**Lecture One: Sociolinguistics**

Sociolinguistics, or the study of language in relation to society, is ascribed to the functionalist approach (Williams 1992). Sociolinguistic research has been concerned with “communication and interaction, linguistic variation and language varieties, the social function of language use, language change and development”, it also “would include work done in the ethnography of communication, discourse analysis, dialectology, sociolinguistic variation, the sociology of language, pragmatics, stylistics, pidgin [and] creole studies” (Figueroa 1994 p. 24).

A better understanding of sociolinguistics can be achieved via a comparison with structural linguistics:

* Structural linguists study the sentence out of context, whereas sociolinguists study the sentence in context. E.g. A. When is the train leaving?

B. the teacher is explaining the lesson?

For structural linguists sentence B is a good one, but it is not for sociolinguists because it does not answer the question.

* For structural linguists we need *sentence*s in speaking, while for sociolinguists *utterance*s. In this sense, sociolinguists claim that the sentence almost does not exist in everyday communication; it is just a creation of structural linguists to build their studies on, we rather use utterances.
* For structural linguists, a language speaker must have ‘competence’ which is the ability to produce and understand an indefinite number of grammatically correct sentences, whereas for sociolinguists the speaker must have ‘the communicative competence’ which is the knowledge of how to communicate with people.
* Structural linguists put focus on ‘correctness’ while sociolinguists emphasize ‘appropriateness’
* For structural linguists, language is a ‘system’, but for sociolinguist it is a ‘phenomenon’.
* Structural linguists deal with one meaning ‘the conceptual meaning’, whereas sociolinguistics argue for the existence of different types of meaning:

**References**

Figueroa, E. (1994). *Sociolinguistic Metatheory*. New York: Elsevier Science.

Leech, G. (1985). *Semantics.* Penguin.

Williams, G. (1992): *Sociolinguistics: A sociological critique*. Cornwall: Routledge.