

Language and Society (CL2.203)

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Introduction

Language use represents some of the fundamental dimensions of human social behaviour and human interaction. Sociolinguistics is the field which studies different aspects of this interaction.

Dell Hymes described sociolinguistics as having three aspects:

- the social as well as the linguistic, *i.e.*, the study of social problems involving language and its use (language teaching, language planning etc.). This is considered only peripheral to linguistics.
- socially realistic linguistics, which looks at speech communities and brings forth issues on variation and validity, finding rules and generalisations of patterns.
- socially constituted linguistics – identifying social functions and how linguistic features are selected to serve those functions.

Mainstream linguistic theory is therefore incomplete, involving only referential meaning and ignoring the functional aspect of language.

Thus, sociolinguistics looks at language as a communicative device, variation in language, language attitude, language and identity, social stratification, language contact, language planning and language and politics.