
Postgraduate Certificate in Linguistic Anthropology

Language Variation and Change

Language Variation and Change is a fascinating field within Linguistic Anthropology that explores the diversity of language use and how languages evolve over time. This course delves into the intricate mechanisms behind linguistic variations and the forces that drive language change. To fully grasp the concepts in this course, it is essential to understand the key terms and vocabulary associated with Language Variation and Change.

1. **Language Variation**:

Language variation refers to the phenomenon where different forms of a language exist and are used by speakers based on various factors such as region, social class, ethnicity, age, or gender. This variation can manifest in phonological, lexical, syntactic, and morphological aspects of language.

2. **Dialect**:

A dialect is a specific form of a language spoken in a particular geographical area or by a specific group of people. Dialects can vary in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar from the standard form of the language.

3. **Sociolect**:

Sociolects are varieties of language that are associated with particular social groups or classes. Sociolects can reflect aspects of identity, such as socio-economic status, education level, or ethnic background.

4. **Idiolect**:

An idiolect is the unique linguistic system of an individual speaker. It encompasses the distinct language habits, vocabulary, and pronunciation patterns that characterize a person's speech.

5. **Code-switching**:

Code-switching is the practice of alternating between two or more languages or dialects within a single conversation or discourse. Speakers may switch languages for various reasons, including to express identity, solidarity, or to convey specific meanings.

6. **Style-shifting**:

Style-shifting refers to the ability of speakers to adjust their language use according to the social context or audience. Speakers may switch between formal and informal registers, depending on the situation.

7. **Language Contact**:

Language contact occurs when speakers of different languages come into prolonged contact with each other, leading to the exchange of linguistic features between the languages. This contact can result in language borrowing, code-mixing, or language convergence.

8. **Language Change**:

Language change refers to the evolution of language over time. Languages are constantly in a state of flux,

with new words, grammar structures, and pronunciation patterns emerging while others fall out of use.

9. **Historical Linguistics**:

Historical linguistics is the study of how languages change over time and how they are related to one another. By examining historical texts and linguistic reconstructions, historical linguists can trace the development of languages and identify patterns of change.

10. **Language Shift**:

Language shift occurs when a community or group of speakers gradually abandon their native language in favor of another language. This phenomenon often occurs due to social, economic, or political factors.

11. **Language Maintenance**:

Language maintenance refers to efforts to preserve a language in the face of language shift or language endangerment. Language maintenance strategies may include language revitalization programs, education initiatives, or community language advocacy.

12. **Language Endangerment**:

Language endangerment occurs when a language is at risk of becoming extinct, typically due to declining numbers of speakers or lack of intergenerational transmission. The loss of a language represents a loss of cultural heritage and diversity.

13. **Language Revitalization**:

Language revitalization involves efforts to reclaim, preserve, and promote endangered languages. This may involve language documentation, language teaching programs, and community-based language revitalization projects.

14. **Linguistic Relativity**:

Linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, posits that the structure of a language influences the way its speakers perceive and think about the world. Different languages may shape cognition and cultural concepts in unique ways.

15. **Language Standardization**:

Language standardization involves the establishment of a standardized form of a language for use in education, government, and media. Standardization can help facilitate communication and ensure linguistic consistency across different contexts.

16. **Prescriptive vs. Descriptive Linguistics**:

Prescriptive linguistics involves prescribing rules for "correct" language use, often based on traditional norms or style guides. In contrast, descriptive linguistics aims to objectively describe how language is actually used by speakers, without passing judgment on correctness.

17. **Language Policy**:

Language policy refers to government regulations, educational practices, and social norms that govern language use within a society. Language policies can influence language maintenance, language rights, and language planning initiatives.

18. **Language Planning**:

Language planning involves deliberate efforts to regulate and manage language use within a community or society. Language planners may implement policies to promote language diversity, support minority languages, or standardize language usage.

19. **Linguistic Anthropology**:

Linguistic anthropology is a subfield of anthropology that focuses on the study of language in its cultural context. Linguistic anthropologists investigate how language shapes social interactions, identities, power dynamics, and cultural practices.

20. **Language Ideologies**:

Language ideologies are beliefs, attitudes, and values that shape how people perceive and evaluate different languages or language varieties. Language ideologies can influence language policies, language attitudes, and social hierarchies.

21. **Language Attitudes**:

Language attitudes refer to individuals' feelings and beliefs about specific languages or language varieties. Positive language attitudes can contribute to language maintenance and vitality, while negative attitudes may lead to language shift or discrimination.

22. **Language Revival**:

Language revival involves efforts to revive or resurrect a dormant or extinct language. Reviving a language may involve creating new speakers, developing language resources, and fostering language use in various domains.

23. **Prestige Variety**:

A prestige variety is a language variety that is considered prestigious or high-status within a society. Speakers may use the prestige variety in formal contexts or to signal social status or education level.

24. **Linguistic Accommodation**:

Linguistic accommodation refers to the process of adjusting one's language use to align with that of their interlocutors. Speakers may accommodate by converging (matching their interlocutor's speech) or diverging (emphasizing differences in speech).

25. **Linguistic Repertoire**:

A linguistic repertoire refers to the range of languages and language varieties that an individual or community is capable of using. A diverse linguistic repertoire can enhance communicative flexibility and cultural competence.

26. **Linguistic Landscape**:

The linguistic landscape refers to the visible display of languages in public spaces, such as signs, advertisements, and street names. Analyzing the linguistic landscape can provide insights into language use, language policy, and sociolinguistic dynamics.

27. **Language Death**:

Language death occurs when a language ceases to have any speakers or is no longer used for communication. The extinction of a language represents a loss of linguistic diversity and cultural knowledge.

28. **Language Ecology**:

Language ecology examines the relationships between languages, speakers, and the environment in which they exist. Language ecologists study how languages interact, compete, and adapt within their linguistic ecosystems.

29. **Linguistic Anthropologist**:

A linguistic anthropologist is a scholar who specializes in the study of language within its cultural context. Linguistic anthropologists conduct research on language variation, language change, language ideologies, and the social dynamics of language use.

30. **Language Evolution**:

Language evolution refers to the long-term changes and developments in language over millennia. Studying language evolution involves examining the origins of language, language diversification, and the factors that drive language change.

In conclusion, Language Variation and Change is a dynamic field that sheds light on the complex nature of language diversity, evolution, and adaptation. By mastering the key terms and concepts in this course, students can gain a deeper understanding of how languages vary, evolve, and shape social interactions and identities. By exploring the intricacies of language variation and change, linguistic anthropologists can contribute valuable insights to the fields of anthropology, linguistics, and sociology.