LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

Introduction
Defining language and society

**SOCIETY**: any group(ing) of people drawn together for a certain purpose or purposes

**LANGUAGE**: what the members of a particular society speak, use for communicative purposes; a means of communication
FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

1. Communicating information

2. Establishing contact between people
Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogenous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors …. in applying his knowledge of language in actual performance. This seems to me to have been the position of the founders of modern linguistics… To study actual linguistic performance, (however), we must consider the interaction of a variety of factors, of which the underlying competence of the speaker-hearer is only one.

Example 1:
Ray: Hi mum.
Mum: Hi, you’re late.
Ray: Yeah, that bastard Sootbucket kept us in again.
Mum: Nana’s here.
Ray: Oh sorry. Where is she?

Example 2:
Ray: Good afternoon, sir.
Principle: What are you doing here at this time?
Ray: Mr Sutton kept us in, sir.
WHAT ARE THE THINGS WE SAY DIFFERENTLY?

- **Example 3:**
  Sam: You seen our ‘enry’s new ‘ouse yet? It’s in ‘alton, you know.
  Jim: I have indeed. I could hardly miss it, Sam. Your Henry now owns the biggest house in Halton.

- **Example 4:**
  (a) Refuse should be deposited in the receptacle provided.
  (b) Put your rubbish in the bin, Jim.
  (c) Please, tender exact fare and state destination.
  (d) Give me the right money and tell me where you are going.
WHY DO WE SAY THINGS DIFFERENTLY?

Are reasons for linguistic variation linguistic?

NO, SOCIAL - WHO IS TALKING, WHO WE ARE TALKING TO, WHERE, ABOUT WHAT, WHAT FOR, that is, PARTICIPANTS, SOCIAL SETTING, TOPIC and PURPOSE OF INTERACTION.
SOCIAL DIMENSIONS RELATED TO (SOCIAL) FACTORS AFFECTING CHOICE OF LINGUISTIC VARIATION

1. Social distance scale - participants WHO
   Status scale

2. Formality scale - setting WHERE
   - social context

3. Functional scale - topic WHAT

4. Functional scale - function WHY
   - purposes
What information do we gather about the relationship between the people talking?

What is the function of the utterances? Convey mainly affective or referential info?

– Example A:
  
  *Good morning little one, you had a good big sleep, didn’t you, pet?*

– Example B:

  *Excuse me, Mr. Clayton. I’ve finished your letters, sir.*
Sociolinguistics is the study of language in its social context, in relation to society

- MICRO SL = Ethnography of communication
  - How are the rules of use (RoU) structured?
  - How does language function when used to communicate by individuals within the speech community?
    - Frameworks for describing RoUs
    - Terms of address
    - Politeness
    - The structure of conversation

- MACRO SL = Sociology of language
  - How is the social structure of the whole speech community reflected in the way language is used and perceived?
    - Regional differences and language
    - Social differences and language
    - Ethnic differences and language
    - Gender differences and language