

## SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT: WHERE FROM, WHAT, AND WHERE TO?

Stanley E. Porter

McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON, Canada

**Abstract:** This paper, divided into three parts, provides an introduction to the field of sociolinguistics especially as it pertains to the area of New Testament studies. The paper serves as an overall introduction to orient those new to the field to the major terms and points of discussion, some of which are developed more fully in subsequent papers in this volume. The first part discusses the origins of sociolinguistics and the linguistic environment out of which it emerged, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. The second part examines the four major approaches to sociolinguistics and their primary promulgators, with some attention to more recent developments. The third part identifies and describes several areas where New Testament scholars have been actively involved in sociolinguistics, providing a brief summary of major topics and some of those involved in them. (Article)

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### 1. *Introduction*

The field of sociolinguistics is large and diverse because it includes a wide range of linguistic topics within its ambit. This paper introduces sociolinguistics and places New Testament studies within it. The paper contains three parts. The first introduces the origins in the 1950s and 1960s of sociolinguistics in reaction to Noam Chomsky and transformational-generative grammar and the rise of social consciousness, especially in anthropology. It then briefly traces the development of sociolinguistics from some of its earliest proponents to the present by way of its contact with and

interaction with other forms of linguistics. The second part examines four major approaches of sociolinguistics: (1) the sociology of language; (2) ethnographic-interactional sociolinguistics; (3) variationist sociolinguistics; and (4) critical-constructivism.<sup>1</sup> These areas are probably largely unknown to most New Testament scholars, even if they often touch on some of them in their work. The third part focuses on areas where New Testament scholars have been involved in sociolinguistics, such as historical sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, contact linguistics, code-switching and diglossia, social domains, and language policy, among others, and draws lines of connection to the major areas of sociolinguistics.

## 2. *Origins of Sociolinguistics*

Sociolinguistics, like so many other modern intellectual fields, is a product of the post-World War II era, with its earliest origins in the 1950s and 1960s. Even though Ferdinand de Saussure published his *Course in General Linguistics* in 1916, this work was not translated into English until 1959,<sup>2</sup> evidencing that modern linguistics—though it first emerged early last century—did not become the flourishing field that it is today until the post-war period. During that post-war period, there were numerous developments in language study. However, there are two principal originating influences on sociolinguistics—a reaction to the rise of Chomskyan transformational-generative grammar and the rise of social consciousness evidenced in a field such as anthropology.

The influence of Noam Chomsky and transformational-generative grammar, especially in North America but also elsewhere around the world, cannot be underestimated.<sup>3</sup> In some ways, Chomsky continued the thought of his teacher Zellig Harris and

1. There are many attempts to recount the history and development of sociolinguistics. I have found the most inspiration for my own account in Bell, *Guidebook*, esp. 6–14, although I differ from him at points (the major categories above are mostly his); cf. also Bell, “Succeeding Waves.”

2. de Saussure, *Course*.

3. As evidence, see several of the histories of linguistics: Robins, *Short History*, 218–55; and esp. Seuren, *Western Linguistics*, who does not treat functional approaches to linguistics.

the North American descriptivist linguists going back to Leonard Bloomfield. In other ways, Chomsky proposed significantly new views that commanded attention while also looking to the past.<sup>4</sup> This is not the place to go into detail about Chomsky and his conceptions of language, except to say that Chomsky began with a few simple ideas. One was the notion of phrase-structure grammar that consisted of basic elements (Eugene Nida would call them kernels, but Chomsky labeled them as VPs [Verb Phrases] and NPs [Noun Phrases], among others) that are linked together in various patterns. These patterns can be altered by various transformations that generate other ways of expressing the same thing—although Chomsky eschewed semantics early in his theory, or at the least saw it as the product of grammar. This is the formalist mechanics of his proposal. Another of his foundational ideas was that all languages have their basic structure (based upon his phrase structure and transformations) in common with one another even if the representation of language varies in individual languages. Chomsky thought that this commonality was because of the cognitive capacity of the human brain. He went so far as to posit a universal grammar that was housed in what amounted to a language organ within the human brain. In this, he reverted to René Descartes's mind-body dualism of the individual and ended up speaking of a Cartesian linguistics. This mentalism, verging on psychology, is the fundamental theory of his proposal.

Chomskyan transformational-generative grammar has had a long-standing and abiding, even if not totally hegemonic, dominance in linguistics, though it has developed quite a bit in its various forms over the years (and entered into some very interesting battles over territory, such as semantics),<sup>5</sup> to the point that forms of Chomskyan linguistics are often assumed as the way, or at least the best way, of speaking about language. There were many early and then later adopters of Chomsky's theories, even as they altered his approach in various ways. However, we often forget that there were also many who at least questioned or even outright rejected Chomsky's theories and argued against him—although many of these are now generally no longer remembered. One of the best

4. Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*; and *Aspects*.

5. See Harris, *Linguistics Wars*.

known of Chomsky's opponents was Charles Hockett.<sup>6</sup> Hockett originally accepted Chomsky's theories but then later came to reject them, especially Chomsky's fundamental philosophical assumptions, his rigid systems, and his separation of meaning from grammar. As an American descriptivist, Hockett placed a huge emphasis upon what he would contrast as a scientific approach that emphasized data.

Arguably even more important than Chomsky and his critics in the rise of sociolinguistics was the emergence of socially concerned orientations to language. This was fostered by the rise in importance of sociology and especially cultural anthropology and its studies of language in various cultures, and the development of various functional and social views of language. These functional views of language were often viewed as being at the periphery, or even outside of, the much more contextless formalist orientation of the descriptivists and then Chomsky and his followers. The foundational scholars in this anthropologically oriented perspective on language included such figures as Franz Boas, who pioneered the study of North American indigenous languages; Bronisław Malinowski, whose studies of the Trobriand Indians were instrumental in the development of social semiotics; and Edward Sapir, whose exploration of Indian languages in North America illustrated the importance of the relationship between language, context, and reality.<sup>7</sup> Many if not most (and all three above) of the seminal figures in this anthropological orientation to language came from Europe to North America and became engaged in study of non-European languages and their differences, especially as these differences were evidenced in the ways that peoples organized and enacted their lives through language. This interest was heightened even if somewhat delayed during World War II, such that the stage was set for a fuller exploration of the social function of language influenced by structuralist views of language.

As a result, functional and social models of language began to flourish around the same time as Chomsky's transformational-

6. Hockett, *State of the Art*.

7. See, e.g., Boas, "Introduction," 1:1–83; Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*; and Sapir, *Selected Writings*.

generative grammar took a very different approach. Social and functional approaches to language—of which sociolinguistics should be considered a part, since sociolinguistics draws upon language in use—were often seen in contrast to “real” linguistics, sometimes referred to as theoretical linguistics, or forms of linguistics that were given to theorizing about language more than they were concerned with how languages are used. Such “real” linguistics was concerned with focused analysis of often hypothetical examples and their relation to logic and mind. One is reminded of discussions of such sentences as *Flying planes can be dangerous* or even *Colorless green ideas sleep furiously*. In contrast, linguistics that fell outside the ambit of theoretical linguistics was often referred to as applied linguistics, that is, linguistics that took the theories developed by others and then applied them to instances of natural language.

Besides sociolinguistics, there are several strands to the social and functional linguistics that developed, many of them with relationships to emerging sociolinguistics. Some of these include the following: various early functional grammars (such as those of Talmy Givón, Simon Dik, and André Martinet); tagmemics of Kenneth Pike; Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) of originally J. R. Firth and more significantly M. A. K. Halliday; stratificational grammar of Hockett and Sydney Lamb; Role and Reference Grammar of Robert Van Valin; word grammars of Richard Hudson and Michael Hoey; various valency grammars (such as meaning-text theory of Igor Mel’čuk, Prague School dependency grammar); Columbia School linguistics of William Diver; and various pragmatic theories, among no doubt others. This is not the place to parse the similarities and differences among them. Van Valin and Randy La Polla offer a helpful taxonomy in which they organize their list of grammatical methods with formalization on one end and communication on the other.<sup>8</sup> We might perhaps use the notion of functionalism or even socialization as the opposition to formalism. There are some other criteria that might be used in such a discussion as well, such as stratification or hierarchy or layers of various types. In any case, we find that many of these grammars that fall within Van Valin and La Polla’s communication per-

8. Van Valin and LaPolla, *Syntax*, 8–15.

spective (I am excluding their cognitive part of the category, since I think that such grammars belong in a third category, as I have argued elsewhere based on conceptual and historical grounds)<sup>9</sup> fall along a continuum. For example, functional grammars range from those with high cognitive elements (such as West Coast functionalism) on the one side to the opposite side with French structuralism. In this group, strata-based grammars abound, including tagmemics, SFL, and stratificational grammar, which often include a stratum given to expression that is different from one given to the social element of language. There are many other distinctions that could be made.

Elements they often have in common, however, that have led to their connection to sociolinguistics include the following: language as functional; natural language description; differentiated strata; and social context. The concept of language as functional is to be distinguished from simply speaking about the meanings of language, since many theories of meaning define it cognitively. The notion of language as functional recognizes that language may play a variety of different roles in human communication, with an emphasis upon these functions over the forms in which they are expressed. Karl Bühler's organon model and Roman Jakobson's communication model are noteworthy in this respect and helped to set the stage for discussion of functional language.<sup>10</sup> Natural language description focuses upon language in use rather than upon an idealized view of language. Such results can often be messier because they reveal that languaging is a process rather than simply a product, and certainly not an artificial product. Natural language description has an inherent effect of expanding the scope of linguistic exploration beyond the limitations of artificially constructed sentences. In fact, it expands the scope beyond sentences altogether to the level of texts or discourse. There are many different models of discourse analysis (or text linguistics), but they virtually all have in common that they are concerned with natural language, even if it be verbal art. Many if not most of the social and functional theories of language differentiate strata for description. These strata are often related to each other in complex

9. See Porter, *Linguistic Descriptions*, 15–18.

10. Bühler, *Theory of Language*; Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics."

ways, to the point that variable analyses are required of them, some of them potentially formal in nature and others more abstract, related to functions or meanings. Most of the functional grammars, tagmemics, stratificational grammar, and SFL, focus upon various types of strata as being at the heart of their linguistic descriptions. Finally, the concept of social context is often equated with various functional grammars, in the sense that their descriptions of natural language necessitate their connecting instances of language with appropriate contexts and these contexts are social in nature. That is, they are not simply reflective of the languaging of a single individual but social events reflective of the individuals and groups that use language as part of some language community. Context is notoriously difficult to define, even if linguists agree that it is important. Even some of the most abstract pragmatic theories attempt to describe language in use within a context, illustrating that although it is difficult to conceptualize it is fundamental to understanding languages and their meaning potentials.

### *3. Major Approaches to Sociolinguistics*

Within the linguistic environment in which social theories of language were developing, sociolinguistics emerged as a linguistic discipline in its own right. This was primarily because of two major factors. One of them was that several linguists had clear, relatively similar notions of the importance of human language within a social or communal context, and they wished to examine in more detail the role that language played within these environments. The second factor was that, even though they lived on the periphery of theoretical linguistics, there were sufficient points of contact that they were encouraged in their development by associations with other approaches to linguistics. These contacts not only encouraged sociolinguistics to develop as a discipline but also helped it to diversify in light of these contacts. I think that it is right to identify four major approaches to sociolinguistics that have emerged over the years. These sociolinguistic approaches are usually linked to one or two individuals who are responsible for encouraging their particular orientation to language to emerge. I offer a brief summary of these four. I treat these four as roughly

contemporary with each other, although I note at the end that others choose to view them in a more diachronic fashion.

### 3.1 *Ethnographic-Interactional Sociolinguistics*

The single most important figure in the emergence of sociolinguistics as a discipline is Dell Hymes. As Bell states, “Dell Hymes was sociolinguistics’ founding theorist, and any consideration of trends in the field tends to find its way back to his early writings as a means of clarifying where we have come from.”<sup>11</sup> In the course of doing his PhD in linguistics, Hymes engaged in field work that oriented his linguistic approach to people groups, natural language, and the field of anthropology. He is associated with what is called linguistic anthropology, that is, the use of language as an important component of human life. His approach to sociolinguistics—and one of the four major approaches within the discipline—is called ethnography. In 1964, Hymes edited a very important book that places language into its social and cultural context, with a very clear orientation toward anthropology. In that sense, sociolinguistics was still at that point probably to be seen as a form of linguistic anthropology. The sections of the book and some of the contributors are worth noting because of their place in linguistics and their relationship to social and cultural factors: linguistic anthropology (Boas, Joseph Greenberg, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Pike, Malinowski, and Firth); linguistic relativity (Nida, Sapir); grammar and worldview (Boas, Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf); culture and semantic fields (Boas); socialization (E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Basil Bernstein); verbal art (Thomas Sebeok); speech communities (Bloomfield, John Gumperz, Charles Ferguson); language change; time and space (Hockett); and historical perspective.<sup>12</sup> These topics are anthropological in nature and draw on work from a very wide variety of contributors, many of whom would not identify as sociolinguists. Nevertheless, this volume also helped set the agenda for emerging sociolinguistics. These agenda items include questions regarding the relationship of language to reality and how they might influence each other. Related to that is the relationship of language to worldview, that

11. Bell, “Succeeding Waves,” 391.

12. Hymes, ed., *Language in Culture and Society*.

is, whether worldview shapes language or language shapes worldview, and to what degree. How one conceives of time and space and how these conceptions are expressed in language are an important part of one's cultural worldview. This has a direct correlation to how one perceives the world and how one expresses this perception by means of organizing a lexicon socially by means of semantic fields or domains. This all recognizably occurs within the context of speech communities that share common language in opposition to those of other speech communities. Even within such speech communities, language changes and such changes must be accounted for individually and within the community. This volume, although in some ways representative, illustrates many of the important issues that sociolinguistics has attempted to answer.

Hymes himself is even better known, however, for his ethnographic approach to language. This may be summarized as focusing on individuals and small groups and their use of language, with the field oriented to both society and language. This approach has ties to sociology, linguistics, and anthropology and is interpretive in its approach to examination of language at the micro level. Ethnographic studies typically ask, "What language is used in particular situations?" and then observe how different interlocutors use different language codes.<sup>13</sup> As a way of describing the language used in a given situation, that is, to describe the contexts in which language is used, Hymes developed a list of sixteen components of language usage, which he believed could conveniently be grouped together to form the memorable acronym SPEAKING: settings, participants, ends, act sequences, keys, instrumentalities, norms, and genres.<sup>14</sup> This rubric is still used in sociolinguistics as a means of describing how an individual or a small group might be using language. Hymes's scheme is relatively unformalized and more discursively oriented—and changed in some subtle

13. This is a summary of the ethnographic-interactional approach provided in the helpful table in Bell, *Guidebook*, 7 (quotation his).

14. Hymes, "Models," esp. 58–65 and summarized on 65 (revision of an essay first published in 1967) and also found in a slightly altered form in Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics*, 53–62, where his ethnography of communication is laid out. For another significant early collection of essays, see Pride and Holmes, eds., *Sociolinguistics*.

ways over the years—but the issues that it brings to the fore regarding use of language well illustrate the features of an ethnographic approach. In his treatment of contextual factors, one can also see how the much more complex metafunctions found within SFL—the ideational, interpersonal, and textual—might emerge. In other words, part of what it meant for sociolinguistics to develop was to come to terms with the relationship of language to context.

A fellow ethnographic linguist was Gumperz, who was an associate of Hymes when the two of them taught at the University of California, Berkeley. Gumperz and Hymes took similar approaches in that they were concerned with ethnography of communication, that is, how individuals and small groups use language. However, whereas Hymes was concerned with broader patterns of usage as revealed in his SPEAKING rubric, Gumperz was concerned with what he called and has been called by others interactional sociolinguistics. In fact, he inaugurated a series of books given that series title with his major book in the field.<sup>15</sup> Based upon doing ten years of fieldwork, including in India as well as elsewhere, Gumperz published his major study of how individuals engage in their discourse strategies, often focusing upon very specific features of the conversations of individuals and how these individual choices by language users are indicative of important features that are lost when the frame of reference is larger language patterns.<sup>16</sup> In that regard, Gumperz's work in sociolinguistics had a strong relationship with various forms of discourse analysis since he was concerned with how personal interactions reveal communicative strategies. There are strong resemblances between conversation analysis, one of the early forms of discourse analysis, and the sociological theories of Erving Goffman in relation to Gumperz's interactional sociolinguistics.<sup>17</sup>

15. Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*.

16. See more recently, Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, *Interactional Linguistics*.

17. See Schifffrin, *Approaches*; Wetherell et al., eds., *Discourse Theory and Practice*; Goffman, *Presentation of Self; Forms of Talk*.

### 3.2 *Sociology of Language*

Joshua Fishman, who also began publishing in the mid-1960s, is the major proponent of “sociology of language” as he usually (though not always) calls it, that is, study of “the entire gamut of topics related to the social organization of language behavior.”<sup>18</sup> Fishman promoted the idea of sociology of language—that is, dealing with the big picture of languages and their use—over the course of his career. Even at the outset, many if not most of the topics that would continue to be important to sociolinguists were already at play in his sociology of language. In his relatively early and influential book of readings in sociology of language, Fishman organizes the topics around the following: various views of sociolinguistics (Hymes, Halliday); language in small groups; social strata (William Labov, Uriel Weinreich); socio-cultural organization (Ferguson, Gumperz); multilingualism; language maintenance and shift (Jakobson); and social contexts and language planning (Einar Haugen).<sup>19</sup> Many of the authors included in the collection are known today as major sociolinguists, but others as major linguists in social and functional views of language.

Fishman’s view of the sociology of language focuses on language in society and, as one can discern from the title of his approach, is closely related to sociology. Fishman was an empiricist who worked at the macro level to ask such a question as “What language is used?” which would be determined by surveying respondents to determine language shift from one language to another.<sup>20</sup> In a sense, Fishman was attempting to expand sociology into linguistics (perhaps something like Hymes’s linguistic anthropology) by the selection of essays in his collection but even more so by his study of diverse languages by various people groups and how language functioned in those contexts. Although sociology of language is not often referred to, its continued study is seen in questions of multilingualism and the attendant issues of diglossia and code-switching and language maintenance.<sup>21</sup>

18. Fishman, *Sociology of Language*, 1. See also his earlier Fishman, *Sociolinguistics*.

19. Fishman, ed., *Readings*.

20. Bell, *Guidebook*, 7 (quotation his).

21. See, more recently, Buschfeld et al., *Multilingualism*.

### 3.3 *Variationist Sociolinguistics*

The concept of linguistic variation early on became very important in sociolinguistics and is especially associated with the work of William Labov, who continued to apply and develop his approach to linguistics in a vigorous and thorough way throughout his entire career. As a result, variationist sociolinguistics has come to be the predominant way that sociolinguistics is done. If one attends a major sociolinguistics conference, it is likely that most papers presented (and hence published) will be variationist in orientation. Despite Labov's death, this continues to be the case for several reasons. One of these is that variationist sociolinguistics retains many of the structuralist features of mainstream linguistics. If one examines Labov's work on internal factors, for example, there is a utilization, even an emphasis upon, many of the features of mainstream linguistics such as detailed phonological descriptions, statistical studies that assess data, and utilization of historical linguistics.

Even though such an approach is usually based upon individual participants, there is clearly not as much emphasis upon social and contextual factors as there are in other forms of sociolinguistics. In that regard, variationist sociolinguistics—on a cline of sociolinguistics in relation to non-social models of language—is more centrist than many others. Labov's variationism studies how linguistic features, such as particular patterns of pronunciation or lexical choice, vary according to differences in social factors, with the emphasis upon language rather than society. These social factors might include geography, education, age, race, gender, or a host of other factors that have been seen to result in linguistic variation. The variationist approach is empirical and focuses upon the micro level, such as a single feature of pronunciation, and typically asks, "What variety of a language is used?" in order to determine language change in different groups of users.<sup>22</sup> Labov's first major study was on variation within language users of New York City and how that indicated various social patterns.<sup>23</sup> He later published three volumes that well illustrate how Labov's approach resembles mainstream linguistics and probably why it has been so

22. Bell, *Guidebook*, 7 (quotation his).

23. Labov, *Social Stratification of English*.

popular. The three volumes deal with internal, social, and cognitive and cultural factors in linguistic change.<sup>24</sup> Despite the subtitles of the second and third volumes, the basic orientation of Labov's variationist linguistics remains consistent and focused upon the micro level in controlled situations, such as New York and Philadelphia vowel shifts.<sup>25</sup>

There are others, however, who have seen development within the variationist tradition. Penelope Eckert refers to this as occurring in three waves. These waves move from Labov's type of variationist studies to more ethnographic studies to more social constructivist approaches.<sup>26</sup> This has been followed by some sociolinguists. However, as Bell points out, these three waves, if they are indeed waves, reflect developments specifically within variationist linguistics and are arguably reductionistic since the kinds of changes that she notes have occurred throughout the course of the development of sociolinguistics.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.4 *Critical-Constructivist Sociolinguistics*

Sociolinguistics as a field falls within the larger field of linguistics broadly conceived. It is also a form of so-called social science. The social sciences were the product of intellectual and social upheaval in the mid nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, led by such figures as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber.<sup>28</sup> The influence of each of these people has been tremendous upon the development of the social sciences, including sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, and even biblical studies. As a result, it is no wonder that developments in social theory have had a strong impact upon sociolinguistics. One of the most recent developments in sociolinguistics is the influence of so-called critical theory on the field. Most disciplines have various forms of critical theory, such as literary studies, etc., but the term

24. Labov, *Principles of Linguistic Change, Volume 1; Principles of Linguistic Change, Volume 2; and Principles of Linguistic Change, Volume 3*.

25. See, more recently, Tagliamonte, *Variationist Sociolinguistics*.

26. Eckert, "Three Waves of Variation Study." She is followed by Park in the essay below in this volume.

27. Bell, "Succeeding Waves," 402–3.

28. See Morrison, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber*.

“critical theory” has come to be attached to a particular kind of thinking focused upon Marx. Critical theory has had a major impact on many, if not most, theory-based academic disciplines, and linguistics, including sociolinguistics, is no exception. Critical theory is associated with and developed from the heavily Marxist-influenced so-called Frankfurt School and its important scholars such as Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, and then especially by the later member Jürgen Habermas (it did not originate in education or law, despite some common misperceptions).<sup>29</sup> The emphasis upon Marxism has led to social criticism directed at such things as economics and material culture, society and its structures, politics, religion, and of course language, since language is one of the most important and obvious social variables and tools.

The result has been a critical-theoretical response to the study of language, in which factors such as the interaction between majority and minority languages—especially within a post-colonial environment—and their relationship to materialist culture, have become prominent. This has been accompanied by a constructivist approach that examines how language constructs society and how society constructs language.<sup>30</sup>

Jan Blommaert and Alastair Pennycook are good examples of critical-constructivists. Critical-constructivism focuses on language as a social practice and takes into account language in society and especially in politics, with close relations to anthropology, linguistics, and education. This constructivism is used at both macro and micro levels of analysis and typically asks “How is language used to regulate complex societies?” and is especially attentive to linguistic diversity in globalized environments.<sup>31</sup> Blommaert was an ethnographer who took the influence of linguistic diversity seriously and studied the effects of globalization upon language at a macro and at a micro level.<sup>32</sup> His major book on globalization is concerned with the larger patterns, while he al-

29. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; Habermas, *Theory and Practice*.

30. See Bell, *Guidebook*, 9. A collection that represents these newer trends in sociolinguistics is Coupland, ed., *Sociolinguistics*.

31. Bell, *Guidebook*, 7 (quotation his).

32. Blommaert and Verschueren, *Debating Diversity*.

so wrote about linguistic diversity in his own neighborhood in the town in which he lived.<sup>33</sup> Blommaert was also a critical discourse analyst, recognizing that the kinds of patterns he observed were part of larger issues of power reflected in language.<sup>34</sup> Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is the major approach to discourse analysis used within contemporary sociolinguistics. CDA was not first developed in sociolinguistics but was developed within a social-semiotic environment. It is based upon SFL but focuses more narrowly upon language and power, that is, the negative side of how language is used as a form of social tool to exercise power and control others.<sup>35</sup> Blommaert's book is an introduction to discourse analysis that is based upon CDA. Pennycook continues in the line of Blommaert's influence upon critical discourse study in the development of critical applied linguistics. Critical applied linguistics focuses upon the influence of what is called "politics" upon the many different facets of language.<sup>36</sup>

This discussion sets the stage for discussion of the use of sociolinguistics in New Testament studies.

#### 4. *The New Testament and Sociolinguistics*

Sociolinguistics as a formal discipline is relatively recent to New Testament studies. However, many of the topics that are treated within New Testament studies represent sociolinguistic issues that have been debated in various forms long before the field of sociolinguistics developed as a discipline in its own right. I will not focus specifically on SFL research, with the exception of one category below. Even though SFL is a social semiotic and shares many characteristics with sociolinguistics, including its social orientation, the foundation for its critical method, and use of natural language, it has from the outset been a separate school of linguistics, with an abundant bibliography in New Testament studies. I will

33. Blommaert, *Sociolinguistics of Globalization; Ethnography, Superdiversity and Linguistic Landscapes*.

34. Blommaert, *Discourse*.

35. See Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*. Fairclough is one of the important originators of Critical Discourse Analysis.

36. Pennycook, *Critical Applied Linguistics*.

focus on those that are sociolinguists apart from SFL. There has been an inclination to draw the boundaries too widely in some instances, including almost every work that has a sociological bent to it.<sup>37</sup> I do not extend my scope that far. Some of the topics that have been discussed and are of relevance include the following broader subject areas.

#### 4.1 *Historical Sociolinguistics*

The linguist Suzanne Romaine was apparently the first to propose the sub-discipline of historical sociolinguistics.<sup>38</sup> Since then, the field has developed in various ways, especially by those in translation studies. In a distinct sense, virtually all but the most theoretical explorations of linguistic questions in the New Testament are exercises in historical sociolinguistics. Historical sociolinguistics, as a sub-discipline within sociolinguistics, grew out of the recognition that in ancient text studies, new challenges present themselves. These challenges include the lack of native informants, limitations on evidence to primarily epigraphic remains, lack of feedback loops and checks on hypotheses, historical distance and its inherent limitations, data gathering and processing constraints, and the heightened role of adequate language descriptions, among others. There have been a few attempts to use historical sociolinguistics—that is, sociolinguistics with awareness of its limitations and need for new methods—in New Testament studies.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4.2 *Major Sociolinguistic Approaches*

I list major sociolinguistic approaches here because some of the work in New Testament linguistics has chosen to follow closely one of the four major approaches listed above. The major ones that seem to be popular are Hymes's ethnography of communication and forms of variationist linguistics, although Gumperz's interactional sociolinguistics has been influential in discourse analysis.<sup>40</sup>

37. E.g., Snyder, *Language and Identity*, 4–6.

38. Romaine, *Socio-Historical Linguistics*.

39. See Porter, "Greek of the Jews and Early Christians"; Park, *Prestige Language*.

40. E.g., Reed, *Discourse Analysis of Philippians*, who uses some of the work of Gumperz; Spolsky, *Languages of the Jews*; Ong, *Multilingual Jesus*,

I have not yet come across any major studies that utilize sociology of language or critical-constructivist approaches, at least the latter explicitly and thoroughly. However, critical-constructivist approaches often involve forms of discourse analysis and so could be categorized there.

#### 4.3 *Discourse Analysis*

The primary area where sociolinguistics is widely used in New Testament studies is in some areas of discourse analysis. Whereas all forms of discourse analysis use natural language, there are some forms that emphasize the social dimensions of language more fully. Of the two major areas of New Testament discourse analysis, those using SFL (rather than cognitive-functional linguistics) tend to be more fully aware of and take into account matters of context, social semiotics, and the like.<sup>41</sup> CDA has not been productive in sociolinguistics so far, even if it has been used occasionally in New Testament studies.

#### 4.4 *Multilingualism*

One area where New Testament studies has in some ways preceded sociolinguistics has been in the study of multilingualism. New Testament scholars have recognized that first-century Palestine was a multilingual environment long before the advent of sociolinguistics. However, when one examines the discussions of such issues, one realizes that sociolinguistics has brought much greater depth of understanding and necessary models for discussing these issues. The discussions of the past have tended to be drawn in binary terms, such that Jews spoke Aramaic and gentiles spoke Greek, and the observation of any linguistic interference prompts

who tends toward an ethnographic approach following Hymes; cf. also Ong, *Sociolinguistic Analysis*, whose essays range over the field of sociolinguistics, but who tends to emphasize ethnographic approaches to the issue of bilingualism; Snyder, *Language and Identity*, who follows Allan Bell's audience design model, a form of variationist linguistics. See Bell, *Guidebook*, 297–301.

41. For a survey of the field and an example, see Porter and O'Donnell, *Discourse Analysis and the Greek New Testament*, with the survey of various models in New Testament on pp. 27–47, esp. 44–45 for examples from SFL. Some representative essays using discourse analytic methods are found in Porter and Reed, eds., *Discourse Analysis and the New Testament*.

certain conclusions, usually those that have more theological than linguistic implications. In a sense, multilingualism has been treated as linguistic diversity rather than as a real multilingualism. More recent studies have recognized the many issues related to multilingualism for both Jesus and his followers and Paul and the early church.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4.5 *Contact Linguistics*

Contact linguistics is another area where New Testament studies has in some ways preceded sociolinguistics. Contact linguistics discusses the effects of languages on one another when they come into contact. One of the major issues in New Testament studies has been the nature of the Greek of the New Testament, especially the level of Semitic influence. This is a question for contact linguistics. There have been various answers given to this question, in the past many of them not being very sociolinguistic. Many have concluded that the minority language has influenced the majority language, including in syntax. However, this is highly unlikely. The grammar of the majority language is usually not affected by minority languages, even if its lexicon may be.

#### 4.6 *Diglossia and Prestige Language*

Within a multilingual situation, there are a variety of possible responses. One of these is diglossia. Diglossia, as it was first defined by Charles Ferguson, concerned high and low forms of language, that is, of the same language.<sup>43</sup> However, the term has been extended to high and low forms of language, even when they are different languages. This reformulation introduces the matter of prestige languages or languages that have greater prestige than others based on a variety of sociolinguistic factors, such as power,

42. E.g., Porter, "Jesus and the Use of Greek"; *Criteria for Authenticity*; Lee, *Jesus and Gospel Traditions*; Ong, "Ancient Palestine Is Multilingual and Diglossic"; *Multilingual Jesus*; Park, *Prestige Language*; Porter, "Languages That Paul Did Not Speak"; "Did Paul Speak Latin?"; "Complex Multilingualism."

43. Ferguson, "Diglossia"; "Diglossia Revisited."

wealth, education, administration, commerce, and the like.<sup>44</sup> The place of the prestige language helps to determine which language is used in a diglossic situation. The Palestinian context was a multilingual environment with Greek as the prestige language for public communication, with Aramaic as a minority language. Hebrew would only have been a prestige language within the narrow confines of the religious sphere.<sup>45</sup>

#### 4.7 *Code-Switching*

Code-switching describes how language users switch between varieties of languages. These may be switches within languages or between languages. There are a variety of factors that determine code-switching, when it occurs, and why it occurs. Some of the factors are based upon individual linguistic factors, such as the L1 (first language) of the speaker (as opposed to the L2), and others by cultural factors, such as situation, social status, social domains, topic, etc.<sup>46</sup>

#### 4.8 *Social Domains*

Social domains have become an important concept in recent sociolinguistic discussions. Whereas much discussion of language use, including multilingualism, code-switching, diglossia, and the like, has concentrated upon individual users and their linguistic repertoire, social domains are concerned with the various domains in which language users find themselves as determinative for language use. For example, those with a common historical language when together with close friends or family may use this language to discuss family matters, but even they may switch to another lan-

44. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 141–56; “Use of Greek”; Park, *Prestige Language*.

45. See especially the essays in part 1 of Porter and Reed, eds., *Diglossia*, with essays on diglossia by Jonathan M. Watt, Scobie P. Smith, Stanley E. Porter, and Christina Bratt Paulston. Part 2 has essays on other topics in linguistics, including some in sociolinguistics, such as Reed, “Language of Change.” See some of the articles listed elsewhere in the notes in this article.

46. See Watt, *Code-Switching*.

guage if they are put in a situation that demands that they discuss a more public topic even with the same social group.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4.9 *Language Policy and Planning*

Modern nations have language policies regarding official languages and how they support or discourage uses of language and languages.<sup>48</sup> The ancient world also had language policies, but these were more functional than they were legislative. The Roman empire did not have a formal language policy, and as a result, it supported the use of Greek, as well as Latin for administrative and political purposes, in the eastern empire. This means that there were various expectations on people at various social strata concerning their language use, with political leaders expected to know Greek and Latin, while those at the bottom of the social hierarchy were only expected to know their historical language—though they may have had occasion to use others.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4.10 *Macro, Meso, and Micro Levels*

Sociolinguistics has traditionally talked of macro and micro levels of analysis. Macro levels are concerned with larger institutional levels, such as the national or large social structural level of the Roman empire. Micro levels are concerned with smaller groupings, such as the language performance of individual people. The meso level is the level in between that connects the two together, such as a community. Such a level is concerned with intermediary levels of social organization that have an important influence upon language use, such as social groupings and gatherings, local clubs and organizations, and the like.<sup>50</sup> The identification of these levels helps to produce more nuanced descriptions of language use, including within the ancient world of the first century.

47. Ong, *Multilingual Jesus*; Park, *Prestige Language*.

48. Fishman, *Advances*; Fishman et al., eds., *Language Problems*; Haugen, *Language Conflict and Language Planning*; Rubin and Jernudd, eds., *Can Language Be Planned?*; Spolsky, *Language Policy*; Spolsky, ed., *Cambridge Handbook*.

49. Park, *Prestige Language*.

50. Park, *Prestige Language*.

*4.11 Register and Context of Situation*

Register is a concept used by many linguistic theories, especially those that are functional and social in orientation, such as SFL. The concept of register is that language varies according to use rather than according to user. That is, a different context of situation is reflected by different registers. Register variables, such as field, tenor, and mode, are used to describe each context of situation. Context of situation in linguistics sometimes refers to a material situational setting but in more robust theories tends to be a linguistic concept. A context describes a linguistic and not a material configuration of features.<sup>51</sup> Register theory has gained in recent significance, probably displacing Hymes's rubric of SPEAKING.

As one can see, there are many topics within sociolinguistics that New Testament scholarship has explored. However, there are also many others that remain understudied and await future exploration.

*5. Conclusion*

Sociolinguistics is a field within linguistics that has distinguished and defined itself in relation to other approaches to linguistics based upon its attention to the social uses of language. In that regard, it is most closely associated with other social and often functional approaches to language, some of which have been viewed disparagingly as "applied" linguistics rather than theoretical linguistics. Nevertheless, some of the major orientations of sociolinguistics, especially its focus upon natural language and its social contexts, provide a major opportunity for New Testament scholars. The topics noted above have all been applied to study of the New Testament to varying degrees and merit further examination. The task is not easy due to the historical constraints on the language models. Nevertheless, the use of sociolinguistics provides an opportunity to adopt and adapt some of the major frameworks within sociolinguistics so as to more fully examine the language of those within the New Testament, such as Paul and Jesus, and the language of the New Testament itself.

51. Porter, "Dialect and Register"; "Register in the Greek of the New Testament"; *Hermeneutics, Linguistics, and the Bible*.

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