6

SITUATED LANGUAGE

Language does not occur in a vacuum. It is situated, contextualized. There are speakers and hearers, a time and a place, a topic and a purpose. This chapter introduces the main ways in which sociolinguists have tried to describe and make sense of how everyday language is moulded by – and moulds – the situation of its usage.

We then go on to examine several approaches to how language operates as part of interaction. The chapter deals with the use of language to do things through speech acts, and the ways in which politeness (or impoliteness) affects how we address another person. It looks in detail at the sociolinguistics of interaction, how that can lead to miscommunication between people, and the ways in which gender dynamics affect conversational patterns such as turn taking. Underlying this is a concern for the micro detail of everyday conversation that is informed by the methods and theories of anthropology, in particular by ethnographic approaches.

6.1 SITUATIONS, CONTEXTS AND DOMAINS

A situation is the extended social occasion within which speech occurs (Hymes 1972). Situations are as variegated as human encounters – 'card games, ball-room couplings, surgical teams in operation, and fist fights', as Erving Goffman put it in a brief early paper on 'the neglected situation' (1964: 135). Language is one player in situation, although most situations are not primarily defined by language but by the shared activity. They may, however, contain conventional language elements, and speech may even be the main activity or prerequisite of what occurs. A committee meeting, a trial in court, a school class are all speech situations – they cannot in fact take place without speaking, and speaking that is appropriate to the specific situation.

Exercise 6.1   Evaluating context

'Context' is a term that is widely used in sociolinguistics even when scholars question its appropriateness.

- How justifiable is it to treat language and context as separate entities?
- How practical is it *not* to treat them as separable?

See for example the essays in Duranti and Goodwin (1992).

Closely related to situation is the notion of context. This assumes that a situation consists of two elements: a core event or activity, and the field of action in which it is embedded – the context. Traditionally, these have been treated as two relatively separable components (Goodwin and Duranti 1992), and interaction between them has been regarded as essentially one-way, from the context to the language. But sociolinguists became increasingly aware that language itself shapes and re-shapes the context, and therefore the overall situation of its own use. Even at the most basic level of who counts as a participant in a situation, language choice can define people as in or out of the frame. In an early phrasing that could represent much of the sociolinguistic work of the early twenty-first century, John Gumperz wrote: 'Sociolinguistic variables are themselves constitutive of social reality' (1982a: vii).

Fishman (e.g. 1965) offers a series of questions about language use in society which have been widely used as a shorthand way of characterizing sociolinguistic situations:

- who uses
- what variety
- of what language
- to whom
- when
- where
- about what
- and to what end.

A good deal of sociolinguistic enquiry can be pursued through these questions, and throughout this book we address the issues they raise in different guises (see Gal's study in Chapter 5.6, for example). Such a series of questions seeks to investigate 'the norms of language usage – that is to say, the generally accepted social patterns of language use and of behavior and attitude toward language' (Fishman 1971: 219). These questions can be used, for example, to examine the choice between polite and familiar second person pronouns, a common feature of many languages. The so called 'T/V' pronouns in European languages (e.g. French *tu* versus *vous*) were the focus of a pioneering study by Brown and Gilman (1960) which characterized them as encoding solidarity versus power.

Exercise 6.2   Address systems

In a classic article, Susan Ervin-Tripp (1972), one of the founding sociolinguistic scholars, proposed a framework of 'alternation and co-occurrence'. She built on the work of Brown and Ford (1964) on address terms in American English. These terms involve choices between addressing your interlocutor by their first name, or by title plus last name, and so on – 'Julia' versus 'Mrs Child'. Ervin-Tripp diagrams a flow chart which offers a series of binary alternatives according to the addressee's gender, relative age, etc.

Address systems differ across languages and in different dialects of English. Read the relevant section at the beginning of Ervin-Tripp's article, then interview each other about address terms in your respective languages and dialects:

1 What terms are available in the address system of your informant's language or dialect (e.g. first name, titles, etc.)?
2 Give examples of how these terms combine to make different forms of address.
3 What are the factors that influence choice of address terms in your informant's language or dialect?
4 List these factors and diagram them in a flow chart similar to Ervin-Tripp's. If there are too many factors or outcomes, just diagram the main parts of the system.
5 Report back and draw generalizations and conclusions on the basis of the class's findings.

Domains of use

Fishman also approached context through his concept of **domains** (1972). The choice of which code to use in habitual situations in a bilingual or multilingual society is not random. Fishman writes about a Belgian official who tends to use one code (standard French) at the office, another (standard Dutch) at his club, and a third (a local variety of Flemish) at home. The domain proposal aims to capture the regularity of these uses without losing the possibility of individual choice and fluctuation. The description here may represent the official's typical code choices, but he will occasionally use Flemish at the office, French at the club, and standard Dutch at home.

Note the links between domain and 'language function', which I introduced in Chapter 3. Function is a macro-level concept which focuses on how languages operate across a whole nation or society. Domain is a parallel micro-level notion, which is concerned with the code choices that individuals or small groups make in particular interactions. Typical combinations of three main elements feed in to make up a domain – the topic of talk, the locale or physical setting and the expected role relations between participants (Table 6.1). The different factors buttress each other, and the likelihood of a particular language code occurring becomes stronger. In the Education domain, for example, there is typically a clustering of participants in defined role relationships (teacher and students), meeting in an educational institution and discussing the content of a course of study. In a bilingual

Table 6.1 Characterizing domains

Domain	Participants	Setting	Topic
Education	teacher	school	coursework
Religion	priest	church, temple	religious practice
Employment	employer	workplace	tasks at hand
Family	parent	home	domestic matters
Friendship	friend	café	common interests

Source: Adapted from Fishman (1972), 445

Exercise 6.3   Applying and evaluating domain

Apply the concept of sociolinguistic domains in your setting:

1 How well do the five domains in Table 6.1 apply to interactions in your society? Do they involve the listed participants, settings and topics, or different ones?
2 What further domains can you identify? How are they defined in terms of participants, settings and topics?
3 Do a domain analysis of one event in your culture such as a workplace interaction or a religious service.

Evaluate domain as a concept:

4 Does 'domain' further your understanding of how languages are used by people and groups in your own society? How?
5 Are there any ways in which it limits or skews our understanding? For example, is it too static to capture some – or many – situations? Does it close off alternative ways of looking at individuals' language choices and behaviours?

society, this educational domain will characteristically favour one language rather than another – for example, English in Malawi (Chapter 3), or Spanish in Mexico.

Research has tended to emphasize those domains associated with institutional public areas such as religion, education or media. However the more private situations with family and friends are also included, as Table 6.1 shows. Domains continue to be used as an organizing principle, for example in Kelly-Holmes's study (2010) of marketing language.

6.2   ETHNOGRAPHIES OF COMMUNICATION

Situated language has long been the interest of broadly anthropological approaches to sociolinguistics which provide much of the substance of this chapter. The most comprehensive early proposals came from Dell Hymes. Starting with a pioneering article in 1962, he developed a framework which he first called the 'ethnography of speaking'. Ethnography is the core method of social anthropology. It involves a close description of

a community's way of life – what they do together, how they interact with each other, how they see themselves and the world. It is mainly the fruit of participant observation: the researcher observes the everyday life of the group through long-term involvement and experience, whether a plateau village in Madagascar (Keenan 1989) or a gang of teenage Latina girls in northern California (Mendoza-Denton 2008). The ethnographer learns the group's language and practices, often over the course of a year or more and with subsequent return visits. She keeps detailed fieldnotes of what she sees and hears, makes audio or video recordings, asks questions, probably conducts interviews. She aims to set aside her own preconceptions and to understand the group in its own terms, but also to maintain an independent view on what she finds. The result is a 'thick' description which leads to an understanding of the group and its practices – including clarifying in what sense it is a 'group' at all.

Blending ethnography into the study of language, Hymes's formulation of the ethnography of communication was typical for the early stages of an academic discipline. He advocated the value of developing a **taxonomy** – a structured and stratified list of the elements of a communication situation, like that used to classify plants into families, species and so on. This taxonomy aimed to help the ethnographer of communication observe, specify and interpret the patterns of a group's communicative behaviour.

In a series of publications Hymes offered related – although not identical – listings of the 'components' of the speech situation. The best-known and most complete list contains 16 terms (Hymes 1972), which he groups under eight headings whose initials form a mnemonic spelling out the word SPEAKING (Table 6.2). Many of these components have been mentioned in earlier chapters, and others will come up later. This is no surprise since they include most of the basic parameters surrounding the use of language. The research activity at the end of this chapter applies the SPEAKING taxonomy to analysing the classroom situation.

Situation consists of the circumstances in which a particular communication occurs. **Setting** (1 in Table 6.2) means the physical parameters of time and location – for example, 6.00 pm on a commuter train in New York City. **Scene** (2) is the culturally defined occasion that is involved – language happens very differently at a rock concert compared to a cocktail party.

Participants are the people who are taking part in a situation where language is being used. Classifying and illustrating participant roles and the part they play in language situations has attracted attention from successive sociolinguists because participants are arguably the key component of any interaction. I deal with Hymes's version of these roles only briefly, and return later in the chapter to look at more detailed formulations. Two of Hymes's four categories identify the people producing the language. The **Speaker/sender** (3) is the authority behind something that is being communicated, the person responsible for the message. The **Addressor** (4) is the physical producer of the speech, the voicebox. Two categories distinguish types of receivers – **Hearers/audience** (5) who are not being directly targeted, and the **Addressees** (6) who are.

Ends are the purposes of a particular communication. Hymes divides this into two: **Outcomes** (7) are the general goals of an activity within a culture. For example, a university graduation ceremony involves staff and students acting out a rite of passage in front of a supporting audience. **Goals** (8) on the other hand are individual participants'

Table 6.2   The SPEAKING taxonomy

1	**Setting**	**S**ITUATION
	time, place, circumstances	
2	**Scene**	
	'psychological setting' – the cultural definition of an occasion	
3	**Speaker/sender**	**P**ARTICIPANTS
	person/authority behind the message	
4	**Addressor**	
	person who voices the message, spokesperson	
5	**Hearer/audience**	
	person/s who hear the message	
6	**Addressee**	
	person directly addressed	
7	**Purposes – outcomes**	**E**NDS
	general purposes within the culture	
8	**Purposes – goals**	
	individual participants' goals	
9	**Message form**	**A**CT SEQUENCE
	how things are said	
10	**Message content**	
	topic, theme	
11	**Key**	**K**EY
	tone or manner in which something is said	
12	**Channels**	**I**NSTRUMENTALITIES
	spoken, written, etc.	
13	**Forms of speech**	
	language codes – varieties, languages, etc.	
14	**Norms of interaction**	**N**ORMS
	cultural 'rules' for conducting conversations	
15	**Norms of interpretation**	
	listeners' or observers' interpretations of the rules	
16	**Genres**	**G**ENRES
	language associated with particular speech events	

Source: Drawn from Hymes (1972)

intentions in relation to the overall event, for example family members who come to support a graduand. The difference between outcomes and goals is most obvious when there is a clash between the general and the individual purposes. Say a political dispute is underway between students and university management, and some students at the graduation ceremony voice their protest – then their goals differ from the outcome and from the goals of most other participants. The importance of participants' goals in communication has been a particular interest of social psychologists of language.

Act sequence involves two components. The **Message form** (9) covers the way things are said – in fact, the stuff of most language analysis. The **Message content** (10) is what is said – the topic or theme. Different topics will often trigger different ways of speaking – we discuss road deaths differently from local gossip.

> ### Exercise 6.4   Topic and language choice
>
> Topic is an important category in sociolinguistic enquiry – note for example its role in Fishman's domain construct. In many workplaces around the world, technology may be discussed in English because technological advancement is associated with English. And surprisingly, in a traditional society an external language such as English may be used for intimate topics because traditional norms simply do not allow them to be discussed in the indigenous language. Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994) detail how one speaker, Foxy, shifted her linguistic style depending on what she was talking about – from teen pregnancies to career issues to drugs to race relations.
>
> * Do you believe the topic you are discussing affects the way you and other people in your speech community talk? How? For example, are some topics discussed in one language but not another? Why?

Key (11) is the manner or tone in which something is presented. What is superficially the same thing may be said in different ways. Conversationalists, like actors, can impart to a line widely different 'readings' through different keyings. The most obvious manifestation of key is when the way something is said subverts the meaning so that it becomes the opposite of what the surface of the words appears to intend – that is, irony. A change of key is often marked in the intonation. In English 'That's brilliant!' with a falling intonation is a criticism, the opposite of the same exclamation with a neutral rise-fall intonation.

Instrumentalities include the **Channels** (12) by which the language is carried, such as writing versus speech, or sung versus spoken. This has become an increasingly important dimension as technological change has created new communication media, especially through the many affordances of the internet. **Forms of speech** (13) covers the repertoire of codes that are available to speakers in a community (see Chapter 5).

Norms are the rules governing the production and interpretation of language in a situation. **Norms of interaction** (14) are the community's rules for communication, and are most easily visible when someone breaks them, for example in an encounter between two contrasting cultures. They include such things as when it is appropriate to take a turn at speech and when to keep silent. For example, Athabaskans leave more silence between speaking turns than do mainstream North Americans (Scollon and Scollon 1981). Such rules for turn taking in conversations are studied in particular detail by Conversation Analysts. The **Norms of interpretation** (15) show how interactants interpret each other's practices. When Athabaskans and mainstream North Americans interact, both follow their own norms for silence after each turn. The Athabaskans find the others rude or dominating because they themselves can never get a word in edgeways. The others think the Athabaskans are sullen or superior because they will not talk. Both groups end up confused and frustrated by each other.

Genres involve the language associated with a particular kind of speech event: a story, a job application, a blog, and so on. Different **Genres** (16) have different rules

Exercise 6.5   New genres on the internet

The internet has opened up new channels of communication that did not exist until the late twentieth century. It has also created new genres, and changed existing genres (see for example Rowe and Wyss 2009, Thurlow and Mroczek 2011). Many people believe it is having a major impact on our language (see e.g. Crystal 2006). Consider these questions:

1   What new genres have been developed on the internet? List as many as you can, and describe their similarities and differences, using appropriate terms from the SPEAKING framework. Have they introduced linguistic changes?
2   Also consider how new these genres in fact are – did they originate in pre-internet channels and genres? (see for example McNeill 2009 on the origins of the blog in hard-copy personal diaries).
3   How have traditional mass media (such as press, radio, television) colonized the internet? How has this changed them and their language? (Use the SPEAKING framework to compare for example a hard-copy edition of a newspaper and its internet site on the same day – see Bell and Smith 2012.)

for language choice and use. New technologies create new genres, most obviously in the burgeoning of internet forms. Genre is a slippery concept which eludes easy definition but which many analysts have found indispensable to understanding language use.

The research activity later in the chapter offers the chance to apply and evaluate Hymes's taxonomy. In the process, it will become clear that some of the terms are overlapping, obscure, counter-intuitive, or simply selected to fit the mnemonic. Despite this, Hymes's listing serves as a wide range where sociolinguists may browse and find something appropriate and usable for their analysis. Later sociolinguists have adapted this kind of taxonomy for their own purposes, for example Scollon and Scollon's 'grammar of context' in intercultural communication (2001). Applied judiciously and perceptively, the analysis of such components makes a good starting point for understanding how language works in specific situations.

6.3   SPEAKERS IN SITU

Earlier we saw briefly how Hymes, as part of his SPEAKING taxonomy, distinguished just two speaker and two hearer roles. A more detailed approach comes from Erving Goffman, the sociologist of everyday life. Goffman's construct of the 'interaction order' was an important influence on sociolinguistic approaches to speaking situations, and in his later work he himself engaged extensively with sociolinguistic issues. In an essay on 'footing', Goffman (1981) laid out what he called the 'production format' in which speakers operate, recognizing three speaker roles: the Animator is the voice box, the Author is the strategist who formulates the message and the Principal is the authority

Table 6.3   Roles in language production

Hymes 1972	Goffman 1981	Bell 1991b
Sender	Principal Author	Principal Author Editor/s
Addressor	Animator	Animator

Source: Bell (1991b), table 3.1

behind the words. Goffman thus splits Hymes's role of 'sender' into two (see Table 6.3). In the default case of ordinary face-to-face conversation, the speaker is the sole 'first person', playing all three of Goffman's roles simultaneously.

But even these prove to be not fine enough for the complexities of many institutional production formats, especially in mediated communication, where a fourth role is required. In my own research on the generation of news language (Bell 1991b), I subdivided the 'author' role again to allow for the fact that there can be numerous 'authors' but not all of them play the same function towards the text (Table 6.3).

The **principal** is the institutional authority behind a speech or text, whose position or stance is being expressed. There is an initial **author** who originates the first draft of a news story. But that story then passes through the hands of a number of **editors** who process and modify the text until it is presented or published in its final form by the **animator**. These roles can be applied to the analysis of language events of all kinds, including internet texts.

The straight listing of roles implies a linear chain, which in Table 6.3 looks like a production line from Principal →Author → Editors → Animator. But what is going on can better be regarded as an embedding or layering or nesting of one role within the next rather than as a line, as Goffman noted (1981: 147ff.). To illustrate again through the news process: each separate role in fact represents its own distinguishable speech event which could be characterized using the full apparatus of Hymes's SPEAKING taxonomy. Journalists work in a particular setting, with particular purposes and norms of interaction. They pass a text to copy editors, who are working in their own, different situation, then on to newsreaders in theirs, and so on. And each of these situations and their resultant texts is embedded within the next (Bell 1991a). Clearly such a detailed description would be large and cumbersome, but traces of the many layers sometimes show through in the finished product, the published text. When a story published in New Zealand describes a location as '129 kilometres west of London', we can safely deduce that the original said '80 miles', but the copy editors have neglected to round up the conversion to '130 kilometres'.

The concept of embedding is extraordinarily important for understanding how a lot of both everyday conversation and mediated language production work. Goffman describes the layerings or 'laminations' which speakers routinely introduce into their talk as they recount stories or incidents about themselves or others. The production format of the story scenario is embedded into that of the story's telling. Each such embedding changes the speaker's footing – their 'alignment, or set, or stance, or posture, or projected self' (Goffman 1981: 128). Contemporary sociolinguistic work also focuses

> **Exercise 6.6   Applying and critiquing production roles**
>
> 1 Review the three approaches to speaker roles (Hymes, Goffman, Bell) outlined in Table 6.3.
> 2 Choose one situation of institutional face-to-face communication – e.g. a service encounter in a government office, or a trial in court – and apply each of the three frameworks to it in turn, especially with reference to any instances of 'embedding'.
> 3 Or: choose one genre of traditional media communication, such as production of a newspaper advertisement or television commercial, and apply each of the three frameworks to it.
> 4 Or: choose one internet genre such as production of a blog or social network site wall, and apply each of the frameworks to it.
> 5 Use your analysis to compare and assess the usefulness of each framework. Are the greater complexities in the Goffman and Bell frameworks justified by the increases they bring in insight? How appropriate and helpful is the concept of 'embedding/layering'.
> 6 How would you modify the frameworks in the light of the analyses you have done?

on how speakers take up different footings, for example in the course of a US presidential campaign where inconsistency or 'flip-flopping' of candidates' stances may itself become an issue (Lempert 2009).

Bakhtin (1981) has maintained that much of our spontaneous speech consists of words that come from the mouths of others, and this is nowhere more evident than in news discourse. Most news is based on talk. The information that journalists write up is gleaned mainly from interviews and documents. Fragments from these texts are embedded into the story, most obviously as written quotations or audio and video clips. As a result, the news story you read or watch consists of a set of textual laminations which would be almost impossible to unravel to its origins.

6.4   AUDIENCES FOR LANGUAGE

Speakers require listeners. The audience makes up the complementary dimension of language interaction, the second and third persons of the pronoun paradigm. We saw in Table 6.2 how Hymes distinguished between addressees and a wider set of hearers who are not being addressed. Goffman, however, points out that 'an utterance does not carve up the world beyond the speaker into precisely two parts, recipients and non-recipients' (1981: 137). He makes finer distinctions between ratified and unratified participants (Table 6.4).

Building on Goffman's proposals, I developed a set of roles as part of the 'Audience Design' framework, systematizing and labelling them as in Table 6.4. Audience Design (Bell 1984) treats the speaker, the first person, as the primary participant at the moment

Table 6.4   Audience roles

Hymes 1972	Goffman 1981	Bell 1984	Participant status
Addressee	Addressed recipient	Addressee	Addressed
	Unaddressed recipient	Auditor	Not addressed
Hearer/audience	Bystander: Overhearer	Overhearer	Not ratified
	Bystander: Eavesdropper	Eavesdropper	Not known

of speech, qualitatively apart from other interlocutors. It then ranks the audience roles according to whether or not the persons are addressed, ratified or known by the speaker. The main audience role is the second person, the **addressee**, who meets all three criteria – known, ratified and addressed. Other, present third persons may be licensed to participate, but they are not directly addressed – I term these **auditors**. Beyond them, talk often has a wider audience of unratified third parties. Those whom the speaker knows to be present, but who are not ratified participants in the conversation, are **overhearers** – parties within innocent earshot of the conversation. Other parties whose presence is unknown to the speaker are **eavesdroppers**, whether they are intentionally and maliciously hiding 'behind the arras', or whether they hear by chance because they just happen to be within earshot but out of sight. The specific configuration of all these roles and relations during any given utterance is, to use Goffman's term, the 'participation framework' of that moment of talk.

These four audience roles are implicationally ordered according to their status as addressed, ratified and known. Often in an interaction, the physical distance of audience members from the speaker coincides with their role distance, with the addressee physically closest and eavesdropper farthest away. Audience roles are assigned by the speaker, and visual criteria such as physical placement, body orientation or direction of gaze are often crucial to identifying who is who.

The differences between these audience roles have significant sociolinguistic repercussions. We have seen in preceding chapters how speakers choose their language code depending on who their specific addressee is. This is most obvious when the repertoire is multilingual rather than monolingual. In a bilingual group, the language you choose to use may in fact be enough to nominate who it is that you are addressing. Gal (1979: 121) reports an instance from her Oberwart study where two younger people in a farm kitchen were joking together in German. The young man switched out to Hungarian when he wanted to ask his mother something. The change in language choice briefly and directly re-classified the mother as his addressee, whereas she had been just auditor to the German conversation of the younger ones.

One case where production and audience roles quickly become very complex occurs with translation or interpretation from one language to another. Vigouroux (2010) describes the role and footing complexities involved in a Pentecostal church service for Congolese migrants in South Africa, where the pastor's French-language sermon must be simultaneously translated into English. Within a monolingual code, speakers can adjust their pronunciations very finely to cater for changes in audiences (Bell 1984: 172ff.) – we return to these kinds of styling abilities in Chapter 11.

Exercise 6.7   Applying and critiquing audience roles

Use the questions from Exercise 6.6 but apply them to audience instead of producer roles.

- Specify audience roles in terms of the addressed-ratified-known criteria (Table 6.4), which are especially relevant to distinguishing different internet genres or sites such as blogs or chatrooms.
- What light do these roles throw on the issue of what is public and what is private on the internet, e.g. on a social media site?

Language choice can be influenced not just by the addressee but by the outer audience roles, the auditor and the overhearer. It is common practice in many bilingual communities for even a single monolingual speaker joining a group (thus becoming an auditor) to trigger a switch by the whole group to the monolingual's language so as to include the person as a participant. Continuing use of a language that one participant does not understand would define the uncomprehending hearer as unratified, outside the group. Even overhearers can have this kind of effect on speakers' language choice. Gumperz found an absolute overhearer-determined rule operating in a bilingual Slovenian/German community in southwestern Austria: 'So strong is the injunction against speaking Slovenian in mixed company, that tourists can live in the village for weeks without noticing that any language except German is spoken' (Gumperz 1982a: 47). But overhearer-oriented choices are generally less determined. Gal and Dorian record identical incidents from their two communities, but with opposite results. In Oberwart, a group of bilinguals at an inn switched from Hungarian to German when overhearers at a nearby table requested it. But in East Sutherland, a group of bilinguals in a bar refused a similar request to switch from Gaelic to English.

Just as the media situation complicates the roles we need to describe the language producers, so it complicates the audience roles through the kind of embedding discussed earlier. Since each interaction situation becomes embedded inside the next, audience roles as well as speaker roles are laminated. A concert performance in front of a live audience can be broadcast (in real time or recorded). The live performance is a situation with its own full set of audience roles. When that performance is then broadcast, embedding it in the mediated situation, the wider audience generates its own, further set of roles. This can lead to trouble: the concert becomes technologically available to an audience which includes groups who were not targeted in the live event. Through mass media, everyone may become overhearers. And through the internet, everyone is potentially an eavesdropper – unaddressed, unratified, unknown but there – as many have discovered to their cost.

6.5   SPEECH ACTS AND POLITENESS

Speaker and audience roles are central to the study of speech acts – the abiding interest of the field of pragmatics, which is one of sociolinguistics' nearest disciplinary neighbours. Pragmatics focuses on language use and users. In its narrowest definition, it is concerned with those aspects of the context of communication that get encoded in the language itself – most obviously deictics such as pronouns (who 'she' means in a discourse can only be specified by reference to the context). More broadly, pragmatics deals with the many ways in which discourses are internally organized and related to their context. Its interests therefore overlap with much sociolinguistic work on syntax and discourse.

The study of speech acts is founded on the work of the British philosopher, J. L. Austin. In 1955 he presented his central ideas as the William James Lectures at Harvard University, although he died before these were published in 1962. His *How to Do Things with Words* is a book written with that shining clarity of style which some philosophers have achieved on difficult linguistic subjects.

Speech acts are **performatives**, Austin argued – utterances that actually perform the action they express. If I say, 'I promise to pick you up at midday', just by saying the verb 'promise', I perform the act of promising. Austin suggested that while statements can be true or false ('I picked you up at midday' – 'No you didn't' – 'Yes I did'), performatives can be either 'happy' or 'unhappy'. That is, they have to meet certain 'felicity' conditions, such as the right configuration of participants. Consider the words, 'I pronounce you husband and wife'. In most countries, the conditions for 'happy' performance of this kind of utterance are severely restricted. The law prescribes who is allowed to say it (a limited set of qualified celebrants), who it can be said to, where it can be said, and even the attitude of the couple.

Austin (1962) distinguished three aspects of the speech act:

- The locutionary act is the activity of uttering the appropriate wording.
- The illocutionary force denotes what act is performed through the utterance, such as complimenting or requesting.
- The perlocutionary effect indicates what the act actually achieves with its hearer – an apology accepted, an offer taken up.

The difference between the locutionary and illocutionary act is important. Many different forms of wording can be used to express the same illocution. 'I ask you to do *x*' may be the most overt form of requesting in English, but phrases such as 'would you please' are the more common locutions.

Austin found that his initial distinction between 'constatives' (statements) and performatives could not be easily sustained. This opened the way for John Searle, a student of his, to develop a general theory of speech acts (1969), including dividing them into five classes:

- assertives (or representatives), such as to state or describe
- directives: order, permit, request
- commissives: promise, pledge
- expressives: thank, apologize
- declarations: appoint, declare.

(Searle 1976)

Sociolinguists and speech acts

Pragmatics scholars and philosophers approach speech acts quite abstractly, using invented examples to illustrate points, but sociolinguists engage with them as they occur in natural language data. Apologies, compliments and complaints offer a very obvious zone for investigating the social workings of language. The earliest research counted and compared the numbers of particular speech acts used by different groups, along with their topics and functions. Much of that work focused on gender language differences in English (see Exercise 6.11).

In many speech acts, the exact configuration of participants is crucial to the success or interpretation of the discourse and interaction, bringing us back to the detail of speaker and audience roles laid out earlier. Some speech acts may be incomplete unless the addressee responds appropriately. 'I bet you –' is successful only if the addressee accepts the bet. When a complaint is produced before an auditor, that person functions as witness to the complaint, and their response helps determine what the outcome will be. Researching interactions within a Montreal family, Laforest (2009) found that the auditor/witness usually affiliates with the complaint and so collectivizes it, but also works to ensure the situation does not deteriorate too far (Exercise 6.8). Even an unratified overhearer lurking unintentionally on the edge of interaction may play a role, for example inducing a speaker to mitigate an uttered threat.

But researching speech acts does raise issues for sociolinguists. Real recorded data is much less tidy than constructed examples, and it can be difficult to decide which speech act is being performed. Very many locutionary acts seem to perform more than one illocution at the same time, and often apparently deliberately so. Is 'How do you feel about coming with me?' a question, request or offer? Or is the speaker relying on just that ambiguity to hedge her positioning between imposing on the hearer or exposing herself to a face-threatening refusal? Researchers are now very conscious that speech acts are multi-functional, that they need to take thorough account of the wider discourse and context in which they occur in order to interpret their meaning, and that the same speech acts may operate differently in different languages and societies.

Politeness

A major strand of the pragmatic approach to language in use, and especially speech acts, is the politeness model proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The term unfortunately conjures up everyday perceptions of 'polite society', etiquette and manners, but here it receives a broader definition. The central construct is 'face', a person's public self-esteem, which Brown and Levinson take over from Goffman's analysis of relations in everyday life. Building on common notions like 'losing face' and 'saving face', they distinguish two dimensions: positive face is a person's desire to be actively appreciated, negative face is the desire not to be imposed on. Behaviour that caters to the first desire is **positive politeness, and to the second, negative politeness.**

Central to the approach is the notion of the **face threatening act** (FTA), and the many ways in which interactants handle these. Obvious FTAs include warnings and commands,

Exercise 6.8   Complaints and witnesses

From Laforest's study in a Montreal family (2009), consider the course of this complaint sequence and especially the mother's role:

23 *	Père	Je te trouve bien des affaires à la dernière minute.
24	Fille	Ben non.
25 →	Mère	Tu te laisses pas le temps de réfléchir [entre tes:entre tes
26	Père	[Bien oui.
		Ça c'est: faut que ça retombe la poussière à un moment donné.

23 *	Father	I think you do a lot of things at the last minute.
24	Daughter	Not really.
25 →	Mother	You don't give yourself the time to think [between your: between your
26	Father	[Yeah.
		Well that's: the dust has to settle sometime.

*	complaint
→	witness's reaction
[	overlapping speech

- What is the nature of the daughter's response to her father's complaint?
- Who does the mother align with?
- What stance does she take towards the complaint itself?
- What effect does that have on the force of the complaint?
- What function does the father's closing remark have?

but gentler speech acts such as requests and advice also embed latent threats (to the hearer's negative face). FTAs can be classified on whether they threaten speaker or hearer, and their positive or negative face. An apology constitutes a threat to the speaker's own positive face, since it implies a past shortcoming of theirs. An FTA is said to be **on record** when a clear single intention is obvious behind it, while for **off record** the intention remains ambiguous. The most direct, bluntly expressed FTA is **bald** – 'Sit down' – compared with the many redressive actions by which speakers mitigate the face threat: 'Please pull up a chair', 'Won't you take a seat.'

The politeness model has triggered a great deal of sociolinguistic research over more than 30 years in many cultures, languages and genres, often focusing on gender differences. It has also faced many refinements and challenges (e.g. Watts 2003). Probably the main issue has been Brown and Levinson's original claim to universality – their subtitle was 'Some Universals in Language Usage' (1987). In particular, face wants are not necessarily the drivers of politeness in all cultures. An ongoing site for research on the nuances and relationship of politeness and face is the use of honorific forms in

Exercise 6.9   Face attack in a Kenyan hospital

Politeness interacts with power, as Watts's text argues (2003). Despite a charter which entitles patients in Kenyan hospitals to respect, Ojwang, Matu and Ogutu (2010) found patients are subjected to frequent face-attacks by nurses. This reflects the power which nurses as professionals hold over patients, overriding usual considerations of politeness. Ojwang et al. give examples of eight types of speech acts from their data (2010: 505):

  Why do you keep disturbing us?
  Don't you know that you must pay for drugs?
  I don't want to see that woman here.
  The problem with you is that you don't understand.
  Why follow me in hospital as if I were your debtor?
  Take that woman out of here now.
  You are adults but you behave like children.
  If you try to be clever here, you will regret.

• What are the speech acts involved here? In Brown and Levinson's terms, which are on- or off-record – with a clear single intention versus ambiguous? Which are baldly put, and which have some mitigating redressive wording? In what cases is it hard to say?

While some patients tried to repair the damage to their dignity or launched a counter-attack on the nurse's face, most responded with a silence that reflected the power the nurse held over them. A teenage girl in labour was reprimanded and humiliated when she appealed for assistance (2010: 506):

  a. Patient: Sister *nisaidie nakufa na maumivu.*
                 'Sister, help me I am dying of pain.'
  b. Nurse: *Si ungemaliza shule kwanza ndiyo ushike mimba wewe msichana?*
                 'Why didn't you complete school before conceiving you girl?'
                 (Silence)
  c. Nurse: *Sasa ndio utashika adabu*
                 'It is now that you will learn manners.'
                 (Silence)

• Interpret how the Nurse's words in this extract threaten the patient's positive and negative face.

Japanese, by which levels of respect are encoded in grammatical forms such as prefixes (see for example a *Journal of Pragmatics* theme issue, 43/15, 2011).

6.6   THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF INTERACTION

Sociolinguistic research into speech acts involves attention to the fine detail of how participants interact in everyday situations. It forms part of a wider interest in how we make ourselves and our communicative intentions understood in daily interaction. This was the pioneering work of John Gumperz, whose name is inextricably linked with Dell Hymes because of their co-editorship of the foundational *Directions in Sociolinguistics* collection (1972). But their work, approaches and contributions were very different. Hymes saw the big picture of the emerging field, taxonomizing and theorizing, and presenting little empirical language analysis of his own. Gumperz's focus was micro, as my Chapter 5 discussion of his research on code switching showed. He examined the minutiae of everyday conversations, and how these functioned to enable individuals to communicate and understand one another. His 'Interactional Sociolinguistics' was hands-on rather than programmatic.

Gumperz's work relates, often quite explicitly, to several of the approaches presented in this chapter. Goffman's 'interaction order' (section 6.3) offered a framework for studying everyday social dealings for which Gumperz looked to work out principles specific to language use. Gumperz (1982a: 156) also built on the thinking of speech act philosophers such as Austin and Searle (section 6.5), and particularly the approach of H.P. Grice. Grice had developed the 'Cooperative Principle' (1975), which spelt out four maxims for the conduct of conversations: that contributions need to be informative, true, relevant and clear. Gumperz's consideration of what was below the surface of conversations drew on Grice's other main construct – 'conversational implicature'. He took the proposals of the philosophers and sociologists and operationalized them for actual everyday conversation.

Gumperz's leading concept was the **contextualization cue**, presented in his foundational book *Discourse Strategies* (1982a). Contextualization cues are 'constellations of surface features of message form ... by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the activity is, how semantic content is to be understood, and *how* each sentence relates to what precedes or follows' (Gumperz 1982a: 131). They offer overt clues to what is otherwise only presupposed or implied below the surface of a conversation. The cues can be of almost any linguistic (and non-linguistic) kind – vocabulary, phonology, syntax, code switching, use of formulae, and (particularly) intonation patterns or 'prosody'. They function to 'key' (as in Hymes's SPEAKING framework, Table 6.2) the interpretation which the speaker expects the hearer to reach. At the start of an interaction, a speaker and a listener will spend some time negotiating the basis of continuing conversation. In this process, the interpretive weight placed on contextualization cues is much greater than their surface linguistic importance. If the interactants coordinate successfully, they have achieved 'conversational synchrony' and move forward in tune with each other.

But if interactants do not share a common set of contextualization cues, trouble follows. Miscommunication brings to the surface presumptions that are usually hidden. Gumperz focused on such misfires, investigating communication problems and seeking to interpret where, how and why such breakdowns had occurred. Much of his early empirical work looked at interactants who share the same language but come from very different background cultural situations, such as Indian speakers of English in conversation with British or American speakers. He analyses in depth (1982a: 174) one employment counselling interview between a (white) British counsellor and an Indian teacher which lasts over an hour in a state of continual misunderstanding and increasing conflict. Their purposes for the conversation clash in the manner of Hymes's Goals/Outcomes distinction (Table 6.2).

Exercise 6.10   Question or request?

Here are two examples from Gumperz's early research on contextualization cues (1982a: 135):

A   A husband sitting in his living room is addressing his wife ...

Husband	Do you know where today's paper is?
Wife	*I'll* get it for you.
Husband	That's O.K. Just tell me where it is. *I'll* get it.
Wife	No, I'LL get it.

B   A mother is talking to her eleven year old son who is about to go out in the rain:

Mother	Where are your boots?
Son	In the closet.
Mother	I want you to put them on *right* now.

1   What sort of speech acts do you think these are? – questions seeking information, or indirect requests for action?
2   Notice the occurrence of strong word stresses in the last utterance of each example. What do these express?
3   When Gumperz played the two interactions to sets of listeners, those who heard the opening line of each example as a request also felt the tone adopted in the closing lines was justified. Why?
4   The husband in A is American, while the wife in A and mother in B are both British. Listeners who were British tended to give different interpretations from Americans. Which variety do you think would favour the question reading, and which the request? (See Gumperz's finding at 1982a: 139.) What could this mean for cross-varietal/cultural communication?

The difficulties that questions 1–3 pose for non-native English speakers, and 4 for non-Americans/British, illustrate how subtly and culturally determined is the knowledge required to interpret such everyday interactions.

Contextualization cues are central to the communicative competence of speakers – recall Dorian's characterization of the interpretive skills of semi-speakers in her Gaelic community (Exercise 4.7). Many of these cues are subtle, specific to sub-groups, and learned through long-term, face-to-face interaction with ingroup members. But the very absence of these skills contributes to limiting the amount and kind of contact that would produce their acquisition by the outsider.

Gumperz's wider research interest was in the sociopolitical repercussions of these kinds of cross-cultural misunderstandings, though his legacy is in many ways the least sharply defined of the sociolinguistic founders. **Interactional Sociolinguistics** is the name

given to the body of work that has built on Gumperz's methods (2001). It shares not so much a cohesive theory as a methodological conviction that the detailed workings of everyday conversations are interactionally important. This it has in common with the fine-grained methods of Conversation Analysis. It has fed into the approaches of sociolinguists whose work we have discussed earlier, such as Gal, Levinson, Heller and Auer (some of whom were Gumperz's students). Best known is Deborah Tannen, collaborator with Gumperz on the development of contextualization cues, whose study of 'conversational style' (1984) is a comprehensive application of the interactional approach. It analyses talk over a dinner (for American Thanksgiving) among six friends in California. Three came from New York, two from California, and one from England. The New Yorkers had what Tannen called a 'high-involvement style': fast and simultaneous speech, rapid questions, quick turn taking. This left the other three participants – who had a 'high-considerateness style' – feeling dominated and sidelined. In Hymes's terms (Table 6.2), there was a clash of norms.

6.7   GENDER AND CONVERSATION

Such research on communicative cross-purposes led Tannen to publish books like *You Just Don't Understand* (1990), which popularized the role of gender difference in conversation to the broader American and international public, particularly with her contrast between men's 'report-talk' and women's 'rapport-talk'. This was part of an upsurge in sociolinguistic work on gender and language, one strand of which treated gendered distinctions in language as a form of cross-cultural **difference**. Extending Gumperz's approach into cross-gender communication, Maltz and Borker (1982: 212) treated American boys and girls as being socialized in different worlds:

> What we are suggesting is that women and men have different cultural rules for friendly conversation and that these rules come into conflict when women and men attempt to talk to each other as friends and equals in casual conversation.

Early research examined differences, for example in speech acts such as compliments in English (e.g. Holmes 1988, in New Zealand). The general findings were that women give and receive more compliments than men. Rees-Miller (2011) replicated such studies in the United States decades later. In 'unstructured' settings, compliments by women to women were largely (74%) about appearance, while male-to-male compliments on appearance were very rare. Most compliments between men were about performance (64%), particularly in sport (see Exercise 6.11).

A second approach takes a **deficit** line. The earliest gender language research implied that women's language is in some ways deficient rather than just different. Robin Lakoff's short book *Language and Woman's Place* (1975) focused on language forms which indicated subservience and, she believed, were typical of women's English rather than men's, for example:

Exercise 6.11 Compliments and gender

Consider these three compliments and their reception (Rees-Miller 2011):

1 M: Hey bro, good game tonight; you played really well.
   M: Hey thanks, man; it was a tough one.

2 F: That color goes great with your eyes.
   F: Thank you for noticing.

3 M: I like that shirt on you.
   M: Thanks, I like your face.

- Describe and interpret the gender mix of participants, the topics and the reception of these compliments. Note the linguistic details such as the use of solidary address terms in 1 (see Kiesling's study on 'dude', 2004).
- Exactly how and why is the response to 3 odd? What do you think it means socially? – for speaker, for hearer, and for the relationship between them? (see Rees-Miller 2011: 2685 for the researcher's interpretation).
- Why were compliments 1 and 2 accepted and 3 not?

Pragmatic markers	*you know, sort of*
Tag questions	*isn't it? can't we?*
Intensifiers	*so much, just great*
'Empty' adjectives	*sweet, adorable*
Precise colour terms	*beige, lavender*

While her book was the foundation of gender language studies, Lakoff was soon criticized on at least three grounds: aspects of her approach implied women's deficiency, the linguistic forms were not at all neatly distributed according to gender, and their functions were much more variegated than just indicating lack of confidence. Many of these are typical Gumperz-type contextualization cues, the pragmatic lubricant which eases the course of conversation, while others are politeness moves which attend to an interlocutor's face needs. And it was not long before feminist sociolinguists questioned why women's language should be regarded as the deviation from men's language rather than vice versa.

The third approach views gender language as involving **dominance**. Lakoff's explicit statements on the matter make it quite clear that she believed the root cause of the 'deficiencies' was in fact dominance:

> The ultimate effect of these discrepancies is that women are systematically denied access to power, on the grounds that they are not capable of holding it as demonstrated by their linguistic behavior along with other aspects of their behavior. (Lakoff 1973: 48)

Gender differences – both in language and generally in society – are not random or neutral alternatives. Gender is itself a significant form of social stratification: there is no known society where women have more power than men (Giddens 2009). That power relation often surfaces in the patterns of conversation. In an article on 'the work women do' in interaction, Pamela Fishman (1978) found that women provided most of the support in conversations with their partners – for example, they asked three quarters of the questions. On the other hand, men did three-quarters of the interrupting in West and Zimmerman's research (1983) on the 'small insults' embodied in conversational interruptions. It was not long before O'Barr and Atkins (1980) concluded, on the basis of comparing male and female witnesses in court, that it was not a matter of women's language but of 'powerless language'.

Gender language research is now a large and varied field, and we return to different facets of it in the following chapters, including nuancing the definition of gender and how it is enacted. We will also see that the deficit–difference–dominance paradigms apply as well – not surprisingly – to other dimensions of social differentiation, particularly ethnicity (Chapter 7).

6.8 THE CASE OF SLANG IN RIO

The South Zone is the wealthiest area of the Brazilian mega-city of Rio de Janiero. It has spectacular hills and beaches and the most expensive real estate in South America. It is also the location of a number of *favelas* – shanty towns. These side-by-side contrasts of rich and poor have, as so often, an ethnic and gender reflex. Poor black young men in the area are some of Brazil's 'most disenfranchised citizens', according to an ethnographic study by the American sociolinguist Jennifer Roth-Gordon (2007: 323).

Research into the language of disadvantaged black male urban youth has a long tradition in sociolinguistics, stretching back to pioneer studies in the 1960s of New York City teenage gangs (Labov 1972a – see Chapter 7, this volume). The methods needed to research language in such situations are necessarily ethnographic. Researchers have to win access to and earn the trust of the people they wish to work with. Roth-Gordon's approach was typical of a linguistic-ethnographic study in its use of multiple data sources, long-term involvement, and collaboration with the participants. She interacted with her informants over a period of 18 months. Data collection began with written surveys and interviews at a high school. This led on to recording casual conversations with a peer group, the central data pool of the project. One group member acted as the researcher's mentor, guide and interpreter to the group and its language. He reviewed the recordings, identifying and translating target expressions from the Portuguese, which made participants' intuitions and judgements central to defining the data of the study. Finally, the researcher took selected excerpts from the recordings and played them back to different groups – the participants themselves, their parents, other adults, and middle-class youth.

Pragmatic markers

The Rio de Janiero study focused on the role of *gíria* or 'slang' in the marginalization of these young men of the *favelas*, and specifically on the role of four 'pragmatic markers' in *gíria*. Sometimes also called discourse markers or pragmatic particles, these are the small bits of language which provide much of the discoursal and interactional glue that hold our conversations together (Schiffrin 1987). In English, expressions like 'all right', 'actually', 'I mean', 'and so on' pepper our conversation, constantly signposting the structure and significance of what we say and the way in which we want to relate to our interlocutors. They are, in Gumperz's terms, some of the leading contextualization cues. Ethnographic, qualitative methods are suited to researching these kinds of linguistic forms, which require a situation where speakers are at ease and analysts can retrieve enough context to interpret the usages.

But there is a sociolinguistic issue here as well as a pragmatic one: the markers are often denigrated, especially in the speech of non-mainstream groups. They change frequently and spread quickly – and are commonly despised by, *you know*, older people as *sort of* indicative of the inadequate language skills of, *like*, younger people? There can be little doubt, however, that these critics will themselves be using pragmatic markers in their own conversation. Everyone does.

The pragmatics of *gíria*

The outsider groups routinely described the *gíria* users' speech as incomprehensible, and pointed especially to their high use of several pragmatic markers that are both textual and interactional. Roth-Gordon studied four expressions: sound words, obscenities, address terms and addressee-oriented tags. Example 6.2 shows multiple occurrences of the first three of these. We will look at just two of them.

Sound words are in fact non-words, phonologically graphic expressions that have also been studied in other languages such as Greek, where they are frequent in narratives (Tannen 1986). Most sound words imitate noises of contact or conflict like *bam!* or *pá!* Often preceded or followed by a pause in *gíria*, they behave almost like spoken commas, punctuating narratives and foregrounding new and important information (see Example 6.2) – classic contextualization cues. These loud, fast-spoken items are widely used in the male peer group, although speakers of standard Portuguese would not even regard them as words. The parents and middle-class Brazilians, whom Roth-Gordon surveyed for comment, know that these are part of stigmatized *gíria* speech and say that they hamper the coherence of the discourse. Since the function of pragmatic markers is to do just the opposite – to organize and structure discourse – the perception of incoherence appears to be a reaction to the speakers rather than to their speech.

Addressee-oriented tags are among the most common interactional devices in language – classically in English *y' know* (Example 6.1). The most distinctive addressee-oriented tag in *gíria* is *tá ligado* 'are you connected/paying attention?', which has been popularized by Brazilian rappers to reference black unity and political consciousness. It therefore functions both linguistically and sociopolitically in the same way as two pragmatic markers in African American Vernacular English – *aite* 'all right' and *na mean* 'you know what I mean' (Reyes 2005).

Example 6.1

Pragmatic markers in English

Pragmatic markers have been heavily researched in sociolinguistics for decades, in English and other languages – in women's and men's speech (Holmes 1995), academic lectures (Chia-Yen Lin 2010), workplace discourse (Holmes 2006), and (Spanish) classroom interaction (De Fina 1997).

One study of my own looked at markers in the peer conversations of young New Zealanders (Bell and Johnson 1997), especially addressee-oriented markers which serve to check the listener's comprehension of and empathy with what the speaker is saying. *Y'know* turned out to be especially common, occurring up to 200 times in a single interview. (Discourse markers often have reduced phonetic realizations, so linguists write them accordingly – *y'know* 'you know', *aite* 'all right'.) One speaker produces frequent clusterings of *y'know* as he talks, sometimes up to 10 tokens in a run, and even the occasional pair of two *y'knows* directly after each other. By contrast, tag questions such as *aren't they?* are very rare in real talk despite their being taught to learners as essential colloquial expressions.

Example 6.2

Hustling in Brazilian *gíria*

The *gíria* speaker 'Karate' describes watching street vendors hustle bystanders into playing a gambling game. He uses three of the four pragmatic markers studied – sound words (three times), obscenities (three times) and address forms (twice). Their frequency 'dramatically alters the rhythm of his speech' (Roth-Gordon 2007: 327) and constitutes a distinctive *gíria* style.

Karate: **Caralho**, *tirou dez mingau do bolso.* **Pum**! *Botou na parada.* **Bum**! **Caraca**, *ganhou os dez mingau.* **Caralho**, *ganhou quarenta merréis. Ih,* **mané**, *é mole! [....] Os outros cara tão apostando também junto com ela.* **Bá**! *Ganhando, perdendo, mas o mesmo,* **cara**.

  Caralho ('shit'), he took ten bucks out of his pocket. **Pum**! Put it in the game. **Bum**! **Caraca** ('gosh'), he won the ten bucks. **Caralho** ('shit'), he won forty big ones. Oh, **mané** ('man'), it's easy! [....] The other guys are also betting along with her. **Bá**! Winning, losing, but it's all his money, **cara** ('man').

'One normal word in ten'

However, the salient thing for listeners is not so much that *gíria* speakers use their own distinctive addressee-oriented tags as the frequency with which they use the standard tags, particularly *sabe* '(you) know'. Some of the outsiders that Roth-Gordon surveyed describe slang speakers as 'speaking one normal word for every ten words' (2007: 332). The markers are indeed frequent in Example 6.2, but in fact they constitute there only one word in five rather than nine words out of ten.

Exaggerating the prevalence of a handful of features is a common stereotype of youth speech in different languages and locations, from Brazilian *gíria* to Californian female youth language to British 'chavspeak' (Mendoza-Denton 2008) – see Exercise 6.12. Yet study after study has found that discourse markers are widespread in everyday speech from all kinds of speakers. As Roth-Gordon concludes, these *gíria* speakers 'present a coherent linguistic style that makes extensive use of pragmatic expressions to organize textual information, manage interpersonal relationships between speaker and listeners, and convey speaker stance towards content and audience' (2007: 339). Standard Portuguese speakers make their judgement of *gíria* on social not linguistic grounds – on the marginalized position of its speakers, and on the way in which *gíria* challenges convention.

Exercise 6.12   The image of pragmatic markers

'Discourse markers in general suffer from an image problem,' observes Norma Mendoza-Denton (2008: 285), whose study investigated Latina gang use of various markers.

1 Are there any such frequent but stigmatized markers in your language and dialect? If so, what are your impressions of how they are used and by whom, what are their discourse and social meanings, and what are general attitudes to them? How did you form your impressions?
2 Use internet and library resources to research these questions further – see for example articles and books by Janet Holmes, and many papers in the *Journal of Pragmatics*.
3 Locate YouTube clips of media representations of this kind of language – such as *Little Britain* and *The Catherine Tate Show* for British chavspeak (see also Bennett 2012), and *Saturday Night Live* performances of young California female talk. Assess the accuracy of these performances, and their part in the social evaluation of the varieties.
4 Consider the role that these pragmatic markers play in stereotyping and marginalizing their users. Why do they attract such negative evaluations? What are the means by which these evaluations get circulated in a society? Should anything be done about them?

See Chapter 10 for further discussion of language ideologies and standards and their repercussions.

6.9   RESEARCH ACTIVITY ETHNOGRAPHING THE CLASS

Apply Hymes's framework as displayed in Table 6.2 to the class you are in. I have expanded Hymes's terms for participants by introducing the finer distinctions shown in Tables 6.3 and 6.4.

Then use the activity to assess the framework. How much does it further your understanding of language use in the classroom? What are its limitations? Can you suggest improvements?

Setting
Time and place where the class is held.
Physical setup, e.g. of seating. Does 'place' signify more than just location?

Scene
What is the cultural definition of this occasion?
Is it a formal lecture? Or some other format – seminar, tutorial? What are the rules?

Animator, Editor, Author, Principal
Who does the talking? Who voices the messages?
Who is the author? Are there any 'editors'?
To what extent is the lecturer conveying content generated by others? Is there a 'tradition' being handed on? Is there much quotation, direct or paraphrased?
Who is the authority standing behind the messages? Who is responsible for the content of the class? Do class members generate content?
Does the institution (department, university management) have a role? How and when might that become an issue?

Addressee, Auditor, Overhearer, Eavesdropper
Who hears the message? The whole class? And only the class?
Are all class members being addressed, or are some of them auditors (ratified but not addressed)?
Are any unratified hearers present – overhearers?
Are all the hearers being addressed all of the time?
Are there any eavesdroppers?!
How do both producer and audience roles change when lecturer or student asks a question? Or when the class breaks out into small groups?

Outcomes
What is the overall purpose of the class?

Goals
Do all class members share this purpose? Does the lecturer?
How can differences between outcomes and goals show up?

Message form
How are things said – by lecturer, by class members? What is the mix of formal and informal?

Message content
What is the overt theme, topic? How is this approached and presented? Is it adhered to?

Key
What is the manner or tone of what is said? Is it always straight and serious, or are there other keyings such as humour, irony?
Are there non-verbal aspects?

Channels
What are the channels of communication – spoken, written, audio, visual?
Are there handouts, graphs, powerpoint, video playback, internet materials, etc.?

Forms of speech
What languages are used, and what varieties? Who by? What codes from participants' repertoires are *not* used?

Norms of interaction
What are the rules for turn taking in the class? Who is licensed to speak? When and how?
Do all interactions take place across the whole class, or are there 'breakouts' such as pair work?

Norms of interpretation
Does everyone interpret the norms in the same way? Are there any clashes between lecturer and students, or between different class members? Why?

Genre
Should this really be classified as a lecture? Or is it some other related genre? What are the criteria?

6.10   SUMMARY

This chapter has interwoven several broadly anthropological approaches to language use and users, introducing a large battery of concepts and terms.

- 'Situation' is the social occasion where language occurs. It involves interplay between language and its context, with language in part shaping the situation of its own use.
- Fishman's concept of domains reflects that there are typical combinations of participants, topics and settings in, for example, educational or religious contexts, and these tend to trigger particular code choices.

- The founding approach to situated language was Dell Hymes's 'ethnography of communication', focused in the SPEAKING taxonomy which identifies the components of speech situations.
- While Hymes recognized only two speaker and two hearer roles, Goffman then Bell advocated for finer divisions. Within the construct of 'speaker', roles from the Principal (authority behind a text) through Author and Editors to Animator (the voicebox) need to be differentiated.
- Audience roles are also ranked in centrality from the targeted Addressees outwards through the unaddressed Auditors and unratified Overhearers to any unknown Eavesdroppers. These finer roles can be seen at work in media and internet production and reception, and are best conceived as embedded within or layered upon each other.
- Participant roles have major implications for language choices, and also for the operation of speech acts, a focus in the neighbouring field of pragmatics. Austin identified performative expressions like 'I promise' which do the action they name. Speech acts have different 'illocutionary forces' such as asking or threatening.
- Early sociolinguistic research in speech acts focused on counting and comparing gender differences in acts such as apologies. Later research attends to the multiple functions and nuances that such speech acts may carry in the context of discourse.
- In the 'politeness' framework of Brown and Levinson, speech acts relate to participants' 'face' needs, especially when confronted with face-threatening acts.
- Gumperz's work in Interactional Sociolinguistics focuses on how we make our communicative intentions understood through the minutiae of everyday interaction. His concept of the contextualization cue identifies surface features by which speakers signal to listeners what is otherwise only implied in a conversation. If interactants do not share a common set of contextualization cues, trouble follows. Gumperz focused on such communication breakdowns especially in cross-cultural encounters.
- Gendered language differences show in conversation. The 'difference' approach regards men and women as coming from communicatively distinct subcultures, shown for example in their complimenting behaviours. The deficit perspective evaluates women as conversationally unconfident and subservient, while the dominance approach sees the differences as the result of men's power in society, exemplified in more frequent interrupting behaviour.
- The chapter's case study is Roth-Gordon's ethnography (2007) of disadvantaged black youth in Rio de Janiero, involving long-term close observation of their way of life, recording their interactions, and eliciting their interpretations. *Gíria* or 'slang' is a key part of their identity and marginalization, and is especially expressed in the high use of pragmatic markers, which is denigrated by standard Portuguese speakers.

6.11   FURTHER READING

For overviews of ethnographic/anthropological approaches, see the complementarily titled texts by Duranti (*Linguistic Anthropology*, 1997) and Foley (*Anthropological*

Linguistics, 1997). Duranti has also edited two readers (2004, 2009). The five-volume Schieffelin and Garrett compendium (2011) assembles an invaluable set of classic and recent articles. For considerations of situation and context, see Duranti and Goodwin's collection (1992) and van Dijk's recent monograph from a text discourse perspective (2009). Saville-Troike's *The Ethnography of Communication* (2003) gives an extensive exposition of Hymes's SPEAKING framework plus several worked examples. The book-length studies by Eckert (2000) and her one-time student Mendoza-Denton (2008) offer insightful expositions and reflections on the doing of ethnography. The *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* gives the flavour of current research, as do articles in *Language in Society* and *Journal of Sociolinguistics*.

Like his contemporary, Fishman, Hymes was central in shaping the field through his work as an essayist (e.g. 1972), journal and collection editor. In 1972 he founded the original sociolinguistic journal, *Language in Society*, and edited it for over 20 years. He also (co-)edited still-relevant early collections (Hymes 1964; Gumperz and Hymes 1972). Hymes's work is most accessible through his 1974 collected works *Foundations in Sociolinguistics*. He is not a tidy thinker or writer, but his thought is stimulating and foundational. See biographical essay in Wodak, Johnstone and Kerswill (2011).

Studies of participation and audience frameworks trace their roots back to Hymes (1972) and Goffman (1981). My own take is in Bell (1984, 1991a), and sociolinguists continue to revisit and refine these basic constructs (see articles in the *Journal of Pragmatics*).

On speech acts, Austin's founding book *How to do Things with Words* (1962) is an essential and elegant read. Collected readers at the more abstract/philosophical end of pragmatics include Kasher (1998) and Allan and Jaszczolt (2012). For empirical sociolinguistic studies, the *Journal of Pragmatics* – at nearly 4,000 pages per year in 15 issues – is a compendium of up-to-date research, especially on speech acts, politeness and discourse markers. The International Pragmatics Association runs conferences and publishes (see website).

Brown and Levinson (1987 – first published in 1978 as the major part of a collected volume) is the foundation document of the politeness framework. There is a *Journal of Politeness Research* devoted to the topic. Watts's reframing text (2003) challenges many of its assumptions and presents politeness as involving a discursive struggle for power. Janet Holmes's research, especially on workplace interaction, forms a major body of work on speech acts, discourse markers and politeness (e.g. 1995, 2006; Holmes and Stubbe 2003; Holmes, Marra and Vine 2011).

Gumperz's 1982(a) monograph is the basic text of Interactional Sociolinguistics, twinned with his edited collection (1982b) of chapters by students and colleagues. The biographical and contextual essay by Gordon in Wodak, Johnstone and Kerswill (2011) provides a good overview of Gumperz's work. Eerdmans, Prevignano and Thibault's *Discussions with John J. Gumperz* (2002) offers a fascinating roundup of his own approach and its successors. Volume 3 of Coupland and Jaworski's collection (2009a) covers *Interactional Sociolinguistics* (although oddly Gumperz's own work appears in other volumes). Tannen's books, both academic and popular (1984, 1990, 1994) probably constitute the most sizeable corpus of overtly interactional sociolinguistic work. Gender/language reading will be summarized in Chapter 7, except to note Pavlidou's very useful overview of 'gender and interaction' (2011).

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7
VARIATION IN LANGUAGE

This chapter introduces the field of variation research that has grown from the pioneering work of William Labov in the 1960s to become the most cohesive and dominant strand of sociolinguistics. The study of sociolinguistic variation had its roots in the tradition of dialectology practised in Europe and North America. This involved surveys of rural communities, concentrating on disappearing dialectal words and pronunciations, and mapping their distribution. Until the mid twentieth century, there had been no such work in urban areas but that changed with Labov's innovative research in New York City.

The 'variationist' strand of sociolinguistics studies the nexus of both variation and change. This chapter concentrates on sociolinguistic variation, as far as possible reserving discussion of linguistic change for the next chapter. Variation is wider than change: a feature may vary without changing, but it does not change without varying. Here we focus on three of the five main social dimensions on which language varies between speakers: class, ethnicity and gender. Chapter 8 will cover another, age, together with change, and Chapter 9 deals with region, including geographical variation. Many of the examples here are from English, reflecting the preponderance of the research. Variation analysis deals in linguistic detail, and so technical terminology will be required in this and subsequent chapters to specify the phonetics of variation with the necessary precision.

7.1 FOUNDATIONS: NEW YORK CITY

Doing sociolinguistic interviews

Labov began his doctoral research in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1962, aiming to investigate the English of New York City, map its social distribution and identify how it was changing. The Lower East Side was an economically and ethnically mixed area that