

PAPER 8

DIALECT, REGISTER AND STYLE

Dialect, register and style are major topics of institutional linguistics, and since language is a social institution, they are worth studying.

DIALECT: A regional, temporal or social variety within a single language is known as dialect. 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. Everybody speaks a dialect, which is not seen as some kind of derivation from the norm of standard language. There is no linguistic justification for saying that one dialect is better than another rather it is a social judgment that leads people to say that a particular dialect is the correct one.

Dialect is not an important type of language variation for teaching. All language teaching, however, at least implies an assumption about the best dialect to teach.

Dialects are dialects not because of linguistic reasons but because of the political and cultural reasons. It is customary to describe them as varieties of a language according to users. Examples: Cockney, Geordie and Scouse are the prominent dialects spoken in England.

To the linguist, however, as stated by Sapir, "There is no real difference between dialect and a language". Grierson also observes, "In the course of survey, it has sometimes been difficult to decide whether a given form of speech is to be looked upon as an independent language or as a dialect of some other definite form of speech". In practice it has been found that it is sometimes impossible to decide the question in a manner which will gain universal acceptance. The two words 'language' and 'dialect' are in this respect like 'mountain' and 'hill'. One has no hesitation in saying that Everest is a mountain and Hauberk a hill, but between these two a dividing line cannot be accurately drawn. However, dialects are of many kinds: Regional dialects, Sociolects, etc.

REGIONAL DIALECTS: Regional dialects are spoken by the people of a particular geographical area within a speech community; Cockney in London, for example.

SOCIOLECTS: Sociolects are spoken by the members of a particular group or stratum of a speech community while a variety of language used at a particular stage in its historical development may be termed as temporal dialects such as Prakrit and Pali in Ancient India.

REGISTER: Whereas dialects are the varieties according to the users, registers are the varieties of language associated with people's occupation. Registers are the languages

that are used in the pursuance of one's job. 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.

According to the role of the speaker, a young lecturer, will speak in different ways when communicating with his wife, his children, his father, his colleagues, his students, when shopping and so on. Each of these varieties will be a register. According to the subject matter or field of discourse, registeral varieties are scientific, religious, legal, commercial, of airport announcers, of telephone operators, etc.

A register is also determined by the medium or mode of discourse. The main distinction is between speech and writing, but in speech also one may find such distinctions as conversation, discussion, debate, lecture, talk, etc. In the same way personal letters, a biography, a memoir, a poem to be read or a play to be staged, etc. are the distinction in writing.

Registers may be classified on the basis of style. This refers to the relation among the participating people who may talk of religion in a temple, or at a seminar with scholars or in a restaurant with friends. In a religious gathering people may be serious, in a seminar analytic while in a restaurant casual. The following type of stylistic varieties may be noticed - archaic, colloquial, humorous, formal and ironical.