Sociolinguistics: An Introduction

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Introduction to the Course:

   Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to society.   Generally viewed as a part of macro linguistics, it is in nature a social science rather than a natural science or a branch of the humanities.   The rise of sociolinguistics in the 1960s posed a considerable challenge to formalistic linguistics, which viewed language as a self-sufficient entity independent of its social contexts.   The aim of the course is to introduce to the students the field of sociolinguistic studies by covering the basic issues and research methods in sociolinguistics.   Students will be enabled to use sociolinguistic methods to collect and analyze actual data.   Classes will consist of lectures and group discussions.

Course requirements: Assessment will be based on: a research brief (5%), class participation and group discussion (5%), a data collection practice (Interview or Observation) (10%)，research proposal (20%), and final paper (60%).

Class Sessions:

   Session 1. Course introduction & overview
   Session 2. Research methods in sociolinguistics
   Session 3. Language and culture
   Session 4. Variation studies
   Session 5. Language and gender
   Session 6. Code choices
   Session 7. Language planning
   Session 8 Research presentation and summary

Textbook: Spolsky, Bernard. 2000. *Sociolinguistics*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Reference Books:

   Holmes, Janet. 2011. ***An Introduction to Sociolinguistics.*** 北京：世界图书出版公。.
   Trudgill, Peter. 1983(1974). ***Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society.*** Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.
   郭 熙, 2004, 中国社会语言学（增订本）。杭州：浙江大学出版社。
   陈建民, 1999, 中国语言和中国社会。广州：广东教育出版社。
   赵蓉晖，2005，社会语言学。上海：上海外语教育出版社。
   祝畹瑾, 1994 (1992), 社会语言学概论。长沙：湖南教育出版社。
   Three very useful journals in English in this area are: ***Language in Society***，***Journal of Sociolinguistics,*** and ***International Journal of the Sociology of Language.***
   One journal in Chinese: 《中国社会语言学》杂志

Topic 1. Overview

1.1. Introduction: What is sociolinguistics?

--- Traditional linguistics and Sociolinguistics

--- Sociolinguistics, as a word (1952 H. Currie); as a discipline (1964)

--- Dialectology and Sociolinguisitcs

--- Sociology of language vs. sociolinguistics

1.2. Scope of sociolinguistics

--- Linguistic situation: diglossia, bilingualism, etc.

--- Dialects: regional and social; varieties.

--- Language in communication: codeswitching, conversation structure and

    conversation style, etc.

--- Language attitude and its effect

--- Language contact and language change

--- Language planning and language standardization

1.3. Insights we can get from sociolinguistics

--- Language is not a closed and abstract system, and it is a social interaction and

  a conduct of communication.

--- Linguistic competence includes knowledge of language and knowledge of

  language use.   Children's socialization/key stage: learn to use language.

--- Linguistic variation and language change are closely related to the social

  context.   (Lawful co-variation)

1.4. In-class group activities:

1. There are several possible relationships between language and society. One is that social structure may either influence or determine linguistics structure. A second possible relationship is that linguistic structure may either influence or determine social structure. A third possible relationship is that the influence is bi-directional; language and society may influence each other. A fourth possibility is to assume that there is no relationship at all between language and society. What is your opinion about the relationship between language and society? Can you give some examples?

2. In recent years some sound translations of foreign words have become popular when they already have Chinese equivalents. Examples are "镭射"vs. "激光" for laser, and "卡通" vs. "动画" for cartoon. Do you have more examples? Which do you prefer? Discuss possible reasons.

In-class Group Activities (1)

Name: _____   Number: _____Date: _____

1. Possible relationships between language and society

Directions: Discuss with your classmates in groups and give your opinions about the possible relationship between language and society. Please give examples as support evidence for your opinion.

Your group's opinion:

Your examples:

2. Collecting Sound Translation Examples

Directions: Discuss with your classmates in groups and give more sound translation examples. Discuss the possible reasons for the choices.

Number	Sound Translation Examples
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Possible reasons

(1)

(2)

(3)

Research Brief

In order to help you learn how to use the literature as a source of research ideas, you are required to submit one "Research Brief". This research-brief exercise will give you the opportunity to learn how to take a published research article and transform it into a related research idea. Your research brief should consist of the following:

1. Correct bibliographic citation of the study. (See example below.)
2. In no more than two or three sentences summarizes the contents of the study --- what was done, to whom and what were the findings.
3. State your research question and explain how it is related to the research article you have read. Point out the similarities and dissimilarities between your question and the research question addressed by the study you have read.
4. Describe briefly how you would carry out an empirical investigation to find the answer to your question.

EXAMPLE OF A RESEARCH BRIEF

1. Handlers, A., & Austin, K. 1980. Improving attitudes of high school students toward their handicapped peers. *Exceptional Children*. 47, 228-229.

2. Twenty junior and senior high school students participated in various activities designed to help them develop more positive attitudes toward handicapped people. At the end of eight weeks, most students reported they felt their attitudes had become more positive, particularly as a result of having had direct contact with handicapped people.

3. My idea is to see if students' attitudes toward handicapped people vary as a function of how old the students are. This idea is related to the article in that both deal with examining students' attitudes toward handicapped people. My idea examines attitudes as a function of students' age, while the article examines changes in students' attitudes as a result of participating in various activities.

4. I would randomly select 10 boys and 10 girls from each of three grade levels: fourth grade, eighth grade, and twelfth grade. I would administer a questionnaire to the three groups that would measure attitudes toward handicapped people. The questionnaire would consist of 25 statements, such as: A. Blind people are unfriendly. B. Deaf people are as smart as people who can hear. C. People in wheel chairs are good workers.

Students would be asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree with each statement. Responses indicating a favorable attitude toward handicapped people would be scored plus one. Responses indicating a negative attitude would be scored zero. Possible scores would consequently range from 0 to 25. I would compare the mean scores of the fourth, eighth and twelfth grade groups.