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Introduction to Sociolinguistics:

1-What do sociolinguists study?

- **Sociolinguistics**: a term that refers to the study of the relationship between language and society, and how language is used in multilingual speech communities.

Q what aspects of language are Sociolinguists interested in?
Sociolinguists are interested in explaining why people speak differently in different social contexts. And the effect of social factors such as (social distance, social status, age, gender, class) on language varieties (dialects, registers, genres, etc), and they are concerned with identifying the social functions of language and the way they are used to convey social meanings.

Q what do sociolinguists mean by the term variety?
A variety is a set of linguistic forms used under specific social circumstances, with a distinctive social distribution.
* Formality increases between participants (*speaker and hearer*) when the social distance is greater. Informality (Solidarity) increases when the social distance is little between participants (*speaker and hearer*).
* Social status depends on a number of factors such as social rank, wealth, age, gender and so on; therefore the person with the higher social status has the choice of using formality or informality (solidarity) when addressing other persons of lower social status. But the person with the lower social status uses only formality when addressing a person of higher social status

2-Multilingual Speech communities:

- **Domains**: domains of language use, a term popularised by an American sociolinguist, Joshua Fishman. A domain of language involves typical interactions between typical participants in typical settings about a typical topic.
Examples of these domains are family, friendship, religion, education and employment.

- **Setting**: the physical situation or the typical place where speech interactions occur (code choice), settings such as home, church, mosque, school, office, etc.

- **Diglossia**: communities rather in which two languages or language varieties are used with one being a high variety for formal situations and prestige, and a low variety for informal situations (everyday conversation). Diglossia has three crucial features; two distinct varieties of the same language are used in the community, with one regarded as high (H) variety and the other as low (L) variety. Each variety is used for quite distinct functions; H & L complement each other. No one uses the H variety in everyday conversation.
Example: the standard classical Arabic language is the high variety in Arab countries, and it is used for writing and for formal functions, but vernacular (colloquial) Arabic is the low variety used for informal speech situations.

Polyglossia: basically polyglossia situations involve two contrasting varieties (high and low) but in general it refers to communities that regularly use more than two languages.

Code-switching: it is to move from one code (language, dialect, or style) to another during speech for a number of reasons such, to signal solidarity, to reflect one's ethnic identity, to show off, to hide some information from a third party, to achieve better explanation of a certain concept, to converge or reduce social distance with the hearer, to diverge or increase social distance or to impress and persuade the audience (metaphorical code-switching)

- **Lexical borrowing**: it results from the lack of vocabulary and it involves borrowing single words – mainly nouns. When speaking a second language, people will often use a term from their first language because they don't know the appropriate word in their second language. They also my borrow words from another language to express a concept or describe an object for which there is no obvious word available in the language they are using.

* *Code switching* involves a choice between the words of two languages or varieties, but *Lexical borrowing* is resulted from the lack of vocabulary.

3-Language maintenance and shift:

- **Language shift**: it happens when the language of the wider society (majority) displaces the minority mother tongue language over time in migrant communities or in communities under military occupation. Therefore when language shift occurs, it shifts most of the time towards the language of the dominant group, and the result could be the eradication of the local language

Q What factors lead to language shift?
Economic, social and political factor
1-The dominant language is associated with social status and prestige
2-Obtaining work is the obvious economic reason for learning another language
3-The pressure of institutional domains such as schools and the media

Demographic factors
1-Language shift is faster in urban areas than rural
2-The size of the group is sometimes a critical factor
3-Intermarriage between groups can accelerate language shift

Attitudes and values
1-Language shift is slower among communities where the minority language is highly valued, therefore when the language is seen as an important symbol of ethnic identity its generally maintained longer, and vice versa.

Language death and Language loss:
When all the people who speak a language die, the language dies with them.
With the spread of a majority group language into more and more domains, the number of contexts in which individuals use the ethnic language diminishes.
The language usually retreats till it is used only in the home, and finally it is restricted to such personal activities as counting, praying and dreaming.

Q How can a minority language be maintained?
1- A language can be maintained and preserved, when it's highly valued as an important symbol of ethnic identity for the minority group.
2- If families from a minority group live near each other and see each other frequently, their interactions will help to maintain the language.
3- For emigrate individuals from a minority group, the degree and frequency of contact with the homeland can contribute to language maintenance.
4- Intermarriage within the same minority group is helpful to maintain the native language.
5- Ensuring that the minority group language is used at formal settings such as schools or worship places will increases language maintenance.
6- An extended normal family in which parents, children and grandchildren live together and use the same minority language can help to maintain it.
7- Institutional support from domains such as education, law, administration, religion and the media can make a difference between the success and failure of maintaining a minority group language.

- **Language revival**: sometimes a community becomes aware that its language is in danger of disappearing and takes steps to revitalises it.
Example:
In 1840, two thirds of the Welsh people spoke *Welsh*, but by 1980, only 20% of the population spoke *Welsh*, therefore the Welsh people began a revival process of *Welsh* language by using a *Welsh-language* TV channel and bilingual education programs that used *Welsh* as medium of instruction at schools.