



Fundamental Concepts in Sociolinguistics
Professor Doctor Om Prakash
Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida
Lecture 49
Charles A Ferguson and His Work

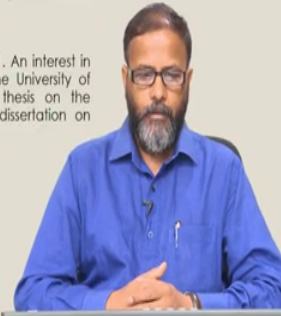
Welcome to class. In continuation with our series of surveying the prominent scholars and major contributors who shaped the field of sociolinguistics, today we are going to talk about Charles Ferguson, who is best known for his classical masterpiece on Diglossia, a stable sociolinguistic situation, a bilingual situation which was published in 1959. So today we will talk about the major works and the academic contribution and journey of the sociolinguist named Charles Ferguson.

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Charles Albert Ferguson
(1921-1998)

- Charles Albert Ferguson, a major scholar in many fields- psycholinguistics, linguistics, Arabic and Bengali, phonology, applied linguistics, and the study of language in religion- and a gifted teacher, as an unending source of inspiration to his students and colleagues.
- Ferguson was born in Philadelphia, PA in 1921. An interest in languages led him to Oriental Studies at the University of Pennsylvania (BA 1942, MA 1943 with a thesis on the Moroccan Arabic Verb; PhD 1945 with a dissertation on Standard Colloquial Bengali)




Charles Albert Ferguson was born in 1921 and he died in 1998. He was a major scholar in many subfields like psycholinguistics and linguistics; his major contribution is in Arabic and he did his PhD on a topic in Bengali. He has written prolifically in applied linguistics and a study of language in religion and he was a gifted teacher, a very meticulous researcher and showed keen interest in developing ideas in various subfields of the discipline.

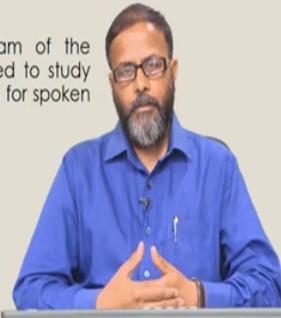
Ferguson was born in Philadelphia in 1921 and an interest in language led him to Oriental Studies at the University of Pennsylvania where he received his BA in 1942, MA in 1943 with a

thesis on Moroccan Arabic verbs and his PhD in 1945 with a dissertation on standard colloquial Bengali.

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- He grew up with a strong interest in languages. He learned Latin, French and German at high school. At the University of Pennsylvania, he added Greek, Modern Hebrew and Old English.
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- Completing a BA in philosophy, his graduate major was Oriental Studies; he studied Moroccan Arabic verbs and the phonology and morphology of Bengali. Zellig Harris was his graduate adviser.
- With support from the Intensive Language Program of the American Council of Learned Societies, he continued to study Moroccan Arabic and developed teaching materials for spoken Arabic.




He grew up with a strong interest in language and he mastered many languages. Some of them are: Latin, French and German at high school, and at the University of Pennsylvania he learned three more languages; Greek, Modern Hebrew and Old English. After completing a BA in Philosophy, his graduate major was Oriental Studies.

He studied Moroccan Arabic verbs and phonology and morphology of Bengali. Professor Zellig Harris was his graduate advisor. With support from the intensive language program of the American Council of Learned Societies, he continued to study Moroccan Arabic and developed teaching materials for spoken Arabic. So, his interest in Arabic dates back to his study days, which continues during his entire career.

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- Inspired by a visit of Roman Jakobson, he saw the value of uniting psychological and linguistic approaches to the study of child language.
- In 1947, he accepted a position at the Foreign Service Institute working with Henry Lee Smith. While there, he wrote an unpublished paper on Arabic politeness formulas in 1955 and published an article on Arabic baby talk (Ferguson, 1956).
- In 1955 he moved to a post teaching linguistics and Arabic at Harvard, where he made contact with social scientists interested in language, such as Dell and Roger Brown. There too his 'interests in language acquisition and social attitudes toward language were strengthened and given more shape' (1995a:18).




Inspired by a visit to Roman Jakobson, he saw the value of uniting psychological and linguistic approaches to the study of child language. In 1947, he accepted a position at the Foreign Service Institute, working with Henry Lee Smith. While there he wrote an unpublished paper on Arabic politeness formulas in 1955 and published an article on Arabic baby talk in 1956.

In 1955, he moved to a post at Harvard teaching Linguistics and Arabic where he made contact with social scientists interested in language such as Dell Hymes and Roger Brown. There too his interest in language acquisition and social attitudes towards language were strengthened and given more significant shape.

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- His classic paper on diglossia (Ferguson, 1959) was his first major contribution to sociolinguistics, and his best-known work.
- There have been several reprints and translations into Italian, Spanish, Romanian, German and Portuguese. In the article, he suggested that a full explanation of these special situations would help 'in dealing with problems in linguistic description, in historical linguistics, and in language typology' (Ferguson, 1956: 2).




Though he continued contributing, writing and publishing during all these years, his masterpiece for which he is known worldwide appeared in 1959 and it was 'Diglossia'. This is an original work and a major contribution to sociolinguistics. And there have been several reprints and translations into Italian, Spanish, Romanian, German, Portuguese and several other languages of this work, and this idea of diglossia made him immortal in the discipline.


In the article, he suggested that a full explanation of these special situations would help in dealing with problems in linguistic description, in historical linguistics and in language typology. So, 'Diglossia' remains his major work, so we will talk about diglossia for a short while. However, if you are interested to know more about diglossia, you can watch the lecture on diglossia.

And that lecture will give you a detailed idea of it not only in the context of Arabic and Greek that he talked about but also in Indian context, there you will get Tamil diglossia and other language multi-glossia for that matter. So, for a detailed understanding of the term diglossia, you can watch the video on diglossia.

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- Ferguson came from a working-class family, but on completing high school he won a four-year scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, where he took B.A. in philosophy.
- He then stayed on at Penn for graduate work in oriental studies; he wrote a master's thesis on Moroccan Arabic and a doctoral dissertation on Bengali, receiving his doctorate in 1945.
- His primary adviser throughout was Zellig Harris; during the same period he began a longstanding interaction with Roman Jakobson, especially with reference to 'his interest in the relationship between linguistic theory and language development in the child' (Ferguson 1995a:14).



Ferguson came from a working-class family but on completing high school he won a four-year scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, where he took a BA in philosophy. He then stayed at Pennsylvania for graduate work in Oriental Studies and he wrote his master thesis on Moroccan Arabic and his doctoral thesis on Bengali, colloquial Bengali.

He received his doctorate degree, his PhD in 1945. His primary advisor throughout his studies was professor Zellig Harris and during the same period he began a long-standing interaction with Roman Jakobson, especially with reference to his interest in the relationship between linguistic theory and language development in children.

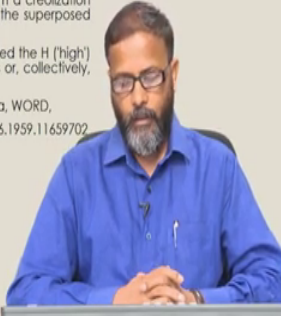
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Charles A. Ferguson (1959) Diglossia

- Of the four defining languages, Arabic diglossia seems to reach as far back as our knowledge of Arabic goes, and the superposed 'Classical' language has remained relatively stable, while Greek diglossia has roots going back many centuries, but it became fully developed only at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the renaissance of Greek literature and the creation of a literary language based in large part on previous forms of literary Greek.
- Swiss German diglossia developed as a result of long religious and political isolation from the centers of German linguistic standardization, while Haitian Creole arose from a creolization of a pidgin French, with standard French later coming to play the role of the superposed variety.
- For convenience of reference the superposed variety in diglossia will be called the H ('high') variety or simply H, and the regional dialects will be called L ('low') varieties or, collectively, simply L.


◦ Charles A. Ferguson (1959) Diglossia, WORD,
15:2,325-340, DOI:10.1080/00437956.1959.11659702



Talking about 'Diglossia', his master class work, first I will quote from Ferguson 1959, what he says which was published in word and I quote from there what Ferguson says about Diglossia, I quote; "of the four defining languages Arabic diglossia seems to reach as far back as our knowledge of Arabic goes and the supposed classical language has remained relatively stable while Greek Diglossia has roots going back many centuries but it became fully developed only at the beginning of the 19th century with the regime, with the renaissance of Greek literature and the creation of a literary language based on large part of previous forms of literary Greek".


Swiss German diglossia developed as a result of long religious and political isolation from the centers of German linguistic standardization, while Haitian Creole arose from a creolization of pidgin French, with standard French letter coming to play the role of superposed variety. For convenience of reference the superposed variety in diglossia will be called 'H-high variety' or simply 'H' and regional dialects will be called 'low L variety' or collectively simply 'L'.

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Diglossia

- A linguistic situation in which a speech community uses two different languages or varieties of a language for different social functions.
- Relatively very stable linguistic situation.
- Often, one form is the literary or prestige dialect, and the other is a common dialect spoken by most of the population.



Now what is this Diglossia that he talked about? He talked about a linguistic situation which is a stable linguistic situation in which a speech community uses two different languages or a variety of the same language for different social functions. It is a relatively very stable linguistic phenomena, often one form is the literary or prestige dialect and the other is a common dialect spoken by most of the population.

So, he discovered diglossia in Arabic, Swiss German situations and Greek where the classical language or the superposed variety or the variety which had written form, the variety which has high prestige value, had a different set of social functions and people speak a different variety or a different dialect of the same language, in informal situations in family gatherings with friends, in the street, for daily transactions. So, he identified two varieties of the same language or in some cases two different languages.


But majorly two varieties of the same language where one variety he referred to as 'H variety', high prestige value assigned to it and that is why it is 'H-high', which is a superposed variety. And the other variety used by the same speech community and the same speakers is 'L' which is a 'lower variety' but he categorically explains and gives a caveat saying that L does not stand for any hierarchy in prestige.

Though because of the high degree of formality and because the particular variety is used in formal domains he calls it H the high variety, and the other variety which is more general dynamic, open and used by people for informal social settings and social context he calls it L variety, low prestige value assigned to it. And this is a very stable situation. It is a very stable situation where H and L, two varieties of the language persist and they are used for two different sets of social functions.

High variety is also called literary variety, because it has a developed system of writing. It is used in administration, media, religious functions, social functions. However, the L variety is used for daily conversation, everyday transactions, informal settings on the streets, in markets and for every ordinary situation. So, it is a very stable bilingual situation and this work of Ferguson on diglossia remains a very prominent work and a very inspiring work.

This was translated into many languages and till date we have been using this idea and it has created a series of publications by other scholars across the world; hundreds of monographs, hundreds of digitization, thousands of digitization for that matter, across the world. So, diglossia remains his masterpiece, in his entire career and which earned him a unique recognition, a unique identity in the field of sociolinguistics.

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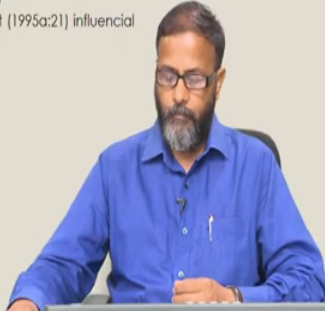


Reflection on his Work

◦ I had always viewed language as primarily a social phenomenon, and language as a matter of individual cognitive competence, I felt that one of the goals of linguistics was how to understand the relation between individual competence and social competence ... My own contributions to sociolinguistic research had been different types of language situations and their possible outcomes over time: standardization, language planning and public policy, in particular language problems in developing countries, and register variation, i.e. variation in linguistic structure occasions of use. (1995a:119-20)

◦ Ferguson himself cited three papers that he considered his 'most (1995a:21) influential work on the social nature of language:

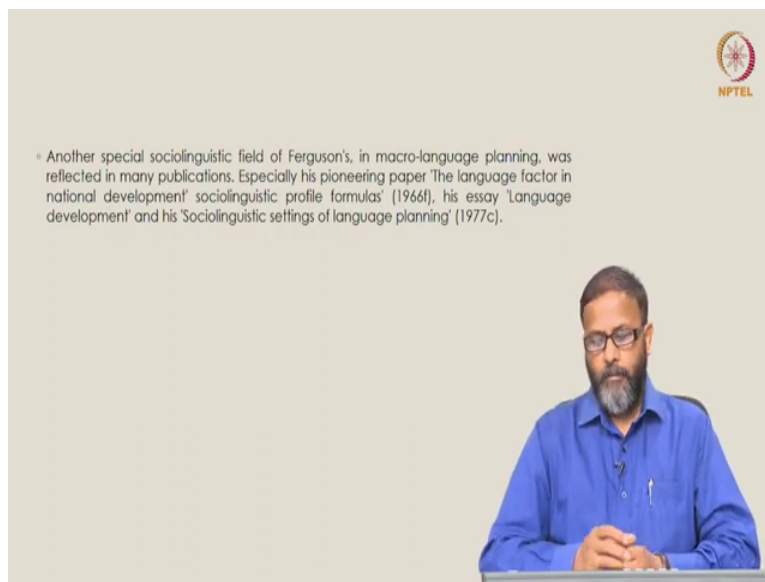
- 'Diglossia' (1959a),
- 'Structure politeness formulas' (1976d), and
- 'Sports announcer talk' (1983g).



If we look at his own reflections on his own work, he cites three works; he cites three of his studies/publications. I will quote from his writing he says; "I had always viewed language as primarily a social phenomenon and language as a matter of individual cognitive competence. I felt that one of the principal problems of linguistics was how to understand the relation between individual competence. and socially shared competence... My own contributions to sociolinguistic research had been quite varied: concern with different types of language situations and their possible outcomes over time, the process of language standardization, language planning and public policy, in particular language problems of so-called 'developing countries' and register variation, that is variation in linguistic structure, correlating with different occasions of use," I unquote.

Ferguson himself cited three papers that he considered his most influential work on the social nature of language. Number one; of course, 'Diglossia' that we talked about, then number two; 'Structure Politeness Formula' published in 1976 and number 3; 'Sports Announcer Talk' in 1983.


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Apart from all these areas that Ferguson worked on, another special sociolinguistic field of Ferguson is macro-language planning, and it was reflected in many publications that he has done. Especially his pioneer paper, 'The Language Factor in National Development': Sociolinguistic Profile Formulas' 1966, his essays 'Language Development' and 'Sociolinguistic Settings of

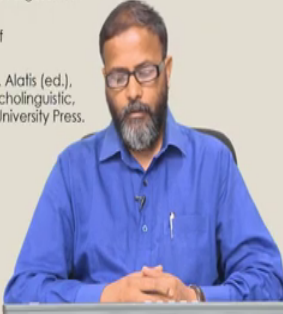
Language Planning' (1977) remain very significant to understand, to make a better understanding of the theme and also, they remain a milestone in the discipline.

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Select Bibliography

- Ferguson, C. A. (1956) 'Arabic baby talk', in M. Halle (ed.), For Roman Jakobson. The Hague: Mouton, pp. 121-8.
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So, he wrote prolifically on various subfields like; his work in Arabic and his work in colloquial Bengali is a master class. He had long affiliations with Arabic and he worked in different capacities, he developed a lot of manuals, textbooks, reference books, monographs in Arabic. And if you want to understand the sociolinguistics of Arabic, he remains the primary source.

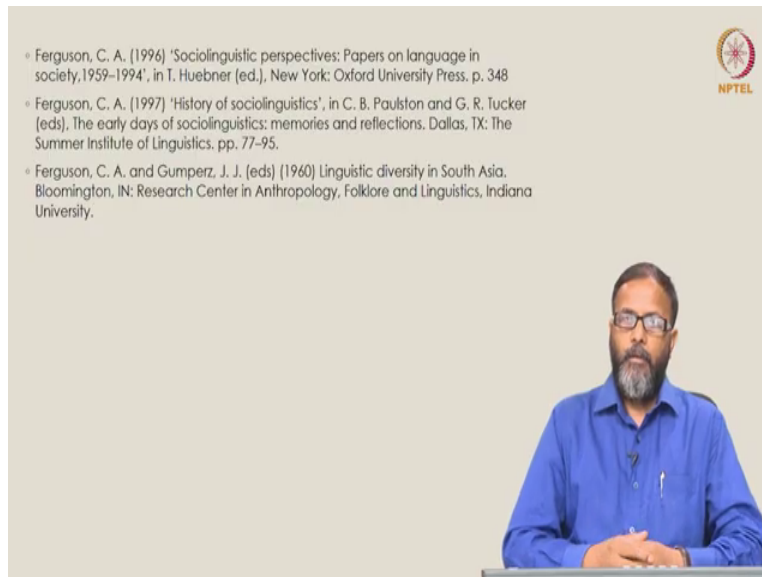
And he inspired a series of publications and work in the Arabic world. So, he is an American who had great influence on Arabic social, Arabic linguistics and he has inspired hundreds of Arabic scholars to pursue work in Arabic linguistics. And his works in Arabic remain the primary source for anything that we do in Arabic linguistics. So, he had a great influence on Arabic linguistics and as a polyglot, and as a linguist he has worked on several other issues in phonology and registers of different languages.

So, some of the selected bibliography. We say 'selected' because it is difficult to exhaust the list, this list is not exhaustive as it is, and it will take a long time to cite each and every work that he has done but some of the major representative works he has done are listed here, like his 1956 publication; 'Arabic Baby-talk', that is one of the most important publications.

Then in 1959, his work 'Diglossia', remains his masterpiece and Ferguson is known worldwide for this work. Then 'Language Problems of Developing Nations: Language Structure and Use, Essays by Charles Ferguson' in 1971. In 1991, 'Epilogue: Diglossia Revisited'. In 1995, the

essay ‘Long-term Commitment and Lucky Events’, in ‘Linguistics and the Education of Language Teachers: Ethnolinguistic, Psycholinguistic, and Sociolinguistic Aspects’.

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Works like ‘Sociolinguistic Perspectives: Papers on Language in Society, 1959-1994’, remains a major publication. Again, ‘History of Sociolinguistics’, is an outline to understand the emergence and growth of the discipline. ‘Linguistic Diversity in South Asia’ is yet another major publication by Ferguson. So overall, Ferguson had a deep impact in the discipline, inspired a galaxy of scholars, worked and collaborated with people like Roman Jakobson, people like Dell Hymes and a number of other scholars working in the field.

His primary works in Moroccan Arabic and all works that followed in Arabic remain the primary source to understand Arabic linguistics. And he has inspired hundreds of scholars who worked in Arabic, he remains the primary source of information and inspiration for them. His PhD in colloquial Bengali is also one of the major works in Bengali.

And he has worked in psycholinguistic linguistics, language planning, language problems of developing nations and similar other works we have just cited here in this small bibliography, selected small bibliography. So overall, Charles Ferguson remains a very prominent scholar and an influencer in the field of sociolinguistics.

He is known for his master class work called 'Diglossia' where he identified a bilingual social situation where two varieties of language, high variety and low variety that he calls H and L varieties. However, he does not ascribe any value judgment to the variety, simply in order to identify these two varieties he says H as having high prestige value, and L as for normal use in informal settings.

So, he identified this stable bilingual situation where he talks about social bilingualism, the speakers of the same speech community using one variety, H variety in all formal settings with high prestige value assigned to that variety and for ordinary exchanges, for ordinary purposes in informal or social settings, the other variety called L variety is used.

So, diglossia remains a very influential work by Ferguson for which he is known worldwide and his work was translated in many languages: Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish, and he has inspired a whole generation of scholars in sociolinguistics. So, he remains one of the solid pillars of sociolinguistics, who shaped the discipline and during his long stints in different capacities, he has produced a number of works, qualitative works which added value to understanding the field.

He remains one of the founding fathers of sociolinguistics. This is it for now and we will talk about some more scholars and contributors, who shaped the field like Uriel Weinreich, like William Bright, like Allen Grimshaw and others. So, stay tuned, this is it for now, we will talk about all other people in our coming videos.