



Hello

Hola

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Salut



# Introduction to Sociolinguistics

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## Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Define sociolinguistics and explain its importance.
- Identify Macro-sociolinguistics and Micro-sociolinguistics
- Identify key concepts such as language variation, code-switching, and speech communities

# What is Sociolinguistics?

Sociolinguistics is the study of how language is used in society and how it varies across different social groups.

Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society, including how language varies and changes in different social contexts.

Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society, but that study can take very different forms depending on who's doing it and what they're interested in finding ( Van Herk, 2012, p.6)

Van Herk.G. (2012). What is sociolinguistics? Willey-BlackWell

# 1. Scope of Sociolinguistics

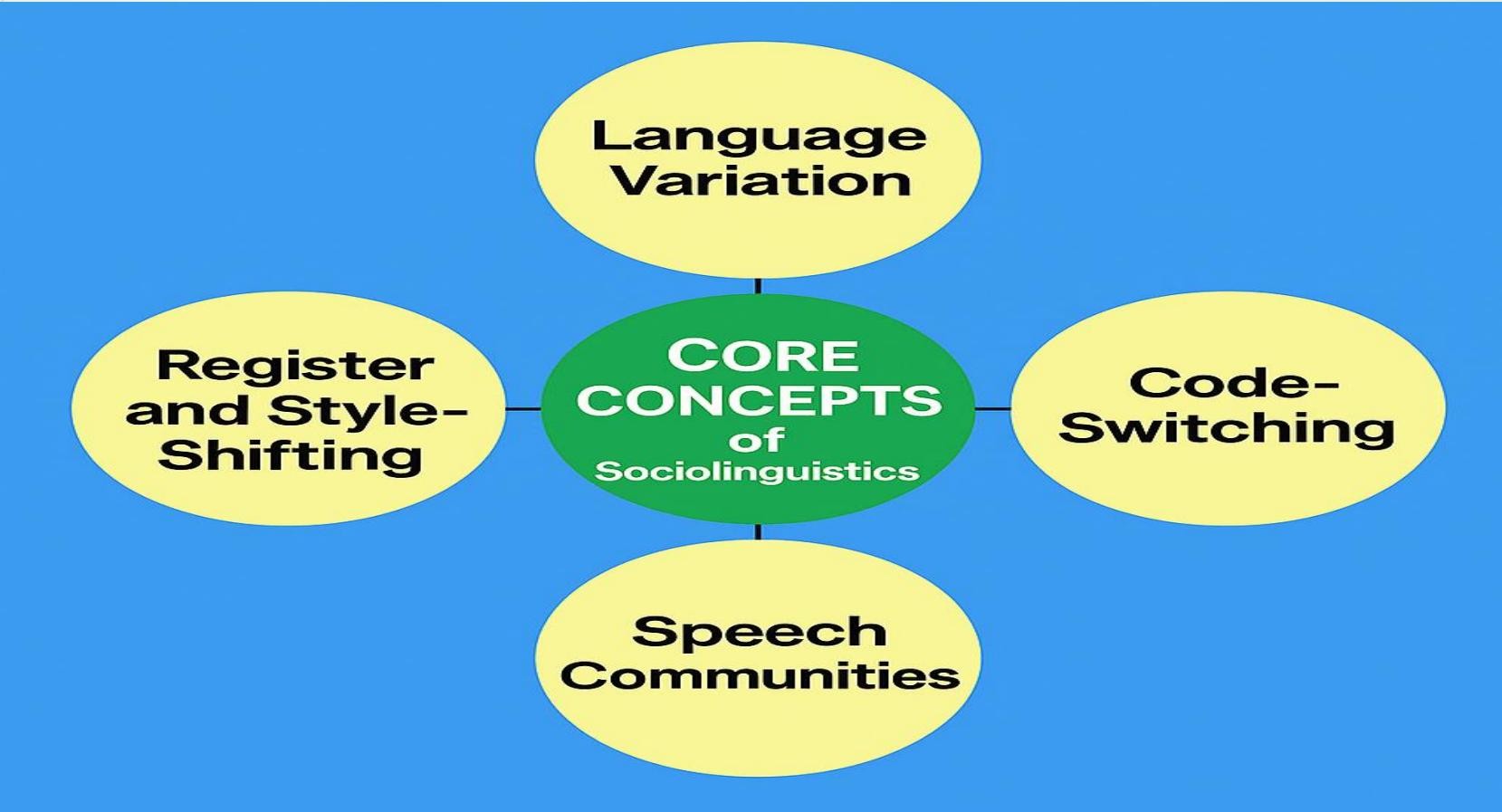
**Macro- and Micro-Sociolinguistics** are two complementary approaches within the field of sociolinguistics, each focusing on different scales and aspects of the relationship between language and society.

**Macro-sociolinguistics** looks at big-picture issues, like how a country chooses its official language or what happens when people stop speaking their native language. So, Macro-sociolinguistics is about language in society as a whole.

**Micro-sociolinguistics** looks at how people use language in everyday conversations, like how boys and girls might speak differently or how people talk at home vs. at school. It focuses on small groups and personal language use

Both of them are essential for understanding the full picture of how language works, with micro-linguistics providing insight into the mechanics of language and macro-linguistics exploring the broader social implications and evolution of language.

### 3. Core concepts of Sociolinguistics





# 1. Language Variation

- **Dialect:** A regional or social variety of a language with distinct grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.  
Example: British English vs. American English ("lift" vs. "elevator")
- **Accent:** Differences in pronunciation.
- **Sociolect:** Language variety linked to a social group (class, ethnicity).
- **Idiolect:** An individual's unique way of speaking.



## The variation can be influenced by factors such as:

- **Geographical location:** Different regions may have different dialects.
- **Social class:** People from different social classes may use different words or forms of speech.
- **Ethnicity:** Different ethnic groups often have distinct language features or ways of speaking.
- **Age and Gender:** Younger people, women, and men may have distinct ways of speaking.



## **2. Code-Switching**

Alternating between two or more languages or dialects in conversation.

## **3. Register and Style-Shifting**

A register is a publicly recognized cluster of linguistic features (e.g. pronunciation, specific words, syntactic constructions, morphology, intonation patterns, sometimes also gestures) associated with particular cultural practices and types of people ( p. 42)

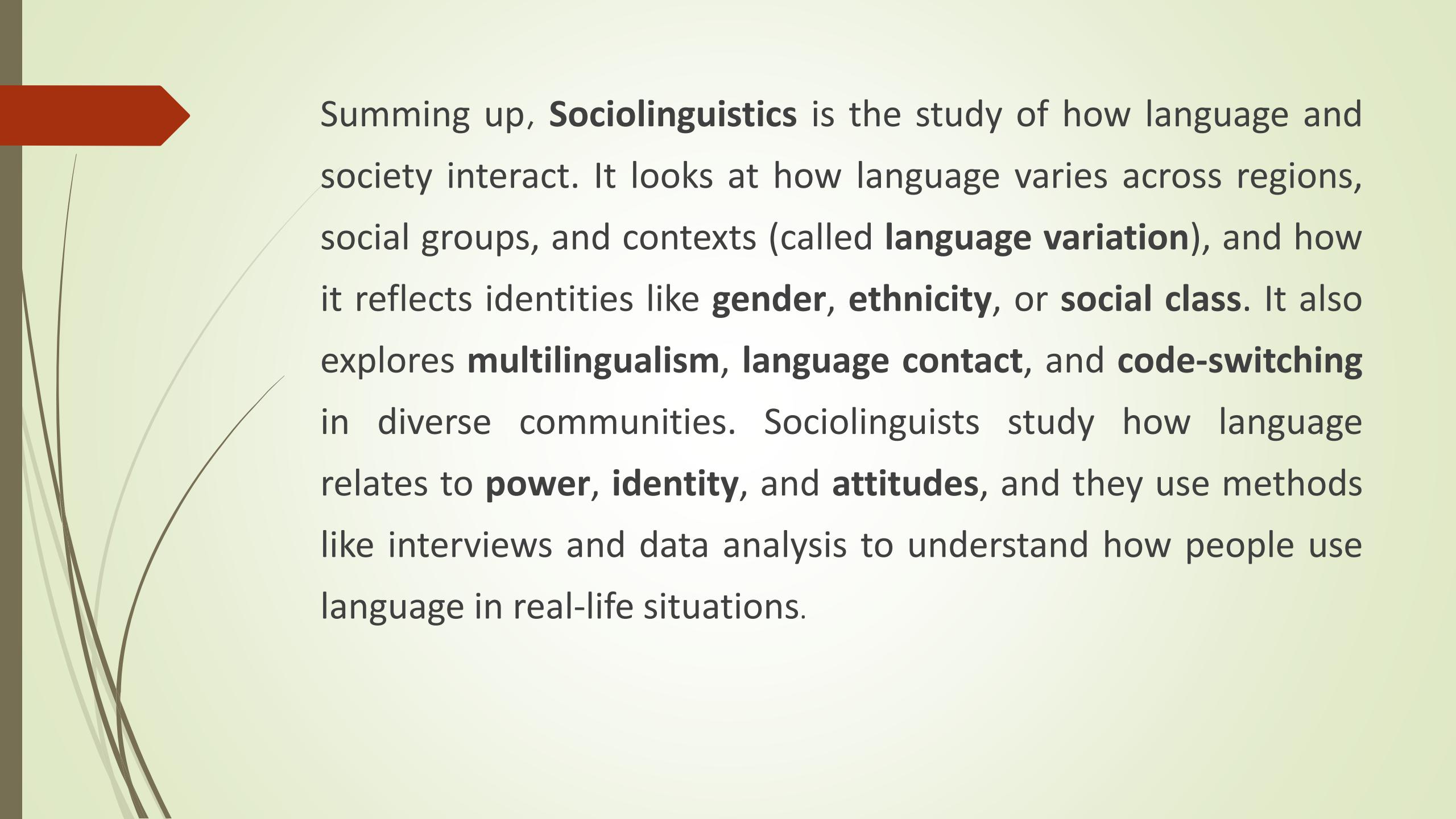
Formal vs. informal language depending on context.

## **4. Speech Communities**

Groups who share norms for language use.

## **5. Linguistic Prestige**

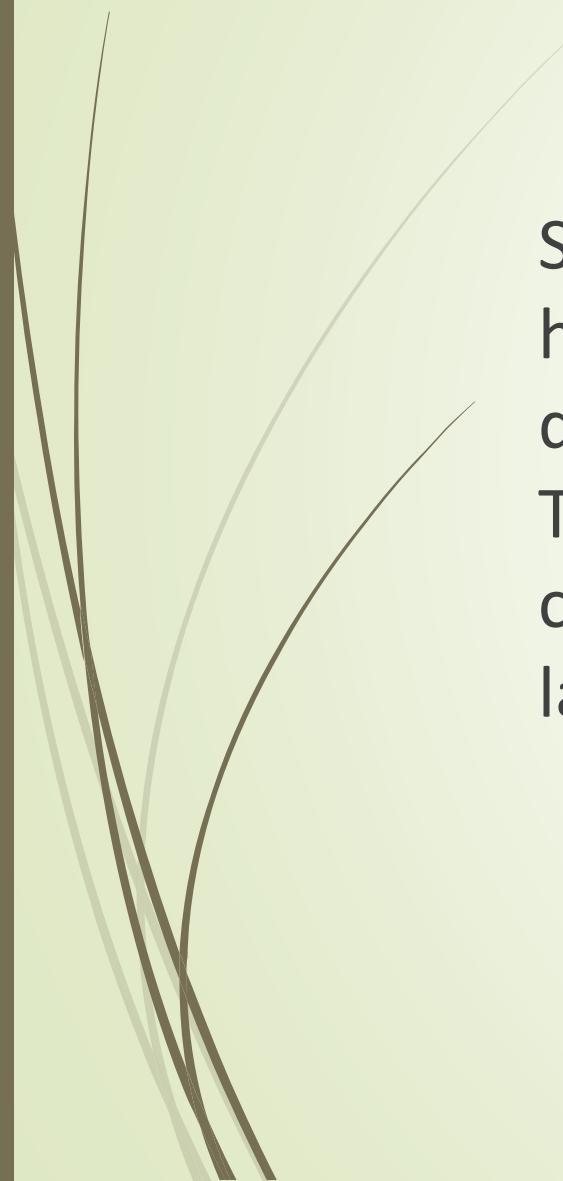
- Some ways of speaking are viewed as “better” or more “correct.”
- Tied to social power, education, and media.



Summing up, **Sociolinguistics** is the study of how language and society interact. It looks at how language varies across regions, social groups, and contexts (called **language variation**), and how it reflects identities like **gender**, **ethnicity**, or **social class**. It also explores **multilingualism**, **language contact**, and **code-switching** in diverse communities. Sociolinguists study how language relates to **power**, **identity**, and **attitudes**, and they use methods like interviews and data analysis to understand how people use language in real-life situations.



# Why is sociolinguistics important?



Sociolinguistics is important because it helps us understand how language works in society. It shows how people speak differently based on factors like region, class, or culture. This field promotes respect for language diversity, improves communication, supports language education, helps with language planning, and protects endangered languages.



## Few famous sociolinguists

- ▶ **William Labov (1927–2022):** known as the father of sociolinguistics. He studied how language varies by class, region and social context.
- ▶ **Dell Hymes (1927–2009):** He introduced the idea of communicative competence. He focused on how people use language appropriately in different contexts.
- ▶ **John J. Gumperz (1922–2013):** expert in code switching. He developed interactional sociolinguistics. He made research in multilingual and multicultural communities.



Summing up , by studying how language works in different **social contexts**, we learn to appreciate the rich **diversity** of speech in the world. It also reminds us that no way of speaking is “wrong”—just **different**—and that every language, even those at risk of disappearing, deserves **recognition and respect**. In a globalized world, sociolinguistics teaches us how to be better **communicators, educators, and global citizens**.

# References

## **The Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics**

[https://uogbooks.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/the\\_cambridge\\_handbook\\_of\\_sociolinguistics\\_cambridge\\_handbooks\\_in\\_language\\_and\\_linguistics.pdf](https://uogbooks.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/the_cambridge_handbook_of_sociolinguistics_cambridge_handbooks_in_language_and_linguistics.pdf)