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THE SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY SOCIAL SCIENCE APPROACH TO LANGUAGE IN SOCIETY*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Man is constantly using language – spoken language, written language, printed language – and man is constantly linked to others via shared norms of behavior. The sociology of language examines the interaction between these two aspects of human behavior: use of language and the social organization of behavior. Briefly put, the sociology of language focuses upon the entire gamut of topics related to the social organization of language behavior, including not only language usage per se but also language attitudes, overt behaviors toward language and toward language users.

1.1 Sociolinguistic Headlines

The latter concern of the sociology of language – overt behavior toward language and toward language users – is a concern shared by political and educational leaders in many parts of the world and is an aspect of sociolinguistics that frequently makes headlines in the newspapers. Many French-Canadian university students oppose the continuation of public education in English in the Province of Quebec. Many Flemings in Belgium protest vociferously against anything less than full equality – at the very least – for Dutch in the Brussels area. Some Welsh nationalists daub out English signs along the highways in Wales and many Irish revivalists seek stronger governmental support for the restoration of Irish than that made avail-

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