

# Socio- Linguistics, the Science of Language: An overview

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**Abstract:** This paper is a humble attempt to relate and show Language is inextricably interlinked to the existence of man with a focus on a profound similarity between all languages especially in their basic structure. It neatly examines how language and abstract thought are closely inter-linked and well-connected with a fast changing subject linguistics which is nothing but a systematic study of language focusing on what is said and formulated describing language in all its complexities.

**Keywords:** language, linguistics, structure, similarity, abstract thought, existence.,

Language is inextricably interlinked to the existence of man. There is a surprising similarity between all languages especially in their basic structure. Children all over the world start picking up words approximately at the same age and both psychologically and sociologically pursue similar paths in their speech development. In Linguistics Jean Aitchison observes, “Language and abstract thought are closely connected and many people think that these two characteristics, above all, distinguish human beings from animals.”(4) As a fast- changing subject linguistics which is a systematic study of language has continued to expand, for, an increasing number of psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, teachers, speech therapists and computer scientists have helped the need to study language more profoundly. As a scientific study of language, linguistics is descriptive, and not prescriptive. Linguistics focuses on what is said, and not on what they think ought to be said. They describe language in all its complexities but do not prescribe any rigid rules or regulations.

In A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics David Crystal defines Socio-linguistics as

**“ a branch of linguistics which studies all aspects of the relationship between language and society. Socio- linguists study such matters as the linguistic identity of social groups, social attitudes to language, standard and non- standard forms of language, the patterns and**

needs of nation language use, social varieties and levels of language, the social basis of multilingualism, and so on (422).

One has to bear in mind the subtle distinction between Socio-linguistics and the sociology of language. While Socio-linguistics deals with the linguistic explications of the subtleties of the use of language and the way language interacts with the other aspects of the society the sociology of language is concerned with the significance of the social aspects of the application of language.

In the chapter entitled “Socio- linguistics” by Floxian Coulmax included in the Handbook of Linguistics edited by Mark Aronoff and the Janie Rees- Miller, the author posits:

**“Socio- linguistics is the empirical study has language is used in Society. Cumbering Linguists and Sociological theories and methods, it is interdisciplinary field of research which attaches great significance both to the variability of language and to the multiplicity of languages and language forms in a given society” (563). In fact, socio-linguistics is an investigation into the interdisciplinary interactions of language and society and how language pertains itself to social class, sex, age, gender, ethnicity, speech situation etc.**

Every language is the direct offshoot of vigorous social interaction and every society evolves itself through the judicious use of language. Socio-linguistics as an independent discourse centres around live language issues which arise in the given social context. Theoretical linguistics, deals with language as a scientific construct whose behaviour can be measured, analysed and predicted. Socio- linguistics, on the other hand, tries to contain the looseness of language as a social phenomenon. It conceives language as a flux. Ferdinand de Saussure, a celebrated structural linguist considers language as a social fact. He insightfully interprets the characterization of language and keeps its social aspects under scanner to initiate a scientific inquiry into the interplay of social dynamics and linguistic subtleties. The major distinction between formal linguistics and socio-linguistics is that the former explains language as an immanent, self – contained structure and the latter identifies change and variation as the centre of its deliberation. Of yore linguistics was conceived as part natural science. Then the sociological dimensions of language were interpreted in terms of natural laws especially the laws of sound change. For a pretty long period linguists and historians of language stuck to this approach which identifies natural processes beneath historical and sociological transformations. They subjected to investigation only those linguistic transformations which could be reduced to natural processes, satisfying the parameters of natural science. As knowledge of linguistics grew it became imperative to find a logical answer to the questions of why and how languages change. Even highly intelligent linguistic interpretations fail to find the reasons for change in linguistic structures in a given social situation. On analyzing and change linguists found in difficult to satisfactorily fill gaps in the sound system. But they noticed that the new ones were in a logical way better than the old ones and that the mutations observed in the language were an improvement an the existing pattern of sound system. Quite naturally linguists impelled to engage themselves in search of the causes of linguistic transformation with the

result that they identified that these take place not within the province of language but in the territory of vigorous social interactions.

Noam Chomsky, the most cited writer in the humanities, has revolutionized the field of linguistics, and has dominated many other disciplines including politics and the philosophy of mind and human nature. He has also contributed significantly to our understanding of the abuse of power and of the controlling effects of the mass media. A range of chapters focusing on the various aspects of his extraordinary effect on our understanding of language, mind, and the abuse of political power, and provide an engaging insight into the connections between Chomsky's work in each of these areas.

Chomsky's obvious contention is that language which is similar to Descartes' investing investigation into cosmology, physics, optics and neurophysiology has incited a similar opposition from expert linguists and philosophers. Linguists who belong to this class see language in terms of its use. For them, language is the product of a set of social practices, a bunch of tools the humans have made to communicate. The majority of linguists and philosophers endorse one or another form of the idea that "language is an institution created by humans to communicate- a 'practice' a product of, history, a set of habits, an 'interpretative medium', a mode of communicating a speaker's intentions '(5)'

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