1 Wanted: a theory for integrated sociolinguistics

1 Introduction

Some fifteen years ago, Jane Hill (1985) had wondered in a review article: 'is a sociolinguistics possible?'. If, to some of her readers, such a question had appeared unnecessarily skeptical in 1985, it would certainly seem even more so today, when sociolinguistics has so firmly established itself as a field of language study. The degree of scholarly enthusiasm, the large number of publications and the popularity of courses on the subject – ours[1] being one relatively humble example – have to be taken as proof not only of its existence but also of its capacity for maintaining itself. But to read Hill as doubting simply the existence or the continuation of the field as we know it today would be a gross misinterpretation: after all, her article was a review of eight publications in the field of sociolinguistics by some very outstanding scholars[2]. In fact, Hill states her real concern quite explicitly in the closing paragraph of her review article (Hill 1985: 470–1; emphasis added):

> The volumes … give us, then, a profile of the state of the art. Among them can be found work with great quantitative sophistication (…), deep interpretive sensitivity, responsible ethnographic observation, and useful contributions to the empirical foundations of our knowledge. *What is missing from them is a sense of integration*, that the project of one group of workers is attentive to the project of another, that the call for a 'socially contingent' linguistics has produced a unity of view point and approach which is beginning to draw together the various strands of the frontiers of grammar, of sociology, of cultural anthropology into a unified disciplinary project. A decade out from Hymes' manifesto, *it is still not clear that a holistic sociolinguistics is possible.*

Notably, today, two decades out from Hill's call for a 'holistic sociolinguistics', the situation has not changed much. And, despite the fact that the field, judged by usual standards, is flourishing, critique of sociolinguistics – particularly aimed at the paradigm associated with the work of Labov and his collaborators – continues to arrive from different directions; response or attention to any of this critique – even that which comes from within the not too well defined field of sociolinguistics – remains conspicuous by its rarity if not by its complete

absence. The multiple enterprises under the banner of sociolinguistics continue in their chosen manner, seemingly unaware of Hill's dream of 'draw[ing] together the various strands of the frontiers of grammar, of sociology and cultural anthropology into one unified disciplinary project'. To my mind, this represents one of the most serious problems a discipline could encounter: today's sociolinguistics[3] appears regrettably unaware of its own true identity – or less metaphorically, the practicing sociolinguists are not aware of the potential of the field properly called 'sociolinguistics'. It is the aim of this chapter to present one image of that 'true' identity by asking a very basic question about the meaning of the label 'sociolinguistics', and pursuing some of the implications of the answer for the conceptualisation of a field deserving of that label.

This very basic but highly pertinent question is: *why would sociolinguistics be possible?* Indeed the rationale for the existence of a discipline called 'sociolinguistics' is not all that evident. The word's own structure –'linguistics' plus the prefix 'socio-' – gives nothing away, except perhaps a simplistic reading according to which in doing sociolinguistics we are actually doing a variety of linguistics which has something to do with society/sociology as suggested by the prefix 'socio-'. Now, so far as the meaning of 'linguistics' is concerned, there can be no question that it refers to a field whose object of study is language[4]: linguistics of any kind that we know today has the aim of modelling human language and of fashioning the description of language according to that model; thus in faulting a linguistic theory we are, in fact, faulting primarily its conceptualisation of language. This much is clear and – dare I hope? – uncontested, but what is not clear is the legitimacy of the original conjunction of 'socio-' and 'linguistics'. Dictionaries will paraphrase the 'word element' 'socio-' as 'of or relating to society'. It is, then, a fair question to ask: how and why would language – a 'mental organ', an autonomous system, a set of (perhaps universal) rules, a stable code, a semiotic modality, call it what you will – come into contact with, or relate to any aspect of human social existence? The question is important for as one interprets this innocent little prefix, so does one prepare the ground for the recognition of a discipline properly called sociolinguistics and for defining its object of study.

1.1 The 'socio-' in today's sociolinguistics

One undeniable historical fact is that from the inception of today's sociolinguistics, most practitioners in the field have interpreted the prefix – at least by implication, if not by assertion – as 'the extra-linguistic entity aspects of which correlate with linguistic variation'. Indeed it would not be far-fetched

to suggest that for most linguists this is the main value of the prefix 'socio-'; not surprisingly sociolinguistics has gone about the business of 'explaining' variation by appeal to this entity called 'society' without asking many questions about the entity itself, as if human society, and particularly social groupings of whatever kind, were invented for the express purpose of explaining linguistic variation, be it synchronic or diachronic. With greater sophistication, explanations of a kind began to emerge. Thus beginning with the recognition of the 'functionality' of variation in complex societies (Weinreich, Labov and Herzog 1968), the discipline moved to the 'obvious' fact that linguistic varieties do not simply reflect social hierarchy: they also reveal attitudes to social strata. It turned out that variation could be seen as a device for accommodating others in the society, which, again quite obviously, is important for maintaining society. As sociolinguistics progressed, variation was also found to be indicative of speaker identity[5], and so the list can go on. I am not saying that these 'social facts' are false or even irrelevant; simply that their status as facts was never something to be argued: the facts were taken as just totally obvious. So naturally, 'correlation' was just that – a correlation: one asked neither why there should be such correlation, nor given that there is correlation, what might be implied by it about the relationship of language and society, though this is what might have formed the first steps toward a holistic sociolinguistics. As I remarked (Hasan 1973a) in today's sociolinguistics, the manifest got related to the manifest; deeper questions about the character of the 'socio-' typically failed to engage the mind.

But if 'socio-' is '*of* society or *relating to* society' then this interpretation of their chosen label for the field of study, no matter how convenient it might be for some sociolinguists, would appear to suffer from two serious flaws: on the one hand, it underplays the value of the pre-fix, and on the other it also makes the relation between society and language appear accidental. Thus reading the literature one may be forgiven for thinking that there are two independent processes, namely, that language varies and that people in society fall into groups, and each of these groups has attitudes toward the other groups' values and their vowels. Current sociolinguistics has shown us in a series of brilliant studies that certain linguistic varieties and certain social attitudes happen to go together, and often the variation and/or the attitude correlates with the group's 'social class' – sometimes called SES as if that acronym absolves us from investigating what the expression means in the life of the status holder. However, social class remains a troublesome category: it is treated sometimes as a cut and dried set of categories, and at others, as one whose very existence is open to doubt. Despite this glaring contradiction, there has been no sustained effort to enquire into the basis of the category's emergence, or to problematise its relevance to the life of the social agent: *ex cathedra* declarations sufficed

instead[6]. In short, what the practitioners of the discipline have regarded as 'social facts' appears somewhat capricious, a matter of chance: I suggest this has happened so regularly because today's sociolinguistics has put its faith in a model that is opposed to linguistics in a social perspective. Given the discipline's allegiance to the formalistic models the concept of society has remained 'intuitive' and un-analysed. Autonomous language has been wedded to functional linguistic variation. It is hardly surprising that when some 'new' point of contact between language and society is brought to attention, the discipline may either ignore it entirely or go so far as to grant its study the status of another 'strand' (as in Hill) or of a 'trend' (as in Lavandera 1988). From this perspective, the earliest such strand emerged in the work on speech varieties (Hymes 1962); Labov and Fanshel (1977) opened up another new 'trend/strand'; Gumperz on social identities yet another, and so on. In this way, the field becomes a collection of strands/trends, with no principle that has the potential of bestowing upon the body of studies 'a sense of integration'. The irony is that in doing all this, the work of thoughtful scholars has been ignored – true, not in the field of formalistic linguistics but in linguistics informed anthropologically or socially – which had not so long ago indicated valuable directions to discovering richer connections between language and society[7]. As Labov of the earlier days pointed out, one cannot help feeling that the language-society relation deserves better treatment, if for no other reason then simply because it forms the crux of what sociolinguistics as a true study of language in its social context should be about.

I propose to explore the relationship of language and society more deeply in section 2 of this chapter. The implications of the revised model of this relationship will be pursued in section 3. My aim will be to formulate a statement about the central object of an integrated sociolinguistics and to present an indicative outline of the problems which would form its concern. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of what kind of theory of language and of society would be needed to support the programme of an integrated sociolinguistics which is itself based on a deeper understanding of the relationship between language and society.

2 Rethinking the relationship between language and society

From a commonsensical point of view, the relationship of language and society poses no problem. It is plain to see that human beings engage in a variety of activities; most of these typically call for 'concerted human action' (Malinowski 1923, 1935); this in turn makes communication with others necessary; language

comes into play because it is the most effective modality for such communication[8]. When we use the word 'language' in such statements, we are not talking about what linguists think of as the code or language system – i.e., Saussure's 'langue'; more precisely, our concern is with language in use, i.e., Saussure's 'parole'. So one way of interpreting this situation is to say that society comes face to face not with langue, but with parole, i.e., language in use in social interaction: the emphasis in current sociolinguistics on the study of speech in its social context thus appears fully justified. Of course, as most linguists accept, parole needs langue for its interpretation – in the words of Saussure (1966: 18) 'language [langue, RH] is necessary if speaking [parole, RH] is to be intelligible and produce all its effects'. The power of parole thus derives from the langue. Accordingly, langue remains the undoubted object of study for the science of linguistics, where it is treated as a regulated, rule governed object. It is this system conceptualised as synoptic and stable that is taken to underlie parole as it meets the exigencies of social interaction.

This simple and seemingly transparent narrative appears satisfactory until one happens to wonder what makes it possible for parole to continue to function so effectively as a means of communication. Granted that it relies on langue as an enabling resource, but then the question simply becomes: what kind of resource is langue that it can meet speakers' communicative needs at all times, all places? The situation is especially puzzling because, by contrast with the assumed 'fixed shape' of the code, a careful examination of naturally occurring parole reveals that human communication displays variation along two different lines: first, it varies along the time line from one socio-historical 'age' to another[9], both in its content and in its form; it is this type of variation that provides the measure for deciding what will count as *archaic* or *avant garde* or *normal* behaviour. Secondly, communication varies also along the context line, whereby during one and the same socio-historical stage the content and structure of one verbal interaction will vary from another according to variation in the social context relevant to that interaction; this is what forms the basis for perceptions of degrees of *appropriateness* of behaviour in interactive practices. That these two kinds of variation in the content and form of communication do occur is an empirical fact – this much should be obvious from the examination of records of socially significant parole over time: the Hansard with its political speeches covering the concerns of the community over the last few centuries would be one such record. Faced with this complex heterogeneity, parole appears to function largely without many noticeable problems. Of course there are hesitations as one wonders 'how to put it', but for the most part the flow of speech is unabated. We thus have a conundrum: how does parole playing by the rules of a static, synoptic system manage to retain its efficacy in the

face of the volatile, dynamic situation presented by the complex variation that pervades the content and structure of human communication?

The above question could be answered quickly by rejecting the view of langue as a static system rooted entirely in synchrony. Indeed, Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968) had cast doubt on such a 'structure': we know that the system of language is subject to ongoing change – its stability is relative. Since parole is guided by langue, what it draws upon is not a static synoptic object but one that is constantly changing; there is, therefore, no mystery about the efficacy of parole. However, this explanation suggests that linguistic change is somehow calibrated with social change. We may go on to assume that this calibration happens simply by chance. Although the assumption has the advantage of preserving the principle of the autonomy of language and so its independence from human environment (see discussion in 1.1), it does smack, in the fashion of classical Greek playwrights, of reliance on the strategy of *deus ex machina*. I am therefore inclined to reject this explanation as fiction and ask: how come change in langue and change in society go hand in hand? Which is just an altered form of the earlier question I raised above: How do human languages acquire those properties which enable the langue of the community to be used with efficacy as parole in a myriad social contexts?

2.1 Langue and parole working in societal contexts

Strange as it may seem the direction for probing into these questions was already indicated in Saussure's seminal text. Often self-contradictory, always thought provoking, this text informs us that (1966: 18–19; *emphasis introduced*):

> … language [i.e., langue RH] is necessary if speaking [i.e., parole RH] is to be intelligible and produce all its effects; but speaking is necessary for the establishment of language, and historically its actuality comes first … *speaking is what causes the language to evolve* … Language and speaking are then interdependent; the former is both the instrument and the product of the latter. *But their interdependence does not prevent their being two absolutely different things*.

It is obvious that Saussure recognises the intimate relationship between langue and parole; but at the same time, he sees no way of accommodating both categories within the scientific discipline that linguistics needs to be. Clearly contraries can be accommodated within the same theory only if one is willing to entertain 'complementarity' as 'scientific' – or one has a more robust idea of what scientific means. Both Firth (1950) and Halliday (1987, 1992b, 2008) refused to accept Saussure's strong classification of the two categories, langue and parole. Halliday in particular engages with the problem of langue-parole because its 'good' resolution is central in explaining how language works. While giving credit to Saussure for problematising the langue parole relationship, he rejects (Halliday 1996: 412) the perspective whereby the two concepts are set up

> … as if they had been two distinct classes of phenomena … [*which*] they are not. There is only one set of phenomena here, not two; langue (the linguistic system) differs from parole (the linguistic instance) only in the position taken up by the observer. Langue is parole seen from a distance, and hence on the way to being theorised about.

To elaborate upon the intimate relationship between langue (system/potential) and parole (process/instance), Halliday presents (1987: 121 and elsewhere) the analogous case of climate and weather:

> …just as, when I listen to the weather report every morning, and I hear something like 'last night's minimum was six degrees, that's three degrees below average', I know that the instance has itself become part of, and so has altered, the probability of the minimum temperature for that particular night in the year – so every instance of a primary tense in English discourse alters the relative probabilities of the terms that make up the primary tense system.

In this view, just like climate/weather, langue/parole are not two distinct sets of phenomena, but the same thing observed from distinct time depths, and just as important, langue is not conceptualised as a 'pre-coded' code – a stable, synoptic structure: it is inherently probabilistic and open to change.

A constant theme in Halliday's writing is that, in order to be able to work as it actually does in the life of its speech communities, the language system must possess the ability to renew itself; this constant evolution of the system is not something 'extra', the description of which can sit at the periphery of our central concerns in 'linguistics proper'; it is in fact a condition for the existence and continuation of that human language which in the end happens to be what the linguistic theory is about. The extract above has indicated Saussure's recognition that instance/parole has a crucial role in enabling the evolution/renewal of langue as an effective resource for meaning in context. Given this, we must reject his recommendation to banish parole from linguistic theory. The aim of linguistic theory is to present a comprehensive account of human language; leaving parole out would turn the linguistic theory into a plot without a hero – the basis for development will disappear. What is needed instead is to conduct a deep examination of how the langue and parole dialectic works; and since parole cannot be dissociated from social context or context from society,

Halliday proceeds to examine the four categories in relation to each other. I present my interpretation of this exploration by starting with figure 1, which is adapted[10] from Halliday (1999: 275).

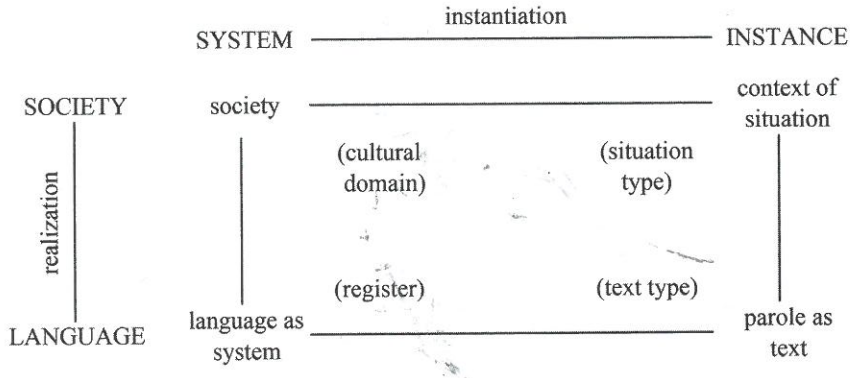


Figure 1: The relationship of society and language: instantiation and realisation

According to figure 1 the four theoretical categories – language system, society, parole-as-text and context of situation – are linked to each other by two kinds of relationship: instantiation, represented on the horizontal axis, and realisation, represented on the vertical. On each axis, the relationship of the categories is analogous. Thus on the horizontal axis, society is instantiated by context of situation, just as language is by parole-as-text, and on the vertical axis society is realised as language just as context of situation is, as parole-as-text [11]; to summarise:

(i) instantiation-wise [society : context of situation :: language : parole-as-text]

(ii) realisation-wise [society : language :: context of situation : parole-as-text]

As the figure shows, each category is connected to the other three either directly or indirectly. To understand the significance of the relationships, we need to examine what role they play in the internal organisation of language, and how they empower the analyst in showing how language works in social life.

As a theoretical concept, INSTANTIATION (Halliday 2008; Matthiessen 2007) permits the analyst a simultaneous focus on the 'potential' and the 'instance': the instance is recognised as 'made intelligible' by reference to the potential, and the potential as a resource constituted by instances. In figure 1, society is said to be instantiated by context of situation. This can be interpreted as claiming that the identity of a specific context is known by reference to that potential which we know as society; at the same time, it is the instances that are in time constitutive of the society. A similar interpretation applies to the other pair on

the lower line of the horizontal axis: language system is instantiated by parole-as-text, and parole is constitutive of the system of language. In Halliday's framework the metaphor of rule is avoided because of its 'absolutist' connotations; the potential is a resource permitting its use as the occasion demands. Parole takes shape by speakers exploiting this resource in relation to the needs of their communication – in doing so, they may follow the regularities of the system as they know it, or they may work variations on that regularity, or they may create new pattern(s) by innovating within the frame of the langue. The patterns in parole become intelligible by reference to the system, even as they extend beyond it, even if the pattern maker happens to be an e. e. cummings or a James Joyce. It is in this sense – not simply by using the system as the original that has to be replicated – that language in use in social contexts will maintain and develop the system as resource; without ongoing speaking, language as meaning potential is a desiccated shell, known as a dead language.

The second relation, i.e., REALISATION, is quintessentially semiotic. By definition a semiotic system combines meaning and expression, the two presenting themselves as a seamless flow of meanings to the receiver. However analysis reveals a crucial difference between expression and meaning: whereas expression impinges on the human body, meaning is apprehended by the intellect. They are inherently different, or using more technical terminology, analysis would establish at least two different orders of abstraction: the separation of meaning and expression is thus a product of analysis; their unity is the receiver's subjective experience. A linguistic theory must explain what underlies the receiver's subjective experience of unity. Realisation is the relation postulated to account for the fact that despite the inherent duality, semiosis is apprehended by the receiver as a seamless entity. The theoretical category 'realisation', thus, refers to an inherent bond between these distinct orders of abstraction without this bond language as we know it could not exist[12]. In terms of Hjelmslev (1961), it is a solidary relation; and the theorisation of this bond as 'realisation' allows the analyst to keep the different levels of language in view at one and the same time.

Such orders of abstraction in semiotic systems have always been recognised in linguistics though they have been called by different names in different models, e.g., components, or levels or strata. In the manner of Hjelmslev, SFL divides both content and expression into two strata each. The two strata of content are meaning (semantics) and wording (lexicogrammar), those of expression are sound pattern (phonology) and sound (phonetics). Language is thus a multiple coding system, with four internal strata: semantics realised as lexicogrammar realised as phonology realised as phonetics. The model also recognises a fifth stratum in the theory of language description. This level, called context, is external to language system as such; it functions as an

interface between language and reality. With the exception of the lowest two strata i.e., those pertaining to expression, realisation is a dialectical relation: the higher level is the activator of the lower level patterns and the lower, the construer of the higher one[13]; for example, in any act of parole, it is meaning that activates lexicogrammatical form, while the lexicogrammatical form is what construes the meaning. The implication of this postulate is that there is no linguistic meaning without lexicogrammar, and the concept of lexicogrammar without meaning is a contradiction in terms.

Figure 1 indicates two realisational relations: society is realised as language, and context of situation, as parole-as-text. The realisation relation between language and society is what accounts for the fact that we can derive a reasonably good sense of what speakers' society is like from a familiarity with their language system[14], just as given parole-as-text we are able to construe the details of a particular context of situation relevant to that text[15].

It is obvious from the above discussion that each theoretical term in figure 1 is related either directly or indirectly to all the others. Thus if we take parole-as-text as the starting point, it is in direct relation to context of situation on the one hand and to langue on the other: it realises the former and instantiates the latter. Parole as text is related indirectly to society: the relationship is mediated via the category of context which in turn directly instantiates society and is constitutive of it; at the same time society itself is realised as langue, which is of course the resource for parole as text. The immediately following sections will attempt to foreground the centrality of the relationships between the four categories of figure 1 to a deeper understanding of the relationship between language and society.

2.2 Parole in context: the shaping of langue

The density of relationship between the various categories of figure 1 explains how human languages acquire those properties which enable the langue of the community to be used with efficacy as *parole* in a myriad social contexts in different socio-historical environments. The significance of the direct solidary relation of parole both to context of situation and to language system is that parole can never be dissociated from either of these categories – its presence implies the presence of both. Just as it is very difficult to banish parole from the description of langue, so also it is almost impossible to leave out context of situation from the description of parole – whenever this is done, something important about the nature of language as a whole is elided, thus damaging the integrity of the description.

Unlike the 1960s, today the term context is much used in linguistics, and a great deal is being written about it, both in SFL and in other models. Our interest in the category here is particularly from the point of view of the social activity of talk, which is one social activity amongst many. Examination of human activities as a whole suggests that the fundamental elements in the make up of their contexts may be listed under three heads: **A**ction type, including where the actants imagine their action to be 'heading'; **R**elation type, i.e., what are the relationships holding between those engaged in this action; and **C**ontact type i.e., how the interactants become engaged with each other apropos the said action. I coined the acronym 'ARC' for this 'logical structure' which underlies all human social activities (Hasan 2001) – the ARC as a whole must form the backbone of any social activity. For linguists interested in the regularities of parole, one interesting fact is that most human activities, though not all (Hasan 1999 for discussion), implicate parole; conversely parole often, but not always, occurs apropos some material action. Arguably, the best framework for the analysis of the relevant context of discourse which also fits the generalisations for all kinds of human activities is provided by systemic functional linguistics (SFL). The framework recognises three distinct but related vectors[16]: (i) the FIELD OF DISCOURSE, which concerns the nature of the social activity; (ii) the TENOR OF DISCOURSE, concerned with the social relation of the interactants engaged in that activity; and (iii) the MODE OF DISCOURSE, i.e., ways in which interactants come in contact in and for the performance of that activity (Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens 1964).

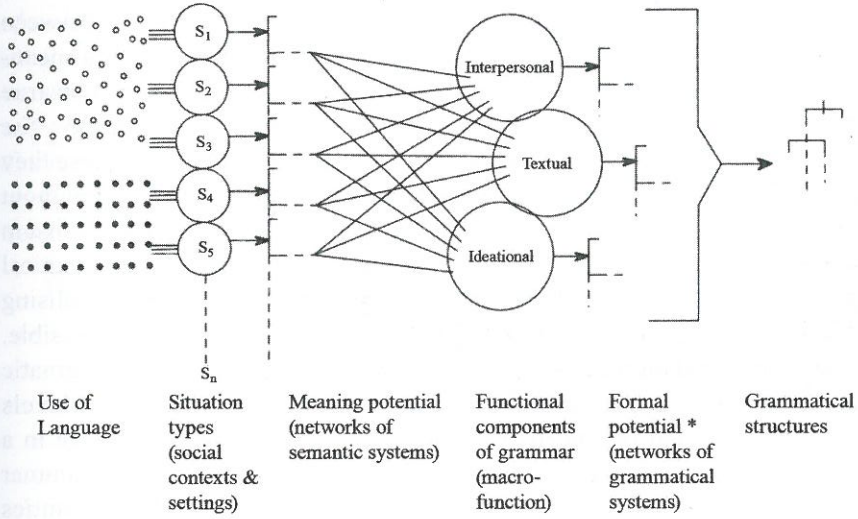
The justifications for recognising only these three parameters as the elements essential to the understanding of context of situation for discourse are obvious: first, it reflects the basic logical pattern for all social activity: engaging in acts of meaning is one kind of social activity; secondly, each of these vectors may be treated as a 'variable'; thus supposing field of discourse to be pedagogic, this may more delicately be described as presentation or revision, or evaluation, and so on; at the same time, one may need to specify the 'what' of presentation – this could be mathematics, or language arts, or history, and so on. What this means is that the description of each vector is extendable in delicacy (i.e., detail); the field of an activity may be analysed with greater or lesser specificity as the needs of the analysis demand. Each vector can be instantiated by a configuration of values pertaining to it; these values are systemically related to each other in a complex *either/or* and *both/and* relation, which can be represented paradigmatically in a system network (e.g. Hasan 1999). The vectors can thus 'cover' the details of all features of the social situation as required by the increasing depth of delicacy of the analysis[17]; for example, relation/tenor is a highly complex vector subsuming the various aspects relevant to the interactants' social identity e.g., gender, status, age,

profession, and ideological stance. Finally, the third justification lies in the remarkable fact that faced with a displaced text, normal acculturated receivers are typically able to derive information precisely about these three vectors from the language of that text. In other words the language of the text encapsulates information precisely about the three vectors listed above – and this is not done by lexis alone. This fact is significant in reflecting both on context and on the system of language.

Context of situation is a 'large word'; it is not easy to specify how much of the materially sens-ible 'scenario' in which the social activity is situated is relevant to the interactants in the performance of the actions they are engaged in; nor are all of the features of the situation material in nature. Consider for example the relationship between the interactants: for some one looking from outside this is not information that can be gathered entirely sensuously though there are features such as sex, age, colour, mode of dressing, comportment that can be 'seen' and their social value as current in the society can be interpreted. But the heart of the information relevant to the relationship lies in the semiotic inter-action of the interactants: what kind of relationship is being negotiated now, at this moment – conflictual or cooperative, 'pulling status' or displaying parity, and so on. The guide to a perception of what will count as the relevant context in the case of discourse is ultimately in the interactants' parole – more specifically in the meanings being exchanged. Assuming that the text is a record of the sayings in the socially situated interaction, the kind of information that is invariably encapsulated in the text could reasonably be treated as construing that part of the social situation which has been treated by the interactants as relevant to the context of their discourse. If so, then in a very important sense, social context of discourse is largely a linguistically construed category. This would make sense because speakers are in the habit of being relevant; they 'cut their parole' to suit the perceived needs of the occasion of their talk. It follows that in their parole-as-text they will attend to various such values of the field, and/or of the tenor, and/or of the mode of discourse. This is what it means to say that *social contexts and parole as text are realisationally related*[18]: the perception of context activates the orders of relevance for the interactants and the text which represents their sayings on the occasion construes the relevant context of discourse for the receiver.

We treat it as established, then, that parole construes the context of situation for the receiver of the ongoing text – which it must, because that is quite obviously a necessary condition for continuing engagement in the 'same' discourse with an other for any duration of time. It follows that if we treat text as the largest semantic unit (cf. Halliday and Hasan 1976, and elsewhere) and proceed to analyse it from the point of view of how the textual meanings are made accessible to the text-receiver, we would establish those lexicogrammatical

patterns which have played a part in their construal. An examination of this kind will lay bare the semantic and lexicogrammatical resources exploited by parole as text. And by the same token, the examination of a large corpus of discourses occurring in different types of social contexts would enable us to offer some idea of what kind of resource language is so that it is possible for it to be used successfully in meeting speakers' communicative needs. It is this line of argument that I believe underlies Halliday's schematic characterisation of language as resource in figure 2 (1973b: 353):



* i.e. meaning potential at the grammatical level, in the system-structure definition of 'meaning'

Figure 2: The evolution of metafunctional resources: from instance to system

The leftmost column in figure 2 presents the different kinds of uses of language in a variety of social contexts; these contexts are indicated in column two as S1 through to Sn. Column three indicates that when the many cases of different types of uses of language are examined, it turns out that despite the fact they belong to distinct types and distinct occasions of talk, they show similarity at a higher level of abstraction: each text 'has' the same three domains of meanings – meanings that relate to the same aspects of human social practice. This similarity is not in types of syntagmatic syntactic structures; rather it can be stated most easily in terms of kinds of meaning and wording. One such kind is relevant to the tenor, one to the mode and

one to the field of discourse: which is simply a different way of saying that (i) field, tenor and mode are encapsulated in discourses of various types of meaning and wording, and (ii) that specific to each vector of context are meanings pertaining to certain spheres of human experience of participation in social practices of one kind or another. In column four, Halliday interprets this tripartite formation of worded meanings into specific classes of linguistic function: one class, called INTERPERSONAL, is concerned with tenor i.e.: these worded meanings form the means of negotiating human relations; a second, called TEXTUAL, is concerned with mode, i.e., its function is to realise the ways of discursively organising social practice – for example, were the interactants materially in contact, on this depends the choice between dialogue or monologue, and so on; and the third class of worded meanings, called IDEATIONAL, is concerned with field, i.e., those which construe the acts and their sequences that go into the make up of the activity. The meaning configurations become accessible to the listener only because they are 'coded' i.e., realised as lexicogrammar: no linguistic meaning without lexicogrammar; no lexicogrammar innocent of meaning. This implies that in some sense the lexicogrammar is also specialised: a set of lexicogrammatical patterns best suited to making interpersonal meaning, another to realising textual meaning and yet another for making ideational meanings accessible. However, if lexicogrammar is conceptualised as consisting of syntagmatic structures only, this tripartite organisation of the semantic-formal levels is obscured. What one needs is to see the organisation of language in a paradigmatic perspective, as made available for the level of lexicogrammar in current SFL grammars (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004; for semantics see enclosed CD and Hasan 1983). Halliday schematically presents the paradigmatic organisation of the formal system in column five of figure 2; and it is the options of these paradigmatically organised systems that are actualised as some syntagmatic structure as shown in the last column. This functional resonance creates a strong relation between the three upper strata of SFL theory, namely, social context, semantics and lexicogrammar. Halliday (1999: 274; emphasis original) has remarked:

> As I wrote myself many years ago, language is as it is because of what it does: which means because of what we do with it, in every aspect of our life. So a theory of language [use] in context is not just a theory of how people use language, important though that is. It is a theory about the *nature* and *evolution* of the system, explaining why the system works the way it does.

2.3 Parole in context: functionality in language

It is the kind of functional resonance depicted in figure 2, which has formed the basis for the recognition of linguistic functionality in SFL (e.g., Halliday 1970, 1979a, and elsewhere). The functionality of language forms another constant theme in Halliday's writing, namely that the structure of langue is as it is because the instantiating parole participates in varied social contexts. Parole is able to satisfy the community's needs because thanks to its own participation in the evolution of langue, the latter is inherently functional.

The concept of 'function' when used in SFL with reference to the system of language as a whole is critically different from the concept of 'function' as applied to a speech act such as promising, ordering, etc., or as applied to isolated utterances a la Bühler (1934) for the classification of children's utterances as referential, conative or expressive. SFL uses the term 'metafunction' to distinguish functions of langue system from the 'function' of an utterance. The SFL metafunctions are well known; here a brief word about the three metafunctions to refresh the memory:

(i) IDEATIONAL whereby each language is a resource for construing its speakers' experiences of the world: the meanings and wordings pertaining to this metafunction are critical for construing the nature of the field of discourse; its realisation in language takes the form of systems e.g., those of transitivity, of tense, signification/reference as described in lexis as delicate grammar (Hasan 1985d, 1987a; Tucker 1998), systems of expansion and projection (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004);

(ii) INTERPERSONAL which provides resources for creating, maintaining and changing human relations: it is primarily relevant to the complex construal of tenor of discourse, and its realisation at the lexicogrammatical level takes the form of such systems as those of mood, modality, modulation (Halliday 1994), and so on; and finally

(iii) TEXTUAL which consists in the linguistic resources that enable the weaving of the relevant meanings into an intelligible coherent discourse, while construing information about the mode of discourse such as cohesion, information focus (Halliday 1994).

Bühler thought of functions as operating one at a time; further, his functions were hierarchically ordered, with the referential as the most important. The metafunctions in SFL are not hierarchised; they have equal status, and each is manifested in every act of language use: in fact, an important task for grammatics is to describe how the three metafunctions are woven together into the same linguistic unit.

In linguistics, it is fairly common to view language as active in society: it does something for society. What the above discussion indicates is that society too is active in shaping human language. This reciprocity between the two is, in fact, the essence of linguistic functionality. There exists a view of the notion of functionalism according to which every single unit of language must individually show a cultural significance – if not, then the whole concept of linguistic functionality crumbles! I suggest that the functionalism of language truly resides in revealing a dialectic between society and language system: the system possesses a meaning potential which enables parole to be active in social life, and as the discussion based on figure 2 above indicates the potential itself has taken a specific shape in the system of language due to the traces of human social practice in which parole has intervened. This is relevant to our investigation of the relationship between language and society: first, such a relationship could not reasonably be seen as accidental; we owe the amazing efficacy of language in use to the metafunctional resonance across social context, semantics and lexicogrammar; it is the functional calibration of these that creates the potential; and it is this potential that forms the bench mark for parole working in social contexts. Secondly, the relationship between language and society is not limited to 'speech' and 'its social context'; it goes beyond parole to langue: it actually shapes the langue as resource. In displaying its ability to satisfy its speakers, one thing that parole is doing is bringing back to bear on the social practice what it took from that practice to the language system. But how does parole eventually renew langue? This is where we need to return to parole and socio-historical changes in discourse.

2.4 Parole in context: socio-historically changing discourse

First, let me take a brief look at language change and discursive change side by side, because the two are closely and logically related, but they are also remarkably different. It is obvious that change in discourse subsumes change in language: after all nothing enters into the language system except through the speaking activities of speakers – and that means through the discourses that speakers produce. Thus, logically, discourse is the site both for the actuation and the transmission of language change; but, in practice, consideration of discourse hardly plays any part in the historical study of that change. The one universally undisputed fact about change in the system of language is that it does actually happen. And despite extensive studies, the explanation of change in language probably remains the single most problematic issue, variation theory notwithstanding.

When it comes to socio-historical change in discourse, like language change, it too is readily recognised in a manner of speaking, but to the best of my knowledge no one has systematically examined the phenomenon of discursive change: there exists no branch of diachronic discourse study, though there are sporadic accounts such as the history of some corner of science (Halliday and Martin 1993; Halliday 2004a; Kappagoda 2005). Not surprisingly change in discourse is not a well understood phenomenon; for example, when sometimes we talk about a 'modernised Chaucer', we might mean no more by that description than that the orthography has been modernised, and maybe a glossary of the lexical items is appended. The fact is that at least two aspects of change in discourse take us well beyond change in language: both apply to whole discourse, and neither can be investigated by any methodology employed today in the study of language change. One of these aspects has to do with change in the over-all 'tone' of the discourse, and the other, with what is known as generic structure. For example, when Klemperer (2005) talks about The Language of the Third Reich, although he too proceeds by discussing specific items, his choice of the items is guided by some principle of 'semantic consistency' which is what underlies the 'Nazi tone' as he perceives it. The tone we know as Victorian piety cannot be characterised by a collection of lexical items and/or a set of syntactic structures. As for changes in discursive form, this becomes obvious from a comparison of changes over the last fifty years in various discourse types from personal letters to formal funding applications. Changes of discursive 'tone' and 'generic structure' and possibly other phenomena which happen to pertain to whole texts and whole text types are sometime subsumed under that 'catch-all' term 'style' – a descriptive term that appears deceptively easy to use but has persistently defied clear characterisation (see for example a recent account presented by Schilling-Estes 2002b).

When it comes to the explanation of discursive change, it seems to be quite easy: most people asked why change in discourse comes about, would answer almost without hesitation: 'because society/culture changes'. And our discussion of the relationship between social context and text (section 2.1–2.2) might encourage the belief in the correctness of the answer, one (less than careful) reading of which could be that to say that society changes is to say that (some) contexts change; to say that (some) contexts change is to say that the discourses relevant to those contexts change. The problem I perceive in such a response is not in the mention of society/culture as implicated in discursive change, but in the 'causal linearity' implied by 'because', whereby first society changes and then discursive change follows suit. Our account of the relations of society context and parole has not been causal; it has been presented as forged by instantiation (society and context) and/or realisation

(context and text). Neither of these relations inserts 'time' between the two processes; they simply argue their reciprocity. The conception of discourse changing a step behind social change is simply not realistic. Take for example the invention of weapons of mass destruction: there have been perhaps very few events that have changed human societies quite as much as the invention of the atom bomb which was dropped on Hiroshima. Clearly it would be absurd to maintain that during the invention stage, the content and form of discourse stayed in its 'pre-bomb' state, that first the bomb got invented and then the discourse changed.

Our experience of how things work in language as it functions in real life runs counter to such linear explanations: we know – or at least we *ought* to know – that everywhere, at every stage of human history, preachers and politicians have persuaded, and are persuading, their listeners *purely through discourse* to support some line of action which is designed to bring change in society. Obviously such preaching has to precede the social action and its outcome. This makes nonsense of the linear causal explanation. To insist on such causal linearity is to underestimate the power of language in shaping human beings and their universe. The view also poses the unrealistic problem of deciding for each social change the actual point of its onset and completion, which is no less easy to determine than the boundaries of *états de langue* are. It challenges the social subjects' authentic experience of what engaging in parole as text is really like: The fact is that more often than not speakers go on producing discourse almost unaware of aspects of social changes. And this is not a fanciful claim. After all, we do not have any record of English speakers going about 'gob-smacked', as today's popular metaphor would put it, over the long decades when the social institution of marriage was undergoing changes, bringing with it today's wide recognition of *de facto* 'partnership', gay marriage, and instead of 'spouse' the use of the politically correct expression 'marriage partner'. There was no moment in our social-linguistic life when the corporate business revolution, still surging ahead as I write, left us speechless, incapable of describing, furthering or critiquing its variety of 'compassionate capitalism'[19]. Klemperer (1975) was recording the language of the Third Reich even as Germany was developing the Nazi agenda.

What this line of reasoning suggests is that the view of discourse running a step behind the social/cultural change is mistaken. Human society, just like human language, is subject to on-going change. And if we agree with Halliday that there exists a realisational relationship between language and society as shown in figure 1, and that realisational bonds are solidary, then it would follow that the change in language and society is reciprocal. In other words, the relationship between the two is more than skin-deep; it is in fact

dia-logical: this is another way of saying that their development is guided by a *cogenetic logic*[20]. We know no living language that has existed outside society; and certainly the whole structure of human societies would be fundamentally different in the absence of the participation of human language in social life. The social agent as an interactant does not come to a context without resources; and we have seen above in following up the implications of figure 2, that the resource language offers its speakers is itself founded upon the participation of parole in social life: nothing enters the system of language – the *langue* – except through the working of parole in meeting the realisational demands in the construal of meanings relevant to some context of situation, and what happens in parole is relevant to the evolution of the resources of language system. To the extent that the interactants have active experience of participation in discourse types, and familiarity with the language they propose to use, the scene for interaction is actually set in their favour.

There are of course occasions when social context as instance of constantly changing society might present a face to parole which puts the interactant under semantic pressure, thus in some sense leading to a semiotic struggle in the construal of meaning. Such struggle is perhaps more clearly visible in the communicative patterns of very young children learning their mother tongue: this is so because much of the complex network of regularities built into their mother tongue is not yet accessible to them: children have more work to do to get their meaning across – and even then in early years their communicative success depends much on the cooperation of their meaning group. For the adult using language, the support from the existing system is in direct proportion to how much of the principles governing its dense relationships is internalised, so that its elements have become 'second nature'. The challenge of semantic pressure which changing contexts present to speakers is not necessarily met by 'innovation' i.e., the creation of new lexical items: it may involve semantic shift as in the meaning of 'free' created through the contemporary use of the expression 'free trade' (Hasan 2003); it may involve variation on structural patterns; it may even involve a play on orthography. Renewal of the system has thus many manifestations as historical linguistics so well documents. With discursive change, there is, however, one aspect which neither currently recognised methodologies in Labovian sociolinguistics, nor those in diachronic language change offer any means of analysing. This phenomenon, to which I have referred above as 'discursive tone', is in fact the manifestation of the changing ideology in the speech community. Its analysis appears most amenable in terms of semantic variation (for examples of such analysis, see the chapters of this volume).

2.5 The dialogism of language and society

With the above discussion we have traveled far. We began with language use for social communication as the only link between language and society (section 1.2). Other than this, society had nothing to do with the nature of language, nor had language any bearing on the nature of society – the two simply came together, albeit very frequently, in speech in its social context. But if the language system changes along with the changing society and it is the changes in language use/*parole* that insert themselves into *langue*, becoming a part of it, then something is very wrong with our original model. The idea that the relationship of language and society is accidental with speech skimming on the surface of society loses credibility. Certainly speech/parole is the key to understanding how language is able to satisfy the communicative needs of its speakers. And speech is undoubtedly the locus of the many on-going patterns of variation in language. But to be able to study these phenomena satisfactorily, the value of speech/parole itself has to be understood.

In elaborating the messages of figures 1 and 2 in the above sections, I have attempted to show that the first steps in this enterprise are to understand the nature of the arena where parole works and to examine how parole manages to continue working effectively. An attempt to do just this has brought us face to face with language system and society. Halliday offers an interpretation of langue/system and parole/instance which removes the most fundamental source of contradiction in Saussure's text. For decades linguistics has reified 'the' system of language to the extent that it has seemed to exist independent of the users of that system. Certainly langue is not the property of any single individual, but to the extent that communities are constituted of individuals[21], individuals are central to the evolution of langue. Seeing langue/parole from the SFL point of view leads us to revise the popular view of language system as a homogenous, synoptic object; it turns out that this 'homogeneous synoptic system' is simply a different view of a 'variable and varying dynamic process': language is – to use Lemke's expression (1984) – an open dynamic system. By showing the centrality of the social in the here and now of speaking, and by seeing langue and parole as the same phenomenon, though viewed from different perspectives for purposes of analysis, Halliday has offered a means of exploring the mutual interaction of society and language as it functions in the life of the community. The explorations of the relations of instantiation and realisation which link society, context, text, and language lead to an understanding of the foundation of linguistic metafunctionality. It becomes quite obvious that there is nothing accidental about the relationship of language and society, that the relation is in fact inalienable; and one that concerns language both as system and as process.

At the same time, judging from what we know today about the evolution of the human race, our species has never known language outside society or society outside the reach of language: the developmental stages of both language system and social system have steadily revealed a pattern of cogenetic evolution (Dunbar 1996, 2003; Marwick 2005). By demonstrating the role of the realisational relation between context and text in the genesis of metafunctions, and the role of metafunctions in foregrounding the intimate relation between system and instance, Halliday negates the possibility of doing a viable explanation of any aspect of language – be it syntax or lexicon, discourse or speech acts – without placing language in its social environment. From this point of view autonomous linguistics is inevitably destined for correction, as is also Bourdieu's 'external linguistics' (Hasan 1998). A linguistic theory that fails to account for the nature of language, will also fail in modelling the relationship of language to anything that intimately concerns its speakers: society is one such concern and the making of human mind is another. Of course it still remains to be demonstrated that a correct modelling of the relationship between society and the system and process of language will help bring about a sense of integration to the many strands of sociolinguistics. How can we specify the object of study for an 'integrated sociolinguistics' of this kind? What would its organisation look like? These are the issues I will attempt to address in the next section.

3 An integrated sociolinguistics

The object of study for today's sociolinguistics is variation in the Labovian sense of the term. This was not always the case (for some discussion, chapters 5, 7 and 9 of this volume). In the 1960s when this paradigm had first burst upon the linguistic scene as a breath of fresh air[22], it seemed for a moment that the discipline of linguistics itself was poised to free itself from arbitrary restrictions. However, the scene changed quickly: the orientation of the field altered almost before the 'socio-' had a chance to be taken seriously; instead of concerning itself with the study of language in its social context, which was what it announced to be the aim of sociolinguistics, it has steadily become the study of the significance of synchronic variation for diachronic change in language. Thus the very first sentence of a fairly recent and prestigious publication tells us that 'the core of the sociolinguistic enterprise' is 'the study of language variation and change' (Chambers, Trudgill and Schilling-Estes 2002: 1): the rest is a tangle of other strands, tolerated but not considered significant as sociolinguistics.

Treating 'the study of language change in its social context' (Labov 1972a: 60) as the 'core' of sociolinguistics does leave room for other strands, but it itself has no means of linking these strands to each other. And yet the undeniable fact remains that neither is all language change rooted in variation, especially as variation is understood in variationist theory (for an interesting discussion see McMahon 1994, especially chapter 9), nor can the study of language in its social context be reduced to the single question of explaining diachronic change by reference to patterns of today's variation; so the rationale for making it the 'core' of the so-called *socio*-linguistics is not at all obvious. This is not to deny that diachronic change calls for explanation; nor to doubt the value of the concept of 'variation' as practiced in Labovian sociolinguistics; nor even to deny that in the last resort all/most language change may be 'explained' as social, especially if the social remains an un-theorised, catch-all term. It is simply to say that the object of study for an *integrated* sociolinguistics cannot be as specific, and as narrowly limited as Chambers et al. (2002) ascribe to Labovian sociolinguistics. Clearly, the more limited and specific the 'definition' of a discipline, the more excluding it will become; and more often than not, the excluded has a way of importing chaos into the neat little world built around a narrow concept. So it comes to pass that ironically today's sociolinguistics is more like a strand in some larger discipline – an integrated sociolinguistics, perhaps? – which would have the capacity of showing how the circumscribed area of 'variation theory' can be linked to other areas concerned with the study of speech in its social context. Change in language is simply a by-product of such speech; it is not an independent force; nor is it the measure of the importance of speech in the life of the speaker.

If what we are aspiring to achieve is to create an integrated sociolinguistics, then we must begin by explicitly acknowledging the basis for this integration: in my opinion that basis lies in the reciprocity of language and society. It is the acceptance of this fundamental principle that will allow us to conceptualise sociolinguistics as a field of enquiry whose aim it is to examine the various aspects of the dialogue between society and language. The object of enquiry for such a field has to be the examination of the working of both 'society in language' and 'language in society' in order to explain how they mutually maintain and change each other. This might sound too amorphous an aim for those who like their theories simple, and their goals limited. But if theories with the virtue of simplicity have consistently failed to deliver even those limited goals in a coherent manner, and if we continue to perceive relationships which simple theories are unable to account for, then I fear we have very little choice: we will need to develop a theory which reflects the complexity of the phenomenon, allowing consideration of its diverse aspects in their complexity. Hill (1985: 1) quotes Paul Friedrich (1980: 120) who is worried that such a

proliferation 'raises the heretical speculation that "language" (like "culture") is an obsolete folk category, no more appropriate as a "field of enquiry" than is "nature"'. The implicit warning should not be ignored, but instead of abandoning the project it is important to ask whether this undesirable eventuality can possibly be forestalled. Throughout section 2, I have attempted to show that a theorisation of 'taken for granted facts' tends to clarify the picture. It places a grid on a kaleidoscopic scene – even as language does on 'reality' – offering principles which help identify order in seeming chaos. We have theorised speech/parole, social context and other relevant categories in the previous sections. It is worth asking whether by making use of such theoretical categories as have been presented above, it might be possible to organise as a scholarly field that large area I have described above as the study of 'language in society and of society in language'. In the following sub-sections I will attempt to examine the feasibility of this enterprise.

3.1 Parole in context: (i) speaker as social agent

Since it is speech in its social context where sociolinguistics finds its data, it might be reasonable to use social context for placing a grid on the dialogue between language and society. Speech in social context is where their mutual interdependence plays out its entire course. The three vectors of context represent readymade categories which can be used to impose order on the vast area of language-society relationship. The examination of each vector is expected to reveal the diverse ways in which language and society function dialogically; and it is reasonable to suggest that such an examination will not only enable us to predict what the concerns of an integrated sociolinguistics are, but also act as the basis for arguing their inherent interconnectedness. The solution has the merit of avoiding the current situation where each concern is viewed as a 'strand', making current sociolinguistics a wilderness of concerns, where the concerns are without any concern for one another.

I would like to begin this exploration with tenor, which concerns interactant relationships of one kind or another. It has perhaps the greatest significance for sociolinguistics: the interactants are, in a very real sense, iconic of the intimate relationship of language and society in that they are at once social agents and semiotic beings. And above all they constitute the most active element of the social situation. 'Context', as I said above, is a large word: just as its boundaries do not manifest a definite shape without discourse, so also the details of the social practice associated with some context are not inscribed in its material aspects[23]. It is the speaker as a social agent who alone has the capacity to recognise the particular kind of social practice called for by the occasion.

Thus the interactants represent the only element of context to which can be attributed consciousness, the capacity to judge, plan and decide – attributes which presuppose the existence of belief systems and which are relevant to the evaluation of the ongoing activity. These observations about interactants would probably be widely accepted, but there may be less agreement on the nature and ontogenesis of consciousness, on the origins of beliefs and desires and on the formation of ability to judge. Interactants represent that awesome category called 'individual' – and for all its currency in the discourse of social sciences, the popular meaning of the term is surrounded with contradictions. An important questions is: do forms of individuality vary with varying social and semiotic experience?

Saussure described acts of parole as essentially 'willful and intellectual'. This may be so, but experience tells us that in natural language use, deliberation on each element of the saying is an exception rather than a rule. So the question is what will any one 'will' naturally and what saying will present itself to their intellect as normal. Nor can it be claimed that the ability to make use of language is a sufficient condition for engaging in speech. Whorf's 'fashions of speaking', Bourdieu's *habitus* or Bernstein's 'coding orientation' do not refer to a form of premeditated behaviour. A speaker's sayings are not activated from within language, but by the speaker's understanding of what saying the occasion calls for. In the end, the reason why anyone says anything lies in who they are as social beings; this is what guides their recognition of the context and their view of what saying is relevant in that context.

Where do such understandings come from? What naturalises fashions of speaking, so that they may be manifested over a range of different contexts? I doubt if these things are innate. It seems rather that the answer has to be what Bernstein called (e.g., 1990: 13) 'social positioning' – a term that subsumes social class as well as its far reaching consequences for social agents, such as their family, friends, social network, range of expertise, belief systems, and experience of living with others. Social positioning is clearly not something that can be shaken off; one is always positioned in some particular way *vis-à-vis* one's society. In so far as experience is the maker of mind, creating pathways of belief and conviction, the precursors to making judgment and decision, a social agent's individuality and identity is moored in the experiences that their social positioning – itself liable to change – makes accessible. There is thus a logical continuity from a social subject's identity to their social positioning to their ideological orientation to their ways of being, doing and saying – which is what Bernstein's 'coding orientation' was attempting to articulate. We thus have a rich array of questions each of which is of interest to the major concerns of an integrated sociolinguistics. Below I enumerate some of these, using speaker in context as the starting point:

- What are the bases of context recognition and of the formation of judgments regarding what social practice is called for where?
- Given in some sense the same occasion of talk, does the recognition of context or ideas about social practice in that context vary across the society? If so, what does the variation correlate with?
- What variation is found in ways of saying in families, neighbourhood and workplace? What does such variation correlate with?
- What part, if any, does social positioning play in the formation of a social subject's identity?
- How are individuals' belief systems created? How and why do they change? Is there any variation in belief systems across the various segments of a society? Where are these lines drawn, and what is responsible for the drawing of these lines?
- How are social identities forged? What part does language play in it? How do established identities change? What is the difference between social identity and 'face' in Goffman's sense of the word?
- What part does language play in creating, maintaining and changing relationships in family, neighbourhood, and other institutional environments e.g. school, work place, and so on? What are the bases of social network?
- What are the ways in which interactant relationship is negotiated between strangers in the course of carrying out social activities? Do these ways display any variation? How, when, and where?
- What is the importance of managing social distance in the negotiation of interactant relation? What part does language play in this enterprise?
- How are age, status and gender relationships enacted, maintained and changed?
- How does language support hierarchisation, evaluation and presentation of social agents? What part is played in this by the speaker's ways of using language? On what basis are accent, 'grammar' and semantic orientation evaluated?

3.3 Parole in context: (ii) social action

Although social action is something that is brought about by the interactant, it constitutes the point of the activity as a whole. It is to do something that interactants come together and establish a mode of contact. It is immaterial that the idea of what is to be done may not be clear in all its details, that in fact the action may be layered (e.g. playing with the child to make the child happy), that its long term character might be quite different from what the interactants thought it would be (e.g. just chatting with the neighbour might become a source of new and unexpected information). Just as there is a great deal of oversimplification in maintaining that saying is a voluntary act by an individual, so also there is a problem in assuming that 'any one can do anything'. The privilege of participating in various kinds of activity is not equally distributed across any society: who the interactant is makes a difference, but equally it is precisely the activities in which a person can engage that leads to the definition of who that interactant is. Below are some of the issues that an integrated sociolinguistics would need to concern itself with:

- What social activities depend entirely on language for their realisation? What linguistic resources does such realisation demand? What segment of the society exploits which resources most frequently?
- What are the bases for the privilege of participation in the various kinds of activities? How are those interactant attributes acquired which 'qualify' for such participation?
- What human actions do not depend on the participation of language? What role does language play, if used, in the course of such practices?
- Given that the details of social practice are variable within the 'same' material situational setting, how do we account for this variation?
- How do social agents acquire the understandings essential to participation in social activities, especially given that they manifest variant details in realisation?
- What activities are specialised by gender, education, and/or socio-economic status and what kind of linguistic resources does their performance demand? How are these resources distributed to the various segments of a society?

- How are the stages of an activity defined, especially in activities whose realisation depends wholly on language with or without help from other visual semiotic systems?
- What part do accent, grammar and semantics play in the realisation of activities?
- What principles are there for the classification of social activities? Are the activity types hierarchised? On what basis?
- What relationship is there between social institutions and the social practices that are specific to each institution? What part do social practices play in maintaining and developing these institutions?
- What if any is the role of activities in the maintenance and development of society?
- Is participation in social practices relevant to the formation of individuality/personality? Do all social practices have this role or only some? How do they differ?

3.4 Parole in context: (iii) modes of contact

Contact specifies how the interactants come together in and for the performance of the activity. Although contact has a material manifestation, it is its semiotic value that is most relevant for our purposes. Thus co-presence may be thought of as a material phenomenon, but seen as a material phenomenon only, it is not relevant to what goes on in language. At any one point on the shop floor many social agents are materially co-present, but it is the recognition of co-presence by the interactants that is decisive. This as Goffman (1983) pointed out many years ago is what shows that they are attending to each other, that their mutual attention has been 'requisitioned'. Along with this come other sociolinguistic issues. To enumerate a few

- Who acknowledges whose presence where and with what kind of language use?
- How do the possibilities of contact between interactants differ according to whether they are specialised or non-specialised and ritualised or extempore? What are the bases of these differences? How are the differences realised linguistically?
- How have modes of contact changed with changing media technology? How has this impacted on the system of language?

- Under what condition does acknowledged co-presence produce the possibility of dialogue?
- On what basis can dialogue be classified? How do dialogues differ according to activity and/or interactant relation?
- Is there systematic variation in modes of managing the activity across distinct subsections of the society? If yes, what are the details of this variation so far as language is concerned? How does it relate to the enactment of interactant relation?

3.5 The concerns of an integrated sociolinguistics

The issues presented above by reference to relevant elements of the social context – field, mode and tenor – read cursorily, might appear at once too many and too few. They may seem too many because they cover a vast area, and too few because they miss out some important ones. It certainly is true that they cover a vast area. Thus consider under mode the questions concerning dialogue: these questions potentially cover a huge span, allowing the possibility of studying today's chat room dialogues, video link discussions, the as-if dialogues in literary fiction, dialogues with an addressee in absentia through writing and those most primitive of all conversations, namely, mother-infant dialogues (e.g., Halliday 1975b; Trevarthen 1974). Instead of restricting the concerns of sociolinguistics, this mode of identifying the issues actually points to further scholarly fields of enquiry, for example, in what respect are these 'dialogues' alike and how do they differ? If the current theories about the making of human minds are correct, what does variation in the active experience of dialogue mean for variation in forms of human consciousness? Or how might we characterise the segments of a society according to their access to any/all of these modes of contact? Each such issue can be studied in greater or lesser detail, depending on the local aim of that study, but one thing this way of introducing the topics in sociolinguistics ensures is the inclusion of all within the same banner on the basis of a principle that points explicitly to their relationship. I do not see the opening up of such a wide range of enquiries as an undesirable proliferation that obfuscates the scholarly analysis of the relationship of language and society; or turns the enterprise of sociolinguistics into an 'obsolete folk category', which is 'no more appropriate as a field of enquiry'. Instead, it seems to me that the issues indicated above and others implied by them would safeguard against the arbitrary limitation of the object of enquiry in a sociolinguistics that aims to be integrated. The integration of the field is based on the interdependence of two very complex systems – the social and the semiotic; the field is thus

inherently complex and the issues mentioned above will form part of a comprehensive investigation of this inherently complex field. The issues, whether stated explicitly or simply implied, may be many, but this is not necessarily a handicap. Given the firm basis of their mutual relationship, their large number and wide scope are actually an asset, pointing to the vastness of the field and the complex relationships within it. It would indeed be quite amazing if an integrated sociolinguistics turned out to be the study of a narrow set of areas.

Do the issues mentioned by reference to the vectors of context exhaustively describe the concerns of integrated sociolinguistics? What is presented here does not necessarily observe the 'fashions of speaking' current in the dominant field; so it fails to mention terms in favour in today's sociolinguistics. For example, the above account has not foregrounded terms such as style, ideology, accommodation, politeness, face, speech variety, social class, SES, and a host of others. But reflection on the issues that have been mentioned will show that each of these concepts will in some way come in for investigation. I have presented the possible concerns of the field as a series of questions; my expectation is that the search for their answers will bring the investigator face to face with the areas referred to by these favoured term. This was partly demonstrated by reference to 'dialogue' in the last paragraph. Or we may take the concept 'style', much discussed in current sociolinguistics, but scarcely mentioned directly in the above questions. The point to be noted is that a careful examination of a questions about variation in 'the recognition of context' or in the 'ideas about social practice' in context would definitely make connection with the concept of style. Take, for example, a context of seeking and giving information (realised semantically as questioning and answering). If across a number of speakers, all else is held equal in the context of discourse except the tenor relation between the interactants, and if in this situation we find that the ways of questioning and answering vary across the speakers such that one group of speakers prefers to question in the negative (*didn't you ask dad?*) while the other questions positively (*did you ask dad?*), and that there exists evidence of robust variation which regularly correlates with the groups' social positioning, we might come to the finding that variation is not only a matter of expression but can extend to content and that (contra Schilling-Estes 2002a) 'group style' is a notion worthy of further examination. Certainly the results discussed in the many following chapters of this volume do fit this description. In short, the limit on the number of questions we can raise with regard to any element of an issue mentioned here is set by how that element actually works in language and/or society. In fact finding variation in ways of speaking simply opens up many questions: Why is style variation important in the life of the individual or in the life of the language under study? What aspect of language-society relationship does style primarily pertain to and what is its

scope? The advantage of approaching popular terms e.g. 'stylistic variation' in this manner is that the theoretical place of the term and its realisational nature – how it is manifested in the actual data – are likely to be made far more explicit than they are today. One might venture to add that even the concerns of today's sociolinguistics with synchronic variation might become subsumed within an integrated sociolinguistics; and by being integrated, synchronic variation might find its true location *vis-à-vis* the other relevant areas of enquiry into the working of language and society. This is exactly what an integrated sociolinguistics had set out to achieve.

I am not claiming that every single relevant problem of integrated sociolinguistics has been either explicitly or implicitly presented here. The only general claim I am making is that it might prove a better strategy to treat integrated sociolinguistics as problem centred, with the problems themselves identified by how they relate to the living of life in community – to the logical form of its social practices. What makes a problem specifically sociolinguistic is its significance to some aspect of the semiotic interactions between the members of the community and to their life in society.

4 Concluding remarks: optimal theories for integrated sociolinguistics

This chapter began with an acknowledgment of the need for an integrated sociolinguistics. This led to a close examination of the relationship of language and society. The results of that investigation led to the conclusion that language does not just *happen* to be useful for communication – certainly the usefulness of language is a fact, but if this fairly obvious fact is probed, it turns out that this is not due to chance. The relationship between language and society is in fact inherent so that neither can be ignored without detriment in the study of the other: the social and the semiotic systems are cogenetic in nature. Language is as it is because of the functions it serves when used for the living of life in society, and human societies are as they are because in their creation and maintenance language plays a crucial part. The dialectic between the two furnishes an objective basis for recognising a field of language study which might be reasonably expected to possess the potential of becoming 'an integrated sociolinguistics'. The scope of this kind of sociolinguistics has been discussed in some detail in the sections 3–3.5.

At this point there arises a question whether as a field of study, integrated sociolinguistics must possess an over-arching methodology in the way that Labovian sociolinguistics presents 'variation theory' as a standard for deciding what can be considered as true sociolinguistic data: according to this principle,

whatever cannot be analysed under the rubric of 'variation theory' is to be treated as sitting at the periphery of 'sociolinguistics proper'. However, it is important to note that the so-called 'variation theory' is in fact better described as a METHODOLOGY for analysis rather than as a THEORY of sociolinguistics on the basis of which the analyses in the field are carried out. The fact is that theoretical clarity is not an attribute which can be readily ascribed to today's sociolinguistics (for some discussion of this point, see my comments on 'variation', 'variant', 'variable' etc. in the following chapters). In any research, it is the theory that models the object of enquiry; this produces a viable hypothesis about the nature and scope of the data; and it is the nature of the data and the aim of analysis that determine the desirable methodology for analysis. In light of these observations, trying to work out an over-arching methodology for integrated sociolinguistics would appear to be something like putting the cart before the horse. In contrast to Labovian sociolinguistics, the scholarly field of INTEGRATED sociolinguistics as outlined here has not been arbitrarily limited, nor has its scope been defined by the methodology currently available to or preferred by some scholar. Its central object of enquiry has been announced on explicit grounds, a range of problems has been identified as the concern of the field, and the vast scope of these has been predicated upon the kind of relationship between society and language. It is certain that in the probing of these problems actual analysis of linguistic data – and most probably some of the social phenomena – will be called for. We now need to ask where will the methodology for such analysis come from? A good answer to this question can be provided only if that relationship of reciprocity between society and language is taken into account which has resulted in indicating the kind of problems such sociolinguistics will be concerned with. If, as suggested here, we think of this relationship as dialogical whereby the two are implicated in cogenetic evolution, this will carry strong implications for some optimal theory, which can be used as the resource for the exploration of problems of the kind raised above. With reference to this, I would first like to make a general observation, following which I will proceed to a more detailed discussion of the kind of linguistic theory that in my view would be optimal for an integrated sociolinguistics.

One general principle to be observed in probing the specific problems in an integrated sociolinguistics of the kind suggested in this chapter is that both the social and the semiotic must be simultaneously present to the mind of the researcher. And there exist many theories of each of these fields, especially if for 'the semiotic' we read 'the linguistic'. These fields are relevant to an integrated sociolinguistics for it is here that the researcher might find methodologies of description that have either already proved successful or that suggest further possibilities of developing a suitable framework of analysis. However, amongst

these theories, there will be some in both domains that either ignore the other domain or by the logic of the syntax of their theory prohibit the acceptance of what has been presented here as the central object of study for integrated sociolinguistics. For example, the sociologist Giddens, almost completely ignores the role of language in the formation or maintenance of society, whereas Bourdieu actively suggests that everything significant in human life is social, and that language brings nothing to the social (Hasan 1998 for critique). This limits their usefulness to doing a viable sociolinguistics. Similarly, the use of those linguistic theories which treat language either as autonomous or as a purely biological phenomenon like the working of the digestive system would be clearly in contradiction to the characterisation of the relationship between language and society on which integrated sociolinguistics rests: to such theories, the shaping of the system, i.e., langue through speech, i.e., parole would most probably be unacceptable. This leads us to anther reason why integrated sociolinguistics must pay attention to those theories of the social and the linguistic which acknowledge mutual relevance: the issues that have been flagged in section 3 will call for the description of aspects of language as well as those of society. Ready made methodologies useful for conducting such analysis can be provided from within sociology and linguistics, as relevant. Clearly, theories acknowledging mutual relevance would be in tune with the central aim of integrated sociolinguistics. One such candidate theory of the social would be the Bernsteinian one. This is not to maintain that Bernstein's theory is either complete or perfect but that it can form a starting point that will be profitable, since Bernstein has a view of society in which social practice, including that of talk, is constitutive of the nature of society. At the same time, integrated sociolinguistics needs in its foundation a theory of the semiotic, especially that of language, which foregrounds the importance of the social in the life of a language. One such theory would be SFL. Again this is not to say that SFL currently addresses all issues such as outlined above. In fact for a theory that introduces itself as a social semiotic one, it is woefully neglectful of specifically sociolinguistic issues; its only substantial contribution is in the field of discourse analysis where it offers a framework for the analysis of social context as well as for that of discourse. However, in both cases, the emphasis is classificatory and concerned with the description of linguistic phenomena rather than sociolinguistic ones; the social enters only somewhat superficially, especially in the description of the vectors of context, making no reference to any sociological framework, and often confusing the description of a phenomenon with its production. But with all their shortcomings such theories will have an advantage over those failing to acknowledge mutual relevance: they will not be in contradiction to the aims of the theory of integrated sociolinguistics,

and will often provide suggestions regarding the methodologies suited to the study of problems in the field.

It is clear from the above that the acceptance of a cogenetic relation between language and society has implications for the kind of linguistic theory that is optimally suited for use in integrated sociolinguistics. Such theories will be exotropic (Hasan 2005): they will locate language in the social environment which is the only site for actually witnessing acts of language, where its use makes a difference, and where as a system it is able to evolve. An exotropic theory of language, such as SFL will possess certain features which will facilitate the pursuit of sociolinguistic studies. Tracing the development of the debate in this chapter about the relationship of the social and the linguistic, we note the usefulness of the following concepts:

- Parole as the instantiation of langue;
- Parole as an integral part of the linguistic theory;
- The dynamic nature of the linguistic system; its continued change and renewal by the working of parole in social context;
- The instantiation of society as context of situation;
- The realisational relation of language and society, and of text and context;
- The inherent relationship of language and society;
- Explicit theorisation of strata in language and in linguistics;
- The theoretical concepts of realisation and instantiation;
- The metafunctional nature of language; metafunctional resonance across context, meaning and lexicogrammar;
- The paradigmatic organisation of language with syntagmatic structure as its actualisation;
- The concept of delicacy of description;
- Framework for the analysis of context;
- Framework for the analysis of texture and structure in discourse.

The usefulness of these features in modelling the relationship between language and society and in imposing order on the concerns of this vast and complex field has already been demonstrated in this chapter. The various chapters of this book indicate how these and other design features of a functional model such as SFL prove useful in describing certain novel sociolinguistic patterns. There

is no doubt that the nature of the sociolinguistic data will lead to the invention of methodologies which will be specific only to this field, but the adoption of a linguistics that in its design does not militate against the aims of an integrated sociolinguistics will make the task easier, and free of contradictions.

Notes

1 This chapter is based on one section of a course on sociolinguistics that I taught at a Summer Institute at Odense University (Denmark) in June 1999. The content of that course fragment has been further elaborated, specifically with this volume in mind. References will be made to some of the other chapters, where I first began to raise related issues.

2 The publications Hill (1985) reviewed in the article are Chambers and Trudgill (1980); Goffman (1983); Gumperz (1982a, 1982b); Labov (1980); Romaine (1982); Turner (1982); and Swann (1983). See bibliography for details.

3 It is important to use the modifier 'today's' because today's sociolinguistics has adopted a path which is significantly different from that heralded by its leaders in the early days of sociolinguistics e.g., Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968), or Labov of the early 1960s. Had Weinreich et al.'s programme of action been followed, today's sociolinguistics would have been a different discipline – it is even possible that it might have been 'holistic' in its approach.

4 Witness the fact that even the most mental linguistics of a few decades back did not begin with an investigation of the structure of human brain, though arguably this might have been one reasonable route to take since language was seen as a 'mental organ'; nor does any functional model of linguistics prioritise the description of social structure over that of language, though all relate the functions of language to speaking in social life, and arguably speaking in social life is closely intertwined with social structure.

5 Though, of course, the chain of arguments that would establish accent as an important element in the perception of the speaking subjects' identity remained un-elaborated.

6 In raising these objections, I have given no specific references to the literature but those familiar with the dominant model's history would definitely have no difficulty in recalling instances of each case. Other chapters in this volume offer these same points of criticism with specific bibliographic references, though one should add that more recently social class has been discussed e.g. Guy (1988) and Ash (2002), but in these writings it is as if no one else has ever thought about the relevance of social class to sociolinguistics, or if they did it is not worthy of mention.

7 I am thinking here of great names such as Boas, Sapir, Whorf, Firth, Pike, all of whom in their different ways tried to show the deeper and more intimate relations between language and society. I believe this literature is suspect, since accepting those views would bring into question the autonomy of language – a principle cherished by the linguistic model adopted by today's sociolinguistics.

8 I am aware that there are models whose conceptualisation of language as a 'mental organ' would suggest that communication is itself an accidental function of language. Whatever the case, the fact of language active in communication is massively present to human experience.

9 The term socio-historical stage is not an equivalent of Saussure's *état de langue*, though the latter is subsumed in the former: the specific focus is on 'the register repertoire' and the 'register-specific ways of using language'.

10 The adaptation is at two points: the first category on the horizontal axis is called 'culture' in Halliday. I have used 'society' instead as the more inclusive and higher order abstraction than culture. Most human societies are poly-systemic, which is manifested in their multi-culturality. Further instead of the last category on the lower horizontal axis which is called 'text' in Halliday, I have chosen to use the complex expression *parole-as-text*, which is really like saying language-in-use. Language in use in a social context typically counts as text (or text-fragment), as defined in Halliday and Hasan (1976); Hasan (1985a, b, c). All parole in this view is incipient text; it may or may not reach that stage in a manner that produces easy recognition of it as text, but given the conditions for continued discourse, text-hood is what communication strives for.

11 By saying that society is realised as language and context of situation as text I do not mean that language is the only semiotic modality that realises society. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that in the realisation of society as in that of a specific context of situation, many different semiotic modalities co-operate; thus rituals, music, and mime realise aspects of society and texts may be multimodal. However, here our attention is focussed on language, and it is also true that language is a far more pervasive modality in the realisation of both society and text.

12 For further discussion, Halliday (1992a); Hasan (1995a, 1996); Butt (2008a); Matthiessen (2007).

13 Lemke's concept of 'meta-redundancy' (1984) is important but will take us far afield. For discussion see Lemke (1984); Halliday (1992a); Hasan (1995a).

14 In making statements of this kind there is a danger that one might immediately move – as is often the case with linguists – from the assertion of this relation to lexical items and individual structures, vociferously pointing out that 'lexicon' and 'syntax' do not support the claim. But no such claim has ever been made by any serious scholar interested in the relationship of language and society.

15 From time to time, there are of course ambiguities, confusions and misunderstandings, but the relation is robust enough in general.

16 There is a great deal of literature on the notion of context and on the realisational relation between text and context, as any published bibliography of SFL will reveal.

17 Thus the various distinctive features of social context to which Hymes has drawn attention from time to time (e.g., Hymes 1962, 1968 etc.) can be shown to be more specific elements of these three general vectors.

18 For a discussion of the concept of realisation see chapter 2–6 of this volume; for its centrality to the definition of variant/variable in variation theory see chapter 2 especially.

19 See Hasan (2003) for a linguistically oriented account; John McMurty (1999) for a multidisciplinary orientation, and Naomi Klein (2007) for a journalistic approach.

20 Whorf (1956) expressed the same point of view many decades earlier, only the term he used was 'culture' rather than society (cf. 1956: 156 'Which was first: the language patterns or the cultural norms? *In main they have grown up together, constantly influencing each other*'. Emphasis added, RH).

21 In fact Saussure emphatically maintained that *langue* is entirely 'social', that it is the property of the community, as opposed to *parole* which according to him is individual and therefore psychological, i.e., part of the mental behaviour of individual speaker. From this point of view, Saussure's conception of the *langue parole* relation is the opposite of Chomsky's competence performance relation; for Chomsky competence is species-defining, an element of the make up of the human mental system, so not specific to a particular community, while performance is affected solely by speaker's environment, so likely to be local, i.e., social, and specific to some particular community.

22 This is particularly true for scholars who equated 'linguistics' with 'Chomskyan linguistics'. However, neither Prague School linguistics nor Firthian linguistics became dissociated from social concerns of language.

23 The extent to which the material aspect is indicative of the details of the social practice depends on the degree to which the practice is institutionalised (Hasan 1980; Cloran 1999a).

2 On semantic variation

> To come to grips with *language*, we must look as closely and directly at the data of everyday speech as possible, and characterise its relationship to our grammatical theories as accurately as we can, amending and adjusting the theory so that it fits the object in view. (Labov 1972a: 201)

1 Introduction

The central theme of this chapter is taken from a talk I presented at a conference[1] in 1998, where I attempted to place the idea of semantic variation in relation to sociolinguistics. That was nearly a decade ago but although recent sociolinguistic publications (e.g. Chambers, Trudgill and Schilling-Estes 2002) do display an engagement with some of the theoretical problems which were first raised in the late 1980s in several chapters of this volume[2], it appears that so far as the concept of semantic variation is concerned, nothing much has changed over this period. So before turning to the main issue, it is still appropriate today to say a few introductory words on the term *semantic variation,* which still remains a complete non-entity in sociolinguistic literature. First a word here on the origin of the term itself: to the best of my knowledge I am the first person to have undertaken an empirical and systematic investigation into *semantic variation* as a sociolinguistic phenomenon[3]. And yet, it is not I who coined that term: this honour, as much else in sociolinguistics today, rightly belongs to Labov; but, ironically, he introduced the term only to deny it the possibility of any status in sociolinguistics[4]. By contrast, throughout the chapters of this volume I have presented what seem to be compelling grounds for recognising semantic variation as a fact of language use in social contexts of human life. Our findings suggest that the patterns of variation we have investigated at the semantic level are orderly and represent paradigm cases of 'structured heterogeneity' (Weinreich, Labov and Herzog 1968). However, dominant sociolinguistics not just ignores, but expressly rejects semantic variation as a *socio*linguistic concept (Weiner and Labov 1983). Behind this partial narrative is a puzzle: given that in all important respects semantic variation presents a parallel to phonological variation, why is it unacceptable as a sociolinguistic phenomenon? In what way is it not an important aspect of the *study of language in its social context*?

In this chapter, I propose to revisit the concept of semantic variation with two main questions in mind: (i) does the structure of language permit