

Language and Society

Assignment 1 – Language in Context: Observing Variation in Everyday Speech

Due: 10 days – 21 August, 2025

Length: 2-4 pages

Objective

You've learned that **language varies** depending on **who is speaking, to whom, where, and why**. In this assignment, you'll **observe real-life conversations** and connect them to sociolinguistic concepts we discussed in class.

1. Choose Your Setting

Pick a place where you can overhear short, natural conversations:

- A café or canteen
- A bus stop or metro station or mall
- A park bench
- Student common room
- Online group calls (with permission)

Tip: Choose a place with variety in speakers—age, background, roles.

2. Take Notes, Not Recordings

To keep this ethical and non-intrusive:

- Do not record audio or video.
- Write down short summaries of what was said.
- Assign pseudonyms or labels like S1 (Speaker 1), S2 (Speaker 2).

Note:

- Speaker details (age group, gender, role – as perceived)
- Exact or paraphrased snippet of their speech
- Context (where, when, what activity)

3. Spot Sociolinguistic Features

Collect 3-5 conversations. (3 long or 5 short chats) Look for at least two of the following:

- Code-switching or code-mixing (switching languages in the same conversation)
- Dialect features (pronunciation, vocabulary)
- Register/style shifts (formal → informal)
- Slang or jargon (e.g., student slang, workplace jargon)
- Pronunciation patterns (your impression; no need for IPA here)

4. Write Your Report

Organize your report as follows:

1. **Introduction** – Where you observed, why you chose it.
2. **Observation Table** – Example:

Speaker	Perceived Age/Gender	Context	Speech Snippet	Features
S1	20s, female	Coffee queue	“Yaar, kal ka assignment submit kiya?”	Code-mixing, informal register

3. **Analysis** – Link observations to concepts from the first four classes.
4. **Conclusion** – What does this tell us about how language varies in real life?

Evaluation

Criteria	Weight
Observation detail & accuracy	30%
Application of sociolinguistic concepts	40%
Clarity & structure	20%
Ethical awareness	10%

Example Observation

Setting: Campus café, lunch break.

S1 (male, early 20s): “Bhai, kal ka viva kaise tha?”

S2 (male, early 20s): “Full tension, yaar... prof ne tricky sawaal pucha.”

Features: Hindi-English code-mixing, peer-group slang (“bhai”, “yaar”), informal register.

NB: Your observation notes should be submitted as well.