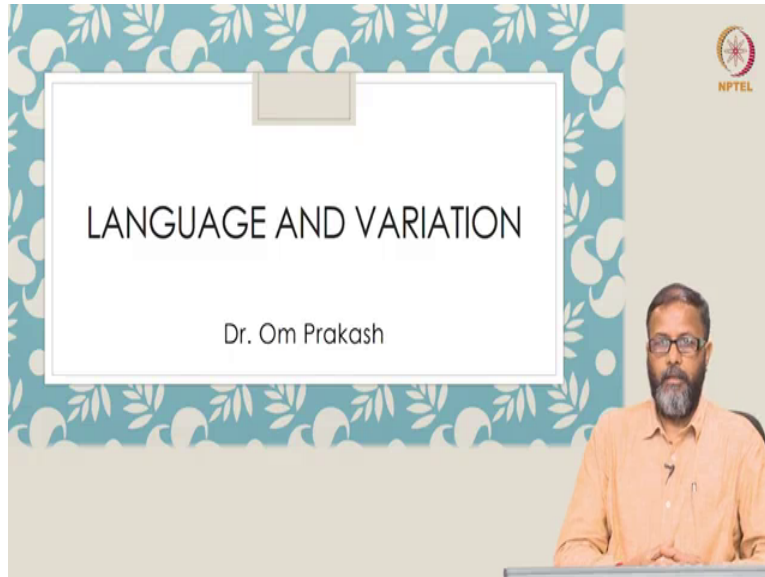



Fundamental Concepts in Sociolinguistics
Professor Om Prakash
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida
Language and Variations

(Refer Slide Time: 00:13)




Welcome to class. Today we will talk about Language and Variation. As we have been talking in the course in different lectures every speaker or every user of a language has an idiolect or individual-centric variety. So, we all use a language in a different way. And communication happens on a broader shared understanding about structures and meaning associated with them. So, we all have our own style of speaking, we all have our own version and variety of language. Such a dynamic nature language has. So, we are talking about language and variation today.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:12)



Language Variation

- We vary in our use of language/dialect/variety/code in terms of
 - pronunciation (accent)
 - choice of words
 - morphological differences
 - syntactic structures
 - style of speech
 - Conversation style etc.
- While the diversity of variation is huge, there are restrictions on variation
- Such variations have patterns and are consistent in a particular speech community. Such linguistic variations can be attributed to differences in the social characteristics of the speakers using the language.
- They are related to
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Class
 - Geographical location
 - Socio-cultural Space
 - Identity
 - Solidarity etc.



And we all vary in our use of language, dialect, variety, code. There is a deliberate motive behind putting all these categories together. The idea of language, dialect or variety or code, they are all the same. They are not different terms. But they have different connotations in which they are used. They have social connotations and as a linguist or the person who is in linguistics, for them, they all belong to the same category. However, we have socio-cultural connotations in using one or the other term.

So, we all vary in terms of our pronunciation, or for that matter, accent, or for that matter, choice of words. We might express morphological differences, different syntactic structures, sentence structures. We all may vary in terms of style of speech or we may vary in terms of conversation style. So, within the same speech community, within the same language boundary or the dialect boundary, we find these variations.

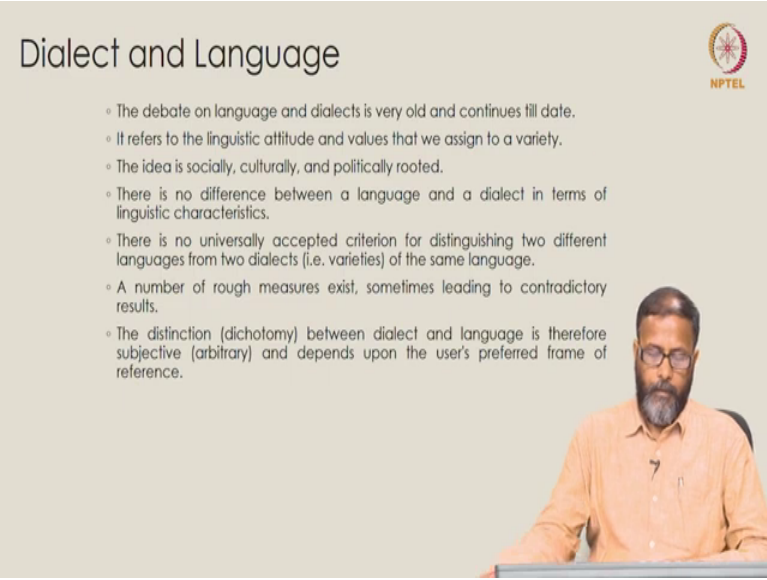
While the diversity of variation is huge, there are certain restrictions on variation. So, it is not indefinitely and infinitely variant, there are certain restrictions which apply. And there is a certain common understanding because of which we are able to communicate. Such variations have patterns. They are not random variations. They have a pattern. And they are consistent in a particular speech community. Such linguistic variations can be attributed to differences in social characteristics of the speakers using that particular variety or language.

And these variations have a number of sociocultural factors which contribute, factors like age, gender, class, geographical location, sociocultural space, context in which you use, the way you construct, to identity, linguistic identity and linguistic regions or for that matter, solidarity that you express with the other members of the community, speech community.

So, language variation is a very normal natural phenomena and we all vary in terms of that. But certain variations which become points of study, certain variations which become focal points of study are related to these social factors and they are consistent in nature. They are predictable. And this is what we study in sociolinguistics, called language variation.

The pioneer, the one who pioneered this study is William Labov and who very meticulously established a correlation between linguistic variables and social structures. And from there we see a variationist tradition of study, of studying the language in society.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:11)



The slide is titled "Dialect and Language" and features the NPTEL logo in the top right corner. It contains a list of seven bullet points discussing the relationship between dialects and languages. In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small inset image of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing an orange shirt, sitting at a desk.

- The debate on language and dialects is very old and continues till date.
- It refers to the linguistic attitude and values that we assign to a variety.
- The idea is socially, culturally, and politically rooted.
- There is no difference between a language and a dialect in terms of linguistic characteristics.
- There is no universally accepted criterion for distinguishing two different languages from two dialects (i.e. varieties) of the same language.
- A number of rough measures exist, sometimes leading to contradictory results.
- The distinction (dichotomy) between dialect and language is therefore subjective (arbitrary) and depends upon the user's preferred frame of reference.

Now, I told you, I deliberately put dialect, language, code, variety all together in the same bracket, because we do have different kinds of ideas about language, about dialect, the prestige that is assigned to a particular dialect, the prestige that is assigned, prestige value that is assigned to a particular language. Now, we need to understand what is the language and what is a dialect.

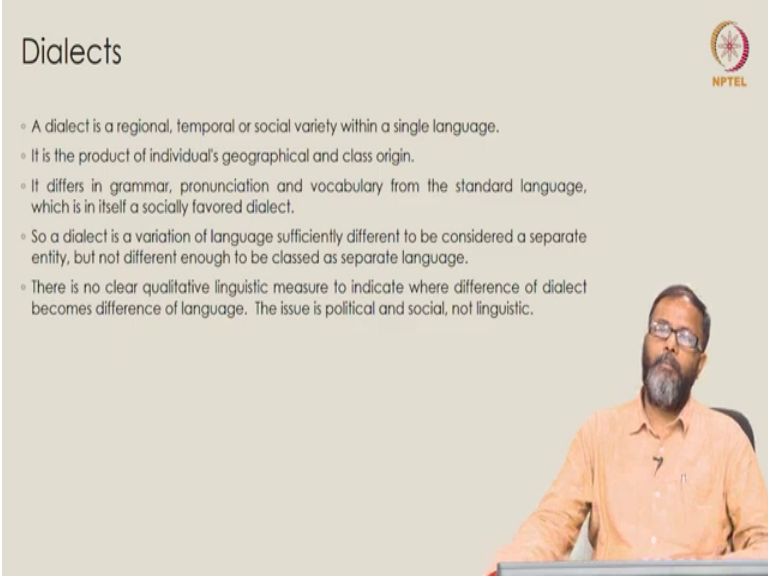
This debate is very old and it is more of a linguistic attitude that the speakers of a particular dialect or language assign to another dialect or variety. There is no linguistic basis of making a

distinction about language and dialect. It is more of a sociocultural attribute that we assign. And there is no universally accepted criterion for distinguishing two different languages and two different dialects.

In fact, the language that we speak is also a socially favored dialect. So, nobody speaks a language. We all speak a dialect. And what you call language is actually accidentally and deliberately socially favored, culturally favored dialect that acquires a high prestige value and that is codified, standardized and it becomes a language, so called language, but actually it is a variety that you speak, even if to you this whole binary idea of a standard and vernacular is a misnomer and is confusing.

Each variety has equal potential of becoming a so-called standard language. It is social, institutional, cultural, institutional support to a particular variety, a favor to a particular variety which makes it a language. So, we all speak dialects. Standard English is also a dialect of that imagined English. Nobody speaks in this so-called 'standard' variety.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:57)



The slide is titled "Dialects" and features the NPTEL logo in the top right corner. It contains a list of five bullet points defining dialects. In the bottom right corner, there is a video inset showing a man with a beard and glasses, wearing an orange shirt, speaking at a podium.

Dialects

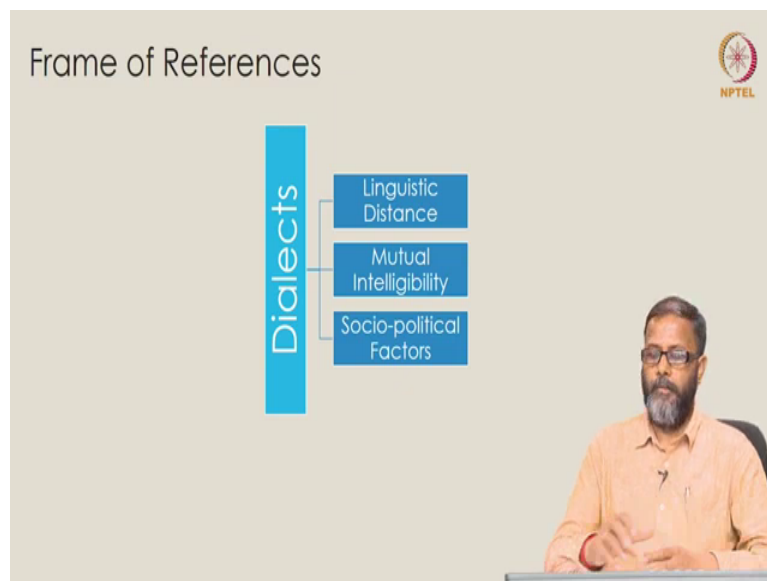
- A dialect is a regional, temporal or social variety within a single language.
- It is the product of individual's geographical and class origin.
- It differs in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary from the standard language, which is in itself a socially favored dialect.
- So a dialect is a variation of language sufficiently different to be considered a separate entity, but not different enough to be classed as separate language.
- There is no clear qualitative linguistic measure to indicate where difference of dialect becomes difference of language. The issue is political and social, not linguistic.

This distinction can be understood in terms of some frames of reference to how we look at a dialect. We will come to that shortly. But broadly we understand dialect in terms of a regional, temporal or social variety within a single speech community. It is the product of an individual's geographical space and class origin. It may differ in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary

from the ‘standard’, which encodes a so-called standard language, which itself is a socially favored dialect, and it is a variation of language sufficiently different to be considered a separate entity, but not different enough to be called a separate language.

However, there are no clear qualitative linguistic measures and quantitative linguistic measures to indicate whether differences of dialect become differences of language. This issue is purely political, social and cultural.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:16)




So, I was talking about frame of references. How we look at a particular dialect that tells you the whole story. So, we go by linguistic distance, so the difference in structures. How a particular variety differs in terms of linguistic structures to the other particular variety that distance tells if the differences are very high, if there are two separate codes, varieties or language. If the differences are overlapping and very low, then we consider them two varieties of the same language.

Then mutual intelligibility is another frame of reference through which we see the dialectal variations, dialectal differences and that means that the speakers of dialect one and the speakers of dialect two are able to communicate, mix and share. And thus both the varieties need to be mutually intelligible—they understand each other and communication is not interrupted, sharing is not interrupted, interaction is not interrupted, they can understand each other.

So, the second frame of reference is mutual intelligibility, to what extent they are able to understand each other determines whether it is a variant of the same language or are the two separate languages.


The third frame of reference in terms of understanding the difference between language and dialect is a sociopolitical factor. So, it is the language attitude or the prestige value that the speakers of variety one assign to speakers of variety two or variety three for that matter. So, these are three references, frames of references that allow us to understand the difference between a dialect and a language. So, mutual intelligibility for that matter remains the major reference point.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:36)



Registers

- Dialects are the varieties according to the users, registers are the varieties of language associated with people's occupation.
- They are stylistic, functional varieties of a dialect or a language. They may be narrowly defined by reference to subject matter (field of discourse), to medium (mode of discourse) and level of formality, that is style (manner of discourse).
- Registers are, therefore, situationally conditioned discourse oriented varieties of a language.
 - scientific,
 - religious,
 - legal,
 - commercial,
 - of airport/Railway announcers,
 - of telephone operators,
 - call centres etc.
- Talk in a religious gathering: serious and full of static expressions
- Talk at a seminar with scholars: analytic and argumentative
- Discussion with friends: casual and informal



Now, another variation that we find is 'register'. So, within the same language or within the same linguistic repertoire, we have variations in registers. So, if dialects are varieties according to the users then registers are the varieties according to the use, according to the occupation and the context associated with the language users.

So, it is context specific, it is occupation specific. And there are registers, like religious registers. So, when you are talking about religion in a religious context you find a set of terms and words and style of speaking different from let us say scientific registers.

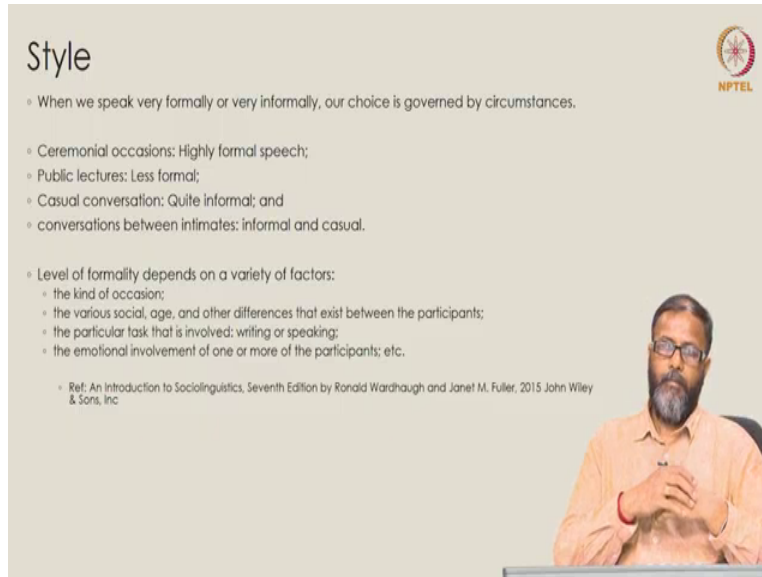
So, people in technology and science, the style of speaking, the conversation degree of formality associated with it: that would be a scientific register. Legal registers in the legal context. Commercial registers, you might have seen airport, railway announcements or telephone operators: the way they talk, or of call centers. So, these are different registers, different varieties. However, they are not different dialects or different languages within the same speech community based on the context and the situation of the speaker. In that sociocultural context we have varieties which are distinct from one another.

So, when you are talking in a religious gathering, the same person may use, the person/speaker of the same variety may use serious language and it would be full of static expressions in a religious discussion. If you are giving a seminar or I am talking to you in this class, I will tend to be highly formal, analytical and argumentative. So, I have this academic register, though I am speaking English. So, language is not different. The variety I am speaking in is not different.

The only thing is that the context is different and that bears upon changes and variations in the style and this variation is called, this variant is called register. Language is not different by the way. It remains the same language, but a different register. So, we need to understand the difference between dialect and register, language and register. And while the same person is talking to friends and family, you become very casual and informal.

So, the degree of formality associated, the context and the domain in which you are using the language will determine the variety. So, domain specific varieties, occupation specific varieties are called registers.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:53)



The slide is titled "Style" and features the NPTEL logo in the top right corner. It contains a list of bullet points discussing the formality of speech based on circumstances and social factors. A small inset image in the bottom right shows a man with a beard and glasses, wearing an orange shirt, speaking at a podium.

Style

- When we speak very formally or very informally, our choice is governed by circumstances.
- Ceremonial occasions: Highly formal speech;
- Public lectures: Less formal;
- Casual conversation: Quite informal; and
- conversations between intimates: informal and casual.

▫ Level of formality depends on a variety of factors:

- the kind of occasion;
- the various social, age, and other differences that exist between the participants;
- the particular task that is involved: writing or speaking;
- the emotional involvement of one or more of the participants; etc.

▫ Ref: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, Seventh Edition by Ronald Wardhaugh and Janet M. Fuller, 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Inc

Then we have another term called style. Style is purely related to the degree of formality, the scene, the settings in which we use the language. So, when we speak very formally, the degree of formality is very high. When you are casual, the degree of formality is low. And our choices are governed by circumstances and our communication partners, the audience who participates in your exchange in communication.

So, for example, if you are in a ceremonial occasion, if you are on stage making announcements or presiding over a function, the tone and tenor of this speech will be highly formal, public lectures would be less formal, casual conversations are quite informal and conversation between inmates highly informal and casual.


And there are several factors which contribute to the level of formality and it depends on a variety of factors: like, for example, the kind of occasion you are speaking and the various social, age and other differences that exist between the participants, the way you speak to the kids and the way you speak to your seniors and elderly people, the style will be different, the particular task that is involved, so in writing you use a different variety of the same code. However, in speaking we tend to be more casual and more informal.

So, you have characters like degeneracy, incompleteness, idiosyncrasies they recur in our oral varieties. However, in written varieties, we are very formal and we try to complete the sentences.

So, the particular task that is involved also determines the kind of language, the kind of variety you are going to use. Your style is determined by the format of the use of language. Then the emotional involvement of one or more participants, if you are emotionally charged, the style of speaking will be different.


So, there are many multiple factors which determine the style of a speech. So, now, we have terms like language, we have terms like dialects, we have terms like registers, we have terms like style. So, they all denote certain variation in the use of language.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:10)



From Dialectology to Sociolinguistics

- study of language in relation to dialects from a regional angle
- begun in late 19th Century
- also called 'Dialect Geography'
- sub-discipline of linguistics
- No focus on social factors in language use and change



The image shows a slide from an NPTEL presentation. The title is 'From Dialectology to Sociolinguistics'. Below the title is a bulleted list of points: 'study of language in relation to dialects from a regional angle', 'begun in late 19th Century', 'also called 'Dialect Geography'', 'sub-discipline of linguistics', and 'No focus on social factors in language use and change'. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a man with a beard and glasses, wearing an orange shirt, sitting at a desk with his hands clasped.

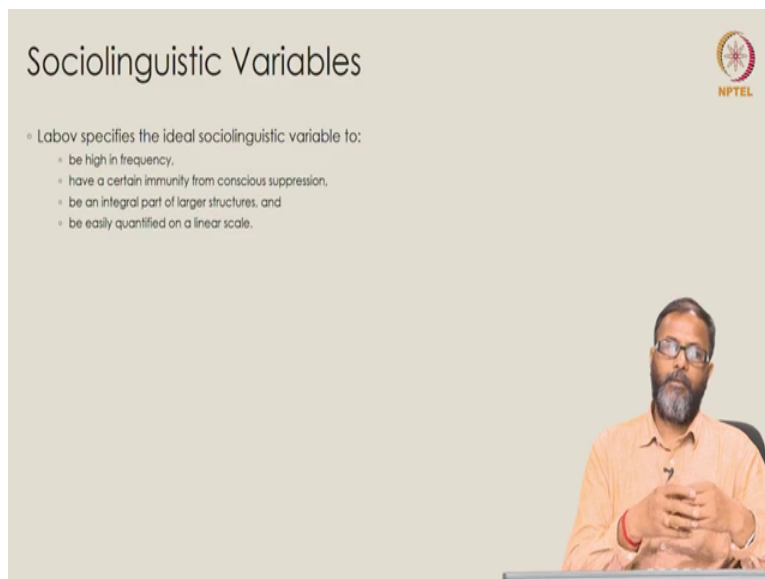
But what we are talking about is sociolinguistic variation and we are talking about language and variation in general. We are not referring to these variations, but we are referring to the sociolinguistic factors which trigger variation in language use, which are consistent in nature, which are high frequency, in high frequency, which have a pattern and which are consistent and there is no conscious effort to suppress these variations, but instead there is an urge and a trigger to assert these variations.

If you look at dialectology, which studies linguistic variations, the aim of the dialectology is to study linguistic variation to understand and explain the dialectical variation based on the geographical location of the language. So, it was purely linguistic variation, where we talked about variation in accent, we talked about variation in style, we talked about variation in speech,

we talked about variation in syntactic structure, sentences, we talked about variations in language, sorry, in the selection of words at lexical levels. They are purely linguistic variations.

But post-1960s and post William Labov's experiment and study in Martha Vineyard Island and the fourth floor survey or social stratification of language English study in New York City, there was a correlation established between such variations and linguistic variations; or you can call these linguistic structures and social structures. And Labov became a pioneer in introducing such a kind of linguistic analysis and understanding of a correlation between language structures and social structures. So, we are talking about that variation.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:43)



The slide is titled "Sociolinguistic Variables" and features the NPTEL logo in the top right corner. It contains a bulleted list of criteria for an ideal sociolinguistic variable. In the bottom right corner, there is a video inset showing a man with a beard and glasses, wearing an orange shirt, speaking at a podium.

Sociolinguistic Variables

- Labov specifies the ideal sociolinguistic variable to:
 - be high in frequency,
 - have a certain immunity from conscious suppression,
 - be an integral part of larger structures, and
 - be easily quantified on a linear scale.

From Dialectology to Sociolinguistics



- study of language in relation to dialects from a regional angle
- begun in late 19th Century
- also called 'Dialect Geography'
- sub-discipline of linguistics
- No focus on social factors in language use and change

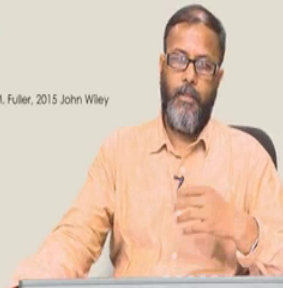


Style



- When we speak very formally or very informally, our choice is governed by circumstances.
- Ceremonial occasions: Highly formal speech;
- Public lectures: Less formal;
- Casual conversation: Quite informal; and
- conversations between intimates: informal and casual.
- Level of formality depends on a variety of factors:
 - the kind of occasion;
 - the various social, age, and other differences that exist between the participants;
 - the particular task that is involved: writing or speaking;
 - the emotional involvement of one or more of the participants; etc.

◦ Ref: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, Seventh Edition by Ronald Wardhaugh and Janet M. Fuller, 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Inc



Registers



- Dialects are the varieties according to the users, registers are the varieties of language associated with people's occupation.
- They are stylistic, functional varieties of a dialect or a language. They may be narrowly defined by reference to subject matter (field of discourse), to medium (mode of discourse) and level of formality, that is style (manner of discourse).
- Registers are, therefore, situationally conditioned discourse oriented varieties of a language.
 - scientific,
 - religious,
 - legal,
 - commercial,
 - of airport/Railway announcers,
 - of telephone operators,
 - call centres etc.
- Talk in a religious gathering: serious and full of static expressions
- Talk at a seminar with scholars: analytic and argumentative
- Discussion with friends: casual and informal



Language Variation



- We vary in our use of language/dialect/variety/code in terms of
 - pronunciation (accent)
 - choice of words
 - morphological differences
 - syntactic structures
 - style of speech
 - Conversation style etc.
- While the diversity of variation is huge, there are restrictions on variation
- Such variations have patterns and are consistent in a particular speech community, such linguistic variations can be attributed to differences in the social characteristics of the speakers using the language.
- They are related to
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Class
 - Geographical location
 - Socio-cultural Space
 - Identity
 - Solidarity etc.



And Labov himself talks about sociolinguistic variables. And he says that it is important to understand and identify a sociolinguistic variable and then you can establish a correlation. So, Labov specifies the ideal sociolinguistic variable to be high in frequency irrespective of the context and situation. It is prolific, it has a pattern of occurrence, and it is high in frequency. For example, the sound /r/ in his New York study, or for example, raised vowel in his Martha Vineyard Island study and such studies have been replicated in numerous languages by a number of scholars establishing linguistic correlates and social structures.

The second point he makes is that it has a certain immunity from conscious suppression. What does it mean, it means that speakers deliberately choose it to express themselves and such expressions have a certain sociocultural antecedent. So, they are not random, they are predictable. It is part of an integrated whole, it is an integral part of a larger structure. In the discourse, it frequently occurs. And such variables are easily identifiable, quantifiable on a linear scale.

So, if you are able to understand and identify these variables, sociolinguistic variables or these language changes, they are predictable. They have patterns. And what happens in Martha Vineyard Island, if you look at the study, the islanders tried to create a separate independent identity and express their solidarity with the community by raising the vowel, /k/ like sound. So, it was a deliberate thing with a different socio-political motive. So, it was not purely a language variation, but it has its correlations in sociocultural, ideological, political space.

So, we all vary in terms of accent, in terms of style, in terms of different registers, but we need to understand the variation in terms of the social determinants and factors, the factors like age, the factors like gender, the factors like class, the factors like geographical location, the factors like sociocultural space, the factors like issues of identity and solidarity: do they make a difference in the way we use the language? Do they have a role, do they factor basically, in our use of language? And if they do, that is what we need to understand and identify.

How come gender be a factor in two varieties of language or language use for that matter? A lot of studies have been done so far. Afterwards, like the Robin Lakoff study, or Deborah Tannen for that matter, and so many other people have studied. So, gender becomes a factor in understanding different uses of language by men and women. And there are lots of theoretical frameworks and debates about it. Class becomes a factor in language use.

So, the idea of language variation actually entails a number of theoretical issues. And you can understand the social act for that matter or the regional dialects for that matter. Specifically social acts become a very important topic for discussion and understanding when you look at class: social class as a factor which determines variation in language use. So, we will talk about all these factors and issues and themes in our subsequent videos when we talk about the founding fathers of modern sociolinguistics.

Now, we will talk about William Labov, his journey as a linguist, his 1963 studies of Martha Vineyard Island, and his 1964 study of English in New York City. Similarly, we will talk about ideas like diglossia, we will talk about sociology of language by Joshua Fishman, we will talk about Basil Bernstein's idea about class and codes in separate lectures and videos. We will talk about all these themes and major thrust areas and the whole “variations tradition” pioneered by Labov.

And you can see around you as well. Look at your mother tongue or look at the language you speak and look at the changes, variations that you have noticed when the same language is used by different people, try to understand what are the factors, first and foremost we identify the differences. Differences may be at the level of accent, pronunciation. Differences may be at the level of choice of words. Differences, religion becomes a factor.

If you look at Kashmiri, for that matter, Kashmiri as a language and it is reported in the study of that. There is a conscious choice of words by a particular religious community to use, for example, the words *shering* and *khand*, which means sugar. So, one community uses, religious community or the followers of a particular religion, they use *khand* for that matter. And the other community uses, let us say, *shering* for that matter for sugar.

Or for *aab* versus *jal*, the water, *treash* in Kashmiri. And you can find so many examples all around you where a particular set of speakers prefer a particular set of words to be used and that is a conscious choice. You might find a particular set of classes, social classes that use the language in a particular style. However, the other class uses the same language with a different style.

So, it is all up to you to see around you, but this is the story of language variation. We will continue our discussion in other classes about the details of these variations and how gender, how age, how class, socio-political preferences, spaces, identity issues and solidarity in the group factoring the difference in language use.

And with this, we close this discussion for now. We will continue with these topics in our further videos. Thank you very much for now!