

**Subject name: Language and Society**  
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**Lecture number : Module -05**  
**Lecture title: Languages – Dialects vs Standard Language**

We will talk about the distinction between dialect and standard language today. In order to continue our discussion on dialect , we would want to understand the following.

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### Names of language

- Most of the time, it is possible to name the language that we speak.
- However, a deeper look/investigation into what we speak establishes the difference between what we speak and what we think we speak.



Most of the time, it is possible to name a language that we speak. However, a deeper look or investigation into what we speak, establishes the differences between what we speak and what we thought we speak. Please and understand this. This follows from our understanding of language so far. What it means is, if someone asks us, what do you speak? In other words, which language do you speak? We can say Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam etc. We can say that without any effort. And here without any effort means without much thinking about this, without much investigation into it.

But when we look deeper into it, we see that language that I speak, lets take the example of Hindi for the purpose of discussion, is very different from Hindi spoken by other people. Hindi spoken in other places. And the kind of language that I use, the kind of mixing I work on in my variety of language is very different from others. At the level of speaking my Hindi looks very different from the Hindi used by other people.

This is what we mean that the closer investigation into what we speak will establish difference between what we speak. That is a combination of Hindi, English, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Marathi, Bengali and what we thought we speak namely Hindi. When I was asked I said Hindi, but I speak Hindi and English, I speak Hindi, English, Maithili, I speak English Hindi Urdu, I speak Hindi English Maithili Urdu Punjabi, Marathi. It is a combination of everything else. In that context, it is also important to mention that I speak Hindi that is spoken around me I do not speak Hindi that is spoken in Delhi, Hindi that is spoken in Allahabad, or the Hindi that is spoken in West Bengal or Hyderabad .

So what I speak, what I thought I speak was Hindi but what I really speak is my Hindi and a combination of many things. Therefore it is important to understand this aspect of language which helps us in understanding names of languages. This is also relevant, what we have discussed before that a language is essentially a combination or a continuum of many varieties within. And we can bring in the point, at this moment, also under the title names of language that in most of the cases in our country names of languages are decided by region, society, sometimes religion, sometimes even names of castes and various other details.

For an understanding of language in society, this whole thing in totality requires a clearer understanding. And this will also become relevant for understanding the idea of dialect. What follows from the understanding of language through the understanding of dialect

## Domains of language use

- Formal
  - Government
  - Media
  - Education
  - Business
  - Religion?
- Informal
  - Family
  - Friends
  - Community



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Let us look at one more issue, we mention some of the things like domains of language use in our discussions yesterday. Today we would want to understand the domains of language use or the domains of language function in two broad headings. One will be formal domains and the other could be informal domains. The use of language in the functioning of government, use of language in media, use of language in education, in particular, instruction and the use of language in business dealings and religion. If we consider religion as a formal domain.

I leave this thing, the decision of religion in question, for some people it could be a matter of formal domain for others it could become a matter of informal domain . So I leave it open. These lines are not important, these boundaries are not important but understanding of two broad distinction, two broad categories of, in terms of, two broad domains which are important. One is formal domain and other is informal domain. Informal domains constitute use of language within families, the use of language within friends and the use of language in community.

What also distinguishes the formal and informal domain is the use of type of language. The formal and informal , these are themselves, by themselves, types. Formal language is strikingly different from informal languages in terms of their cognitive settings. Formal language is cognitively loaded, is cognitively demanding and whereas informal language is less cognitively demanding.

It is used mostly unprepared whereas for formal language, for the use of formal language in formal domains, we require lot of preparation, lot of precision. And thus lot of precision and preparation make it loaded that is cognitively loaded. So this is also important for understanding the distinction between language and dialects.

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## Myths of 'Standard' Language

- Language has got **script**.
- Language has got **literature**.
- Language has more **number of speakers**.
- Language of **formal domains**.
- Pervasiveness of the language.
- Lack of intelligibility.



To talk about language and dialect and to establish what we discussed yesterday ; that languages there is literally no difference between language and dialect. We will need to understand little bit more in terms of myths of a standard language. There are certain things which appeared to be accepted facts by people. And please understand the language that; any discussion on language is so normal and natural that people end up talking a lot.

And people will have opinion about it and some opinion becomes myths. So for example, lots of times, people understand language in connection with the script that the language uses for the purpose of writing. However if you remember, we have discussed earlier that ability to write where we use a script is a part of general purpose cognition whereas only spoken part only the speaking capacity is the part of language is what makes language, is what brings language into the domain of special purpose cognition.

Therefore speaking and writing are two different types of human abilities. Nonetheless whenever we discuss language, we get to hear that language must have script. And therefore I am putting these things in the red "Script". To underline the connection between language and the script, technically, there is none. But it has become a myth. Similarly the term standard language itself is a myth.

But an understanding of standard language requires or has become so fossilized that only languages with scripts are considered standard language. Language that has got literature, printed literature in it,

in terms of stories, drama, poetry, novel and then, that is considered language. The richness of literature and the availability of literature from any language gives it higher status as a language and as a standard language. One of the things associated as myth for a standard language is number of speakers. So most of the time, people decide whether a language is language or a dialect, on the basis of the number of speakers.

While comparing the two, if one has more number of speakers and the other has fewer numbers of speakers then the language with fewer numbers of speakers is often termed as dialects. And language with larger number of speakers is considered language. At the same time, if two languages are intelligible that there is some sort of mutual intelligibility between two languages then one on the basis of number of speakers would be considered the dialect of the other.

So language with fewer number of speakers with shared intelligibility with the language spoken by larger number of speakers would often naturally be termed as the dialect of the language. People also believe that the language of the formal domain is language on the other hand language of the informal domains would be considered dialects.

And for something to be gaining the status of language and getting out of the level of dialects, it must be spoken in the wider spread geography. The language in the small locality, small geography with fewer numbers of speakers which lacks literature and probably it does not have its own script will form the standard set; standard features for something to be called a dialect. Whereas in this context we are putting these things as parts of myth for standard language which is self explanatory, none of these are technical requirement for something to be language or other to be dialect.

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## Standardization

- Standardization is to reduce variation and eliminate diversity.
- Diversity and variation is natural to language.
- Standard English
  - Used in print
  - Normally taught in Schools
  - Learned by non-native speakers
  - Spoken by educated people
  - Used in news broadcast



There is another part which we can discuss in the process of standardization. As we started with standard language is a myth. It is a myth, in the sense that all languages are languages, there is nothing, there should be nothing as standard and in order to understand the distinction of standard and non-standard languages in the context of language is not only a myth but a completely untenable idea.

Nonetheless this exists. So what is it that happens when something gets perceived as standard language? This is an important point for us to look at. You can substantiate your understanding by reading around these topics. In short I would like to underline that, standardization takes place only when we reduce variation and eliminate diversity from language.

Please understand the diversity and variation are natural to language. These two things are inseparable from language. There is no language possible which will not have variation within. And which will not have diversity within or which will not cover diversities. Therefore we can also conclude on of basis of these two statements, that standard language or the whole process of standardization of language is not natural, in other terms artificial.

Therefore, we termed the whole process of making the distinction between language and variety on one side. Also the making the distinction between Standard and Non-standard language will be a part of superficiality. Take for example, standard English. It will be easy for us to understand the distinction between standard and non-Standard given the example from English. What is it we call a standard English?

If you take a look at it carefully, standard English is only referred to as R.P. R.P. stands for Received Pronunciation and in a layman's term R.P. is the language of the people at Oxford and Cambridge. In other words the backyards of Buckingham palace. Language of people of power, language of the people of queen of England was considered R.P. And the important thing to underline is such a variety was spoken by handful of people and even until now, when we try to establish certain features of standard English, we use things like use in print.

The English that is in print is considered standard language English. The English that is taught in the school is considered standard language. And the effort of non-native speakers and here non-native speakers mean everybody who does not speak R.P. Effort of rest of the world to speak close to how R.P. sounds will make English, standard English. The language English that is spoken by educated people is standard English.

And the English used in broadcast is considered as standard English. Please see all these features are centered around the use of language. So from the perspective of use of language, a particular type of English is considered standard English. However there is nothing intrinsically standard about what we call as standard English. So, we see that the use of English in certain formal domains is what people mean, when they say standard English.

At the same time when we start establishing features of what is called non - standard or particularly, non-standard English the primary example that comes in mind is English spoken by African-Americans in either Britain or United States of America. And also in many other parts of western world. Sometimes that is called non-standard english. After consistent usage and NSE –Non- Standard English is one of the standard term in the study of language.in general, and English in particular.

African-American vernacular English is another term which is standardly used studying non-standard English. So these are few varieties of non -standard English. And of course, English is spoken around the world for a long time was considered non-standard English. I would like to go a step beyond and underline that English is spoken in other parts of the world like Africa, some Asian countries, South Asian countries were not even considered non-standard English. They were simply aberrations, they were simply some defects.

Slowly, they were first considered non-standard English and then they become what are known as different varieties of English. That at least sounds little bit more prestigious and atleast in the hierarchy

of language prestige and language identity. So to come back again, to the features of non-standard English, we will find the English that is used informal context.

English that is used with less cognitive load on it becomes what is called non-standard English. It requires detailed investigation but for the understanding of the distinction between standard and non standard it was important for us to understand what goes into the process of standardization. What we conclude that what goes into the process of standardization is not really natural. We cannot eliminate diversity and reduce variation from language.

At the same time, if we only consider the use of language, in formal domains for something to be standard, then most of the time people use language in the informal domains. In the usual domains where they are not guarding themselves cognitively, all the time therefore such distinctions are artificial.

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## Dialect

- Socially loaded term
- A language is dialect with an army and navy.
- Superficiality of the distinction
  - If all natural languages are acquired in the same manner; how could one be a language and the other a dialect?
- Technically there is no distinction between language and dialect.



And then it becomes easier for us to understand what we mean, when we say the term dialect it is socially loaded. We have established that technically, there is no distinction between standard language and what is called non-standard language. Similarly, technically there is no distinction between what is called language and then dialect. We will look at a little bit more in terms of details of dialects.

However, allow me repeat this once again that all natural languages that we acquire whether or not we can give a name to what we speak, whether or not how I speak is similar to other speakers are not, they are all acquired in the same manner. Therefore it is not possible for one to be the language, one to



be more important and the other to be dialect less important. The technical understanding of language acquisition helps us, understanding that there is no distinction between language and dialect and no distinction between standard and non standard language.

They are only socially loaded terms and in such a context it has been said that language is only a dialect with an army and a navy. And so so we can call something is Standard only only when that is language of powerful people with an army and a navy. And people of the underprivileged and powerless people on the street, people in the real world in real society will be termed anything. However that does not mean any distinction, any difference.

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## Dialects

- Local/Regional language
- Vernacular, Non-standard
- Language of the poor, under-privileged, non-prestigious
- Subordinate variety of a language
- Standard is not formal language.
- Dialect continuum
  - Regional, Social, Political, Linguistic



So let us look at more about dialects, some features of dialects. If an language that is within a smaller geography and that is considered as regional or local language that is very easily very comfortably such a language is termed dialects. However we do want to understand dialects continuum as well. And we have already established standard is not formal language keeping the two things together. What we would see is that there are different types of dialects.

On the dialect continuum, we understand regional dialects, social dialects, political dialects and linguistic understanding of dialects. Linguistic understanding of dialects helps us understand that whatever the realities may be underlying describing regional dialects, social dialects in political terms they are all superficial explanations, superficial descriptions from the perspective of linguistic understanding of how people speak.

Therefore it becomes also apparent that whenever we say a dialect we tend to mean that the subordinate variety of a language. For example English spoken in Africa, India, Japan and Singapore could be considered let us say non standard could be considered only varieties of English. But whenever we say Indian English or Japanese English or African English, we do mean that there is a super-ordinate variety structure. And these varieties follow from there. These are the varieties of that super structure. So for a dialect we need that super structure. But for a language too we need a super structure only then we can explain different varieties of languages.

Now, what do these things tell us? Hardly we could establish connection between language and variety and language and dialect. What the real picture looks like there is the super structure. Probably nobody speaks that and that is what that is what helps us from notion of standard language as well as the notion of 'A language' but what actually people speak is a dialect, what actually speak is variety and that is subordinate variety.

So something like Texan English or Boston English or Californian English. These things are going to be dialects of English and then because they are subordinate varieties of English. Therefore they can only be understood on a dialect continuum. So, the subordinate varieties and the dialects of language can be understood on a dialect continuum in terms of regional and social structure. However, technically there is no distinction between the two.

There are more terms that are used for understanding such ideas. Sometimes it is called vernacular, sometimes it is called non standard. However, the fact is, the language of the poor underprivileged and at times what sound non-prestigious are called dialects. These terms explain nothing about technical understanding of language. Technicalities involved in explaining language linguistically.

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## Society

- For the purpose of the study of language a group of at least two person with no upper limit may constitute society.
- A group drawn together for a purpose.

## Culture

- Shared norms constitute culture.



And with this we, indicate again, our understanding of society. Such an understanding of the distinction between language and dialect, language and variety, standard and non-standard becomes very apparent and relevant in the society, that is where people interact in the groups. Along with this, by now, we have established language and society. What comes into picture in understanding of this, overtly is the term culture. And language plays an important role in understanding of culture as well.

So culture is called shared norms. Shared norms constitute culture and people who share norms in a society are part of one culture we will look at how the meaning of shared norms and how when people share norms becomes really important in understanding both language and society. Thank you.