarked type of human. One way in which androcentrism is reflected and reinforced linguistically is the use of the **generic masculine**, in which a masculine linguistic form is used to refer to an unspecified person or group, as exemplified in older expressions like *Man's inhumanity to man* and *To each his own*. Some English speakers continue to prefer *he* as a generic pronoun (rather than *she*, *they*, or *she or he*), despite objections that such language marginalizes those who don't identify as male.

The generic masculine is widespread in languages with **grammatical gender**, a system for categorizing nouns into two, three, or more classes which are marked by grammatical agreement on words of other categories. (For languages with many such classes, the term "noun class" is typically used rather than "grammatical gender.") Grammatical gender systems generally

place women in one class and men in another, with the social expectation that so-called feminine forms will be used in reference to women and masculine forms in reference to men. The generic masculine is found in languages like French, Hebrew, and Hindi, where masculine grammatical forms are used for nonspecific referents and when referring to groups of mixed gender. It is rare for

SIDEBAR 11.13

Systems of grammatical gender are introduced in Section 5.2.

a language to use generic feminine forms, although some examples exist, such as Tunisian Arabic. And linguistic innovations have been proposed to avoid gender marking altogether (as illustrated by the use of *Latinx* instead of the generic masculine form *Latino* in this chapter).

While struggles over the generic masculine are ongoing, in English generic masculine forms are becoming much less common, as gender-neutral substitutes have been made (e.g., *committee chair* replacing *committee chairman*). Other relatively successful gender-related language

reforms include the introduction of *Ms.* as a title that can be applied to women regardless of their marital status. However, changes promoted by those concerned with sexism, homophobia, and transphobia in language continue to be hot-button issues in the public sphere.



STOP AND REFLECT 11.7 GENDER- AND SEXUALITY-RELATED LANGUAGE REFORM IN ENGLISH

Language change often occurs without speakers' awareness, but when language perpetuates problematic ideologies, people may take an active interest in changing how we use it. Think about the following examples:

- Some speakers use the word *bitch* as a verb meaning 'complain.' It is also used as a derogatory term for a woman. Some people see both uses of *bitch* as contributing to sexism against women.
- The use of *they* as a generic pronoun to refer to a single person has a long history in English, including use by celebrated authors such as Jane Austen, Lewis Carroll, and William Shakespeare. Prescriptivists may argue that singular *they* is ungrammatical and should not be used, but some individuals with trans and/or nonbinary gender identities identify with the pronoun *they* rather than *she* or *he*.
- Over the past century, the word *gay* has shifted from meaning 'happy' to being the most common term to refer to people (especially men) who are attracted to others of the same gender. Following that change, the word began to be used by younger speakers as a general term of negative evaluation (e.g., *That's so gay*, meaning 'That's stupid/uncool').

What arguments might language activists make in response to these issues? Why do you think these debates become intensely heated? Would a sociocultural linguist be more likely to see these as matters of prescriptivism or of sociolinguistic justice?

Early feminist linguists argued that gender inequality in language arises not only in grammar but also in how women and men speak, or at least in how they are thought to speak (see Textbox 11.3).

TEXTBOX 11.3 "WOMEN'S LANGUAGE": LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY OR LINGUISTIC REALITY?

A much-discussed book by Robin Lakoff, originally published in 1975, proposed that women's language is characterized by features of what she considered powerless speech, including the following:

1. Special terminology related to "women's work" such as color terms like *magenta* or words related to activities like sewing.
2. "Empty" adjectives like *divine*, *charming*, *cute*, etc.
3. Indicators of questions on declarative utterances: tag questions ("It's so hot, isn't it?") and rising intonation in statement contexts ("What's your name, dear?" "Mary Smith?")
4. Hedges like *well*, *y'know*, *kinda*, etc.
5. The use of intensifier *so*
6. Hypercorrect grammar

7. Superpolite forms
8. Women don't tell jokes
9. Women speak in italics [i.e., use frequent emphatic stress]

(Lakoff [1975] 2004: 78–81)

Other researchers sought to test these claims in the speech of women and men, with mixed results. Linguists now understand that the notion of "women's language" is not necessarily a description of the speech of all (or most, or any) women, but rather a language ideology regarding how women are expected to speak – or suffer the social consequences if they do not. Lakoff herself recognized the ideological power of "women's language" in restricting women's behavior and opportunities. It may seem that this decades-old ideology is no longer relevant, and it

TEXTBOX 11.3 (cont.)

is certainly true that some of the characteristics of conventionally feminine language use have changed over time, as cultural ideologies of femininity have

changed. However, ideologies about how women and men “should” speak and act are still with us, as is the underlying ideology of gender as fixed and binary.

Many ideologies about supposed differences in the language use of women and men focus on discourse practices. These ideologies portray women as more cooperative, social, and attuned to their interlocutors’ needs, while men are characterized as competitive, informative, and attuned to their interlocutors’ status. For example, men are often said to interrupt more often than women because of their need to demonstrate dominance. Women, by contrast, are frequently said to talk more than men because of their interest in building and maintaining social relationships. Although there are certainly women and men whose behavior seems to fit these expectations, empirical study presents a more complex picture.

Comparing whether women or men talk more, for instance, requires us to decide how to quantify speech – for instance, do we count the number of words used, the amount of time spent speaking, how many separate ideas are expressed, or how many turns a person takes in a conversation? Next, we need to decide whether to account for differences in the type of talk – for instance, do supportive comments like “mhm,” “I see,” and “wow” inserted into another person’s stream of talk count in the same way a statement expressing new information would? Furthermore, we have to consider how the context of our observations plays a role in the results; when people claim that women talk more, they tend to have in mind social peers engaging in intimate conversations, not necessarily the more formal, institutionalized talk that happens in classrooms, boardrooms, or courtrooms. Often what researchers of language, gender, and sexuality find is not that women speak one way and men speak another, but that women and men are often inclined – or permitted – to do different things with language in different contexts because of differences in gender-based power (consider, for example, Hillary Clinton’s language during her 2016 US presidential campaign versus Donald Trump’s language).


STOP AND REFLECT 11.8 CURRENT IDEOLOGIES OF “WOMEN’S LANGUAGE”

- When you imagine a woman who would be likely to use features of “women’s language,” as described in Textbox 11.3, what type of woman do you picture? What characteristics other than gender seem important, such as age, class, race or ethnicity, or sexuality?
- In your opinion, which of the features listed in Textbox 11.3 are still associated with women? Why does this association persist?
- In your opinion, which of the features index social meanings other than (or in addition to) their association with women? Why might they have these meanings?
- Can you think of linguistic features not listed here that are currently associated with women (or with certain kinds of women)? How might they have come to have this association?

Despite such ideologies about how women and men speak (or should speak), there is in fact a great deal of variability in the speech of each gender and a great deal of similarity across the genders. Even when linguists do feel able to make generalizations about gender, these are by no means straightforward: For example, correlationist studies have found that women lead sound changes by making greater use of innovative vernacular variants, but that they often have more conservative, standard speech when it comes to stigmatized vernacular variants.

Ultimately, though, ***it is almost impossible to generalize about how women or men speak***. This is because gender looks – and sounds – very different depending on how it intersects with other identities like sexual orientation, ethnicity and race, or socioeconomic class. What it means to be a person with a particular gender identity, a person of color, or a teenager differs substantially depending on the multiple communities and identities that speakers negotiate as well as the experiences of power or oppression associated with those identities. An individual's or group's experience of multiple simultaneous forms of marginalization and oppression based on social categories is known as **intersectionality**, and this experience may affect language production and perception. (Textbox 11.4 on p. 278 provides an example of intersectionality.) An intersectional perspective on identity moves us away from the quest for differences between women and men and toward a more holistic and contextualized view of speakers' identities.

11.3.2 Styles and Communities of Practice

The shift from correlationist to constructionist perspectives on language and gender has led to changes in the way sociocultural linguists think about variation. Older models of style shifting and language change framed variability as largely determined by a speaker's demographics along with factors such as social context, but today sociocultural linguists tend to be more attuned to the way speakers exert agency by making linguistic choices that position them socially.

Demographic categories like gender are central to how we are perceived by others, but more important to our own identities and hence to our language use are the social groupings that we orient to in everyday life. These social groupings are sometimes termed **communities of practice**, or social groups that jointly engage in culturally meaningful activities. Communities of practice include families, friendship groups, teams and clubs, professional and community-based organizations, and any other group that undertakes a shared effort. In accounting for speakers' language use, membership in different communities of practice may override shared demographic membership. Thus the community of practice model helps us understand why it is so difficult to make generalizable claims about whether women tend to be more standard or more vernacular than men.

For example, a classic study done by Penelope Eckert in the 1980s in a largely white suburban high school near Detroit, Michigan, found a sharp distinction between “jocks” and “burnouts.” Jocks were clean-cut, dressed in bright or pastel colors and trendy “preppy” styles, were college-bound, and participated in sports, student council, and other school-sponsored activities. Meanwhile, burnouts wore non-trendy dark clothing, were rebellious or disengaged from school, smoked cigarettes, and planned to find jobs in the

local community after high school. Linguistically, burnouts used more nonstandard grammar (specifically, **negative concord**, or the marking of negation in more than one possible grammatical position, as in *They didn't never do nothing to help*), and they also outpaced the jocks in some elements of a sound change in progress in the vowel system of the Detroit area. Previous correlationist studies of variation and language change would lead us to expect that girls would be leading this sound change while boys would make more frequent use of negative concord. However, the way these variables patterned with respect to gender ended up interacting with the locally meaningful categories of jock and burnout. For example, it was the "burned-out burnout girls" (that is, girls who got into the most trouble at school) who were the most advanced participants in some parts of the sound change, particularly the raising of the central vowel in the diphthong /aɪ/. The most extreme raised variant is [ʌɪ], so that *fight* sounds almost like "foight" and *all-nighter* sounds similar to "all-noighter" (a slang term used by burnouts to refer to staying out all night partying). The female jocks, while they led the sound change relative to male jocks, made much less use of the innovative variant than either female or male burnouts.

Figure 11.1 presents in visual form the correlation of combined speaker gender and social category with the extreme raising of /aɪ/. The numbers, derived from statistical calculations that are widely used for analyzing sociolinguistic variation, are probability values for the use of the innovative raised pronunciation by each group of speakers. Numbers above 0.5 indicate that the change is favored in that group; numbers below 0.5 indicate that the change is disfavored in that group. The differences between the five speaker groups are all highly statistically significant.

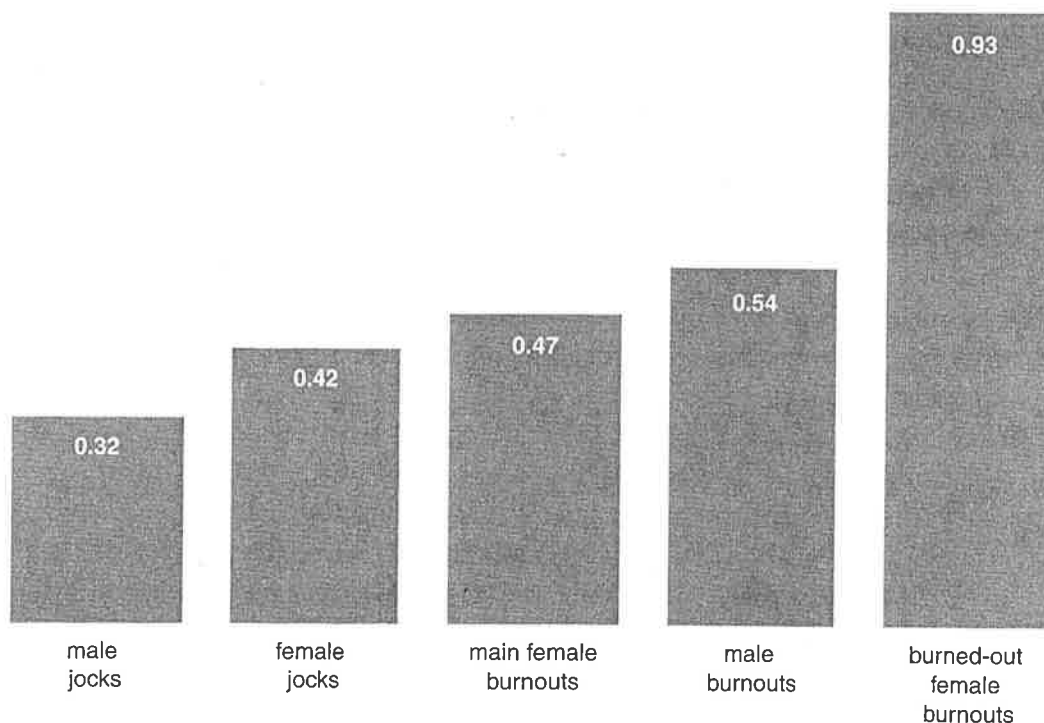


Figure 11.1 Extreme raising of /aɪ/, combining gender and social category, separating two clusters of burnout girls (adapted from Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995: 503)

The figure shows that jocks mostly tended not to use the new pronunciation, regardless of gender, and that among the burnouts, most girls had a slight tendency to avoid it. Even burnout boys as a group only slightly favored the innovative variant. By contrast, the burned-out burnout girls were the clear leaders in the use of raised /a/. It seems that this variant was especially important for burned-out burnout girls in indexing a tough, rebellious identity. It isn't that the burnout girls were less feminine than the female jocks – or, for that matter, than the male jocks. Rather, they were adhering to a different set of local norms for how girls should speak.

The example of the jocks and burnouts demonstrates that although we may be tempted to sort speakers into simple demographic boxes, such as “white suburban high school girl” or “African–American lesbian professional,” speakers often work hardest to distinguish themselves from others to whom they seem similar. This is shown in a study of sociolinguistic variation among Beijing professionals in the 1990s, as China shifted toward a global market economy. State employees tended to use local phonological variants, including adding a rhotic quality to syllable-final vowels, a feature that indexed a smooth, streetwise identity. Meanwhile, employees of similar backgrounds with equivalent positions at transnational corporations used full tones in unstressed syllables, a characteristic of the Hong Kong and Taiwan dialects of Mandarin but not of Beijing Mandarin; this feature was viewed by locals as a cosmopolitan, “yuppie” way of speaking. Such research shows that it is largely through their language use that seemingly similar groups are able to differentiate themselves from one another.



STOP AND REFLECT 11.9 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

- What local communities of practice were important in your own high school or in the town or city where you grew up? Did any communities of practice define themselves partly in contrast to other groups?
- How did members of each group index their identities both linguistically and in other ways (such as clothing, activities, or attitudes)?
- How did people change community of practice membership or manage to belong to multiple communities of practice at the same time?

Linguistic researchers of communities of practice do not simply focus on language use. They also examine such issues as how speakers dress, what activities they engage in, their goals and attitudes, and their orientation to larger social and cultural forms (e.g., school, global culture). In short, they look broadly at the locally available categories of **style**, or socially distinctive ways of doing things. Communities of practice are often characterized by distinctive styles. Although clothing, activities, attitudes, and the like are all important dimensions of style, language is an especially valuable resource for aligning oneself with some social groups and distinguishing oneself from others. **Every aspect of the way we talk indexes information about our identities.** At the same time, this information is not accessible to everyone. The social meaning of our style often requires insider knowledge – such as residence in a local community or attendance at a particular high school – in order to be correctly recognized and interpreted. The issue of interpretation is especially important given the multiple social meanings that a linguistic form can index.

TEXTBOX 11.4 THE INTERSECTION OF SEXUALITY AND IMMIGRATION IN DANISH

Sociocultural linguists are interested in both the production and the perception of social meaning. One area of particular interest to perception researchers is sexuality. Speakers of several languages, including English, Spanish, Japanese, and Danish, have been shown to be more likely to view men as gay if they produce /s/ with a slightly fronted place of articulation compared to men who are perceived as straight. (This perception is associated with the widespread ideology that gay men have a distinctive “lisp,” although a fronted pronunciation is not the same as lisping.) However, the connection between sexuality and /s/ is complicated when we consider how sexuality intersects with other aspects of identity. In Danish, a fronted /s/ indexes not only gay men but also speakers of a variety known as “street Danish” that is associated with immigrant youth. In a tightly controlled experiment, a team of Danish linguists found that listeners were more likely to hear a speaker of standard Copenhagen

Danish as “gay” when a fronted /s/ was present. However, for listeners who thought they were listening to a speaker of “street Danish” (based on a distinctive type of intonation used in that variety), the presence of a fronted /s/ had no effect on the perception of the speaker’s sexuality. In short, the perception of a variant as having a specific social meaning (such as “gay”) depends on the other linguistic features that accompany it.

It appears that these listeners were influenced by social ideologies about sexuality, race and ethnicity, and immigration. In Denmark (and most Western nations), the prototypical gay person is a white non-immigrant. This perception is due to listeners’ failure to consider the possibility of an intersectional identity – for instance, that a speaker could be both gay and an immigrant. Lack of awareness of intersectionality may make it more difficult for listeners to hear the voice of an immigrant as the voice of a gay man.

11.3.3 Stances, Personas, and Identities

Although social categories like race and ethnicity, gender, and sexuality are constructed through language use, speakers do not make their linguistic choices simply to signal that they are women, that they are in their forties, that they come from a working-class family, or that they are bisexual. More often, speakers are focused on how to position themselves at multiple levels within specific interactions.

To begin with, depending on the situation and the other participants, we enact a variety of social and cultural roles, such as teacher, sibling, or best friend. The **relational roles** we perform imply a certain set of social rights, obligations, relationships, and areas of expertise that influence the way we speak in particular contexts. Moreover, throughout social interaction we rapidly take up and abandon temporary roles such as narrator, joke-teller, or question-answerer. These **interactional roles** allow us to engage in specific linguistic activities within social interaction. In addition, each time we speak we also position ourselves toward what we are saying and toward our interlocutors. Such positionings, or **stances**, linguistically enact our attitude at any given moment. Finally, through the way we enact all of these categories, community memberships, roles, and stances we create **personas** (or personae). Personas are social types associated with specific personal attributes and/or broader social groups. For example, we may present ourselves as “bubbly,” “aggressive,” or “laid-back,” attributes that may be ideologically associated with social groups like “cheerleader,” “lawyer,” or “hippie,” which in turn may be tied to locally meaningful styles or broader social categories of race, gender, social

class, and the like. Speakers can index many different kinds of identity all at the same time: demographic categories, styles based in local communities of practice, relational social and cultural roles, interactional roles, stances, and personas. This wide range of identity positions necessarily requires speakers to use an equally wide range of linguistic (as well as nonlinguistic) resources to index themselves as particular kinds of people in a given situation.

This point is illustrated in a case study of the speech of a gay white American medical student, Heath. Heath's use of a falsetto (i.e., extremely high-pitched) voice quality for expressive purposes was measured in three different social contexts: with his friends at a barbecue, on the telephone with his father, and during a medical consultation with an elderly patient. The results showed that Heath's speech to his friends involved a falsetto voice that was not only more frequent than in other contexts (see Table 11.2), but also of longer duration and of broader pitch variability, and used in a wider variety of utterance types. The researcher argued that Heath uses falsetto to create a flamboyant "diva" persona but that he does so not simply because he is gay – after all, many gay men do not adopt this sort of persona, and Heath himself does not always do so. Rather, the use of falsetto to construct a diva persona is specific to this particular speaker in a particular context. Identity, then, is not simply a static category but an ever-changing image that we produce through language and other practices.

TABLE 11.1 Frequency of falsetto occurrence in Heath's speech across situations (adapted from Podesva 2007: 486)

	Barbecue	Phone	Patient
Number of falsetto utterances	35	10	15
Total number of utterances	386	260	403
Percent falsetto utterances	9.07	3.85	3.72

All of the categories, styles, roles, stances, and personas we inhabit, whether temporary or more durable, together constitute our identities, because they comprise the variety of ways that we position ourselves and are positioned by others within the social world. Thus, although identity is often thought of as a psychological phenomenon, it is more fundamentally a social and interactional process, constructed and negotiated every time we engage with others, based on our own and others' language ideologies. A speaker may say *talkin'* instead of *talking* in order to sound casual but instead be perceived as uneducated; they may swear to convey strong feeling and instead be perceived as unladylike (if female-identified) or as appropriately tough and masculine (if male-identified); they may use translanguaging practices in order to show solidarity with other bilinguals and instead be perceived as unable to speak either language well. Sociocultural linguistics offers us a wealth of analytic concepts and tools for closely examining language as perhaps the most basic and pervasive way that we display identity.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Language is more than a tool for communicating information or accomplishing immediate interactional goals; it is also a resource for creating social meaning, a marker of who we are and how we want to be seen by others, and a site of struggles for power on the one hand and social justice on the other. In this chapter, we have seen that the principle of linguistic diversity and the principle of language variation together make possible the numerous social functions that language plays in our lives. Linguistic resources may be used to position the speaker as a particular kind of person in a particular social context. Likewise, language may be used to display social identities at multiple levels, from brief interactional stances to more enduring personas and categories. However, as speakers we are not entirely free to create whatever identity we want using whatever kind of language we want. We are constrained by our own linguistic repertoires, as well as by language ideologies that may lead others to interpret our language use negatively or inaccurately. At the same time, language ideologies are not entirely rigid and can be challenged or changed through individual and collective action. In so doing, we create new ways of linguistically positioning ourselves and others within our social worlds.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Alim, H. Samy, and Geneva Smitherman. 2012. *Articulate while Black: Barack Obama, language, and race in the U.S.* New York: Oxford University Press.

An engaging discussion of the politics and practices of African-American English as viewed through the language use of the first Black president of the United States.

Bell, Allan. 2014. *The guidebook to sociolinguistics.* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

This introductory textbook provides an overview of key topics in linguistic diversity and language variation while also offering a guide for student research.

Ehrlich, Susan, Miriam Meyerhoff, and Janet Holmes (eds.). 2014. *The handbook of language, gender, and sexuality*, 2nd edn. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

The second edition of a key resource for current research on language, gender, and sexuality.

García, Ofelia, Nelson Flores, and Massimiliano Spotti (eds.). 2017. *The Oxford handbook of language and society.* New York: Oxford University Press.

An authoritative reference to many different issues in sociocultural linguistics, with an emphasis on critiquing power and inequality.

Piller, Ingrid. 2016. *Linguistic diversity and social justice: An introduction to applied sociolinguistics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The first textbook to focus on the use of sociolinguistic research to advance social justice.

EXERCISES

1. Classify the following pairs as *different languages*, as *different dialects of the same language*, or as *the same variety*. Why might nonlinguists and linguists come up with different answers in some cases? (You may need to do some internet research to reach a decision in some cases.)

- Salvadoran Spanish and Castilian
- Dutch and Pennsylvania Dutch
- Dutch and Afrikaans
- Farsi and Persian
- Gullah and Geechee
- Haitian Creole and French
- Indonesian and Malay
- Taiwanese and Mandarin
- Silacayoapan Mixtec and Coatzacoapan Mixtec
- Yiddish and German

2. The following passage is taken from an interview that Carmen Fought (2003: 159) conducted with a 45-year-old bilingual Mexican American man.

- i. Classify the type of each codeswitch from English to Spanish in the data. (Spanish portions are marked with italics in the passage.)

Original: But I am the only one that came out *músico*. My- all my brothers were into sports, basketball, baseball, *y todo*, and I couldn't do that. *No me gustaban*. I could, you know, play *y todo*, *pero a mí me gustaba más la guitarra*.

Translation: But I am the only one that came out *a musician*. My- all my brothers were into sports, basketball, baseball, *and everything*, and I couldn't do that. *I didn't like them*. I could, you know, play *and everything*, *but I liked the guitar more*.

- músico*
- y todo*
- No me gustaban*.
- y todo, pero a mí me gustaba más la guitarra*

- ii. Based on the above excerpt, how would you argue against the language ideology that codeswitching indicates that the speaker is not fluent in either language?
- iii. Why might some linguists argue that this use of Spanish and English constitutes a unified whole rather than a combination of two separate systems?

3. Match each of the examples in a–e with the appropriate term in (a)–(e).

- I have twenty-one years.* (= *I'm twenty-one years old.*)
 - Ungewöhnliche Hobbys* ('Unconventional hobbies,' the subject line of a discussion thread on a German dating site)
 - I dun have lah!* ('I really don't have it!' said by one Singaporean person to another)
 - Aljuab Khata'a, sorry* ('The answer is wrong, sorry,' a Facebook comment by an Arabic-English bilingual in Australia)
 - "I chuned him, 'Let's chuck.' "* ('I told him, "Let's go,"' said by a South African speaker of Indian descent. Note: *chun* is from the British English pronunciation of *tune*.)
- slang
 - translanguaging
 - lexical borrowing
 - interlanguage
 - tag switching




4. Consider each of the following linguistic features and then answer the questions (i) to (iii).
- a. The choice of an adverbial intensifier (i.e., a word that strengthens the meaning of an adjective) in a sentence like "Taylor is _____ nice."
 - (a) *quite* (e) *totally*
 - (b) *really* (f) *very*
 - (c) *so* (g) *hella*
 - (d) *super*
 - b. The pronunciation of intervocalic /t/ as [t], [ɾ], or [ʔ] in words like *better*, *pretty*, and *seated*.
 - i. Brainstorm as many aspects of identity as you can that might be associated with each variant. Consider demographic categories, communities of practice, social and cultural roles, interactional roles, stances, and personas.
 - ii. Do some variants have more associations for you than others? What language ideologies may underlie some of these associations?
 - iii. Discuss your answers with a classmate. Do you both agree on the indexicalities of each variant? Do any of the indexicalities seem to be related?
5. For each of the following situations, what issues of linguistic ownership, if any, might arise? Support your answers by referring to the concepts introduced in this chapter.
- a. the use of African-American English by a Nigerian rapper
 - b. the use of African-American English by a Finnish rapper
 - c. the use of English between a Portuguese-speaking sales clerk and a Chinese-speaking customer in Brazil
 - d. the use of the term *queer* as a slur by a straight person
 - e. the use of the term *queer* as a term of self-identification among LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) people
 - f. the use of slang from LGBT communities of color (e.g. *throw shade*, 'criticize or insult someone, usually indirectly') by white straight fans of the US reality television show *RuPaul's Drag Race*
6. Table 11.2 shows a partial selection of first-person and second-person pronouns used in Japanese, a language in which pronouns are typically grammatically optional. Take note of the different meanings associated with each pronoun.
- i. Compare the Japanese pronoun system with the pronoun system in English or another language that you know. What kind of information is encoded or omitted in each system?
 - ii. What social functions do pronouns seem to play for speakers of Japanese compared to speakers of the other language? Given that pronouns are often optional in Japanese, why do speakers use them at all?
 - iii. What are some possible social or cultural reasons the Japanese pronoun system works the way it does? What kinds of linguistic reform might some speakers advocate?
7. Not all speakers of languages with grammatical gender adhere to the norm of mapping grammatical gender onto social gender. One example of a group that alternates between feminine and masculine grammatical forms is a transgender group in India known as hijras. Hijras are typically assigned to the male gender at birth but describe their identities and bodies as neither female nor male. Hindi, one of the languages spoken by hijras, has extensive grammatical gender marking. Although hijras usually use feminine grammatical forms for themselves, at times they refer to themselves or one another with masculine forms.

TABLE 11.2 Japanese first-person and second-person pronouns

Pronoun	Person	Formality	Gender norms	Other traits
<i>watakushi</i>	1	Very formal	Women and men	Unmarked formal pronoun
<i>watashi</i>	1	Both formal and informal	Women and men	Informal use associated with women
<i>atashi</i>	1	Informal	Usually women (esp. younger)	Conversational, rarely written
<i>boku</i>	1	Informal	Usually men (esp. boys)	In use by some younger women; can be perceived as humble
<i>ore</i>	1	Informal	Usually men	Sometimes seen as rude, can index intimacy between interlocutors
<i>otaku</i>	2	Formal	Women and men	Also used among self-identified nerds and obsessive fans
<i>anata</i>	2	Formal and informal	Women and men	Often used to refer to generic 'you,' e.g., in commercials
<i>kimi</i>	2	Informal	Women and men	Affectionate when used among peers, often along with <i>boku</i>
<i>omae</i>	2	Very informal	Usually men	Used by older or higher-status speakers
<i>kisama</i>	2	Rude	Usually men	Historically highly formal, now used sarcastically to indicate lack of respect

Examine the following utterances from Hindi-speaking hijras in which masculine forms are used (slightly modified from a study by Kira Hall and Veronica O'Donovan). What are some possible reasons the speakers use masculine grammatical forms in these utterances, given that they usually use feminine forms? Superscript ^m indicates a masculine form; ^f indicates a feminine form.

- ghar mē, to – mardānā raharē^m the^m, to mardānā bolī bolte-bolte^m hai*
'(Before becoming hijras,) they were^m living in a masculine way at home, so they were always speaking^m masculine speech.'
- jo barā^m hotā^m hai to guru. jo choṭī^f hotī^f hai, to kā bolālā nāin se bulāte hai*
'We'll call someone (i.e., a hijra) who is^m elderly^m guru. But we'll call [a hijra] who is^f younger^f by her name.'
- to apne logō mē cācā^m vagairah nahī kalite^m hai na? mausi^f kahēge^m, apne guru^m ko guru^m bolēge^m*
'But among ourselves we don't say^m cācā^m ('paternal uncle') etc., right? We'll say^m mausi^f ('maternal aunt'), (but) we'll call^m our guru^m ('leader') guru^m.'
(Note: Hijra communities have hierarchies based on constructed kinship relationships like aunt/niece and spiritual relationships like guru/disciple.)
- maī hindū hū to apnā hindū kā kām kartī^f hū, jo musalmān hai vah apnā musalmān kā kām kartā^m hai*
'I'm Hindu so I do^f the work of Hindus but whoever is Muslim does^m the work of Muslims.'
- hā, Channū hai, [place name omitted] mē jo Channū hai, to vah bhī ādmī^m hai, hijrā to hai nahī*
'Yes, Channu [personal name] is – that Channu who lives in [place name omitted] is a man^m, he's not a real hijra (despite claiming to be one).'

 YouTube “Barack Obama’s Presidential Announcement”

8. As noted in the chapter, politicians often provide interesting illustrations of language variation. For this activity, you will view Barack Obama’s 2007 announcement of his candidacy for president. This speech took place in Springfield, the capital of Illinois; at the time, Obama was an Illinois senator. Read through the instructions and view the first two minutes or so of the speech, from approximately 0:46 to 2:49. As you listen, notice when Obama style-shifts between standard English and a more colloquial speech style. Pay particular attention to his pronunciation of *you* and his pronunciation of the morpheme *-ing*. Then answer the questions below.
 - i. What variation did you notice in Obama’s pronunciation of *you*? Phonetically transcribe each variant, and for each variant, give at least two examples of utterances where it occurs.
 - ii. What variation did you notice in Obama’s pronunciation of *-ing*? Phonetically transcribe each variant, and for each variant, give at least two examples of utterances where it occurs.
 - iii. What appears to be the function of these shifts? That is, why does Obama shift at these points and what social effect does his style shifting have?
 - iv. Does Obama shift into African–American English or another variety? Why do you think he used this variety rather than another in this context? (Hint: Consider his use of other variables, such as postvocalic /r/.)
9. The study of linguistic landscapes – the use of multiple linguistic varieties in public signage – is a valuable way to gain insight into language ideologies. For this activity you will document the linguistic landscape of your own community by photographing linguistically interesting signs using a smartphone or camera. Depending on whether your community is multilingual or monolingual, you may focus on signage in multiple languages, multiple varieties of the same language, or both. Some signs may be monolingual while others may involve some form of translanguaging.
 - i. For each sign you photograph, make a note of where the sign was located, what it was communicating, and who the target audience seemed to be.
 - ii. For each sign, what may have motivated the linguistic choices of the sign’s creator?
 - iii. For each sign, what language ideology underlies its use of language? (This might be an ideology discussed in the chapter or another that you identify and describe.)
10. Think about the following ideologies about gender differences in language, and brainstorm other ideologies about language and gender in your own communities of practice. How would you go about testing their accuracy? Use the chapter’s discussion of whether women or men talk more as a starting point.
 - a. Men interrupt their interlocutors more often than women do.
 - b. Women talk about their feelings more than men do.
 - c. Men tend to dominate discussions in workplace meetings.
 - d. Women are more polite than men.
 - e. In interactions between heterosexual partners, men are more likely to choose the topics of conversation.
11. Consider some issue of inequitable language use that concerns or affects you. This may be the use of gendered nouns or pronouns, as discussed in the chapter, the use of words and expressions that have their roots in offensive stereotypes (such as *gyp* from *Gypsy*, referring to the Roma people, or words for mental illness like *mad* or *crazy* used to express intensity), controversial social group labels (such as *Hispanic*), or some other issue. How might you design a linguistic activism project to address this problem in your local community or more broadly? What challenges might you confront, and how would you address objections to your proposed reform?