**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research  University of Djilali Bounaama Department of Foreign Languages Third Year Students of English**

**What is Sociolinguistics?**

Sociolinguistics is a developing branch of linguistics and sociology which examines the individual and social variation of language (Spolsky, 2010). Just as regional variation of language can give a lot of information about the place the speaker is from, social variation tells about the roles performed by a given speaker within one community. Sociolinguistics is also considered as a branch of sociology in that it shows the relationship between language use and the social basis for such use (Hudson, 1996). It differs from sociology of language in that the focus of sociolinguistics is the effect of the society on the language, whereas the latter’s interest is on the language’s effect on the society (Bell, 1976). Sociolinguistics is a practical, scientific discipline which researches into the language that is actually used in order to formulate theories about language change.

There are numerous definitions of sociolinguistics. However, each of these definitions does not fail to acknowledge that sociolinguistics has to do with language use and a society’s response to it. Let us examine some of them:

1. The study of the link between language and society, of language variation, and of attitudes about language (Spolsky, 2010).

2. A branch of anthropological linguistics that examines how language and culture are related, and how language is used in different social contexts (Bell, 1976).

3. A study of the relationship between language and social factors such as class, age, gender and ethnicity (Hudson, 1996).

4. The study of stylistic and social variation of language (Wardhaugh, 2010).

5. The study of language in relation to its socio-cultural context (Van Dijk, 2009).

 6. Sociolinguistics is the study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context on the way language is used (Trudgill, 2000).

 In all these definitions, it is clear that sociolinguistics is a discipline that makes a link between sociology and linguistics. It is a branch of sociology and as a concept it is concerned with how language use is a determinant of a given society’s linguistic requirements. Every society has its linguistic codes that are acceptable for interaction (Meyerhoff, 2006). Sociolinguistics shows how groups in a given society are separated by certain social variables like ethnicity, religion, status, gender, age and level of education and how adherence to these variables is used to categorize individuals in social classes (Hudson, 1996). The social study of language is a modern linguistic paradigm because it was the modern linguist who first acknowledged and accepted that language by its nature is totally a social phenomenon (Bell, 1976). All the above-mentioned definitions demonstrate that sociolinguistics is related to language use and a society’s response to it.

 (Extracted from **Basic Concepts in Sociolinguistics, 2012)**