

## THE CURRENT POSITION OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS WITHIN THE LINGUISTICS

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**Abstract:** *Our purpose is to observe how researchers from various scientific backgrounds position themselves in relation to this issue. It is not a question of arguing in favor of a vision of sociolinguistics but of seeing how the authors thematize this question in their disciplinary field(s). In the lines that follow, we will focus on the main themes that run through all the contributions, namely the definitions of sociolinguistics proposed by the authors, the reflections on the debate between internal and external linguistics, the advantages and the limits methods of interdisciplinarity and, finally, the possible "zones of silence" appearing in the interdisciplinary network within which sociolinguistics fits.*

**Keywords:** *sociolinguistics, interdisciplinary, positioning, multidisciplinary*

Developed gradually in French from the mid-1970s, sociolinguistics reached a kind of maturity in the early 1990s and assertive recognition in the 2000s. Sociolinguistics is first presented in French as a social linguistics therefore as a variant of this discipline then called linguistics, which will later become sciences of language in France, with a significant plural. It is, moreover, as a complement to generative linguistics that Labov initially proposes it, before drawing the conclusion that it constitutes an alternative and no longer a complement to it. This journey with Labov poses one of the three main terms of the global debate as to the positioning of sociolinguistics:

- it is a linguistics / a science of language,
- it is a sociology / ethnology of language,
- it is an interdiscipline based on the crossing of previous fields and others.

Sociolinguistics was thus the subject until the 1990s of ostensible debates as to its position among the scientific "disciplines" (which are also and above all institutional divisions, see below).

One of the recurring debates consisted in wondering about the classification of sociolinguistics on the side of sociology rather than on the side of linguistics, as clearly invited by its prefixed name, the similarity of major theoretical and methodological orientations, and in particular the "first sociolinguistics", known as variationist or Labovian, which clearly uses the approaches of a quantitative macro-sociology.

At the same time, and especially in the 1990s, sociolinguistics was widely presented as an interdiscipline, partly to answer the question of the complex relationships with the dominant structural-linguistics where, for the most part, sociolinguistics is stigmatized and explicitly rejected outside the linguistic. We have a good example of this positioning with Boyer who situates this "vast territory" (I quote) between five polarities "social communities/groups/networks, subjects/actors/language partners, languages/dialects, speeches/texts, communication practices", and which defines sociolinguistics as a crossroads between social psychology, philosophy, ethnology, sociology, history, psychoanalysis and anthropology. At Baylon this crossroads is designated as a "junction of disciplines" distributed between the fields "language and society (sociolinguistics, sociology of language, ethnolinguistics), language and space (linguistic geography, dialectology), language, space and society (geolinguistics)". The difference is that, for Baylon, this interdisciplinary constitution is a phase of emergence which leads to the "constitution of a new theoretical object, linguistic anthropology", which refers to the alternative classification of sociolinguistics on the side of sociology / anthropology.

Because sociolinguistics has an open conception of the phenomena it studies, it has all the more need to have recourse to interdisciplinarity, on the condition of course of doing so with epistemological coherence. The withdrawal of (structuro)linguistics onto a closed and artificial object studied in a hyper-specialized way and

outside the world, with an opaque jargon, for which it has been strongly criticized<sup>4</sup> (putting into question, as a result, its social function, in any case in public service research and higher education), is precisely a serious shortcoming against which sociolinguistics is inscribed.

It therefore seems to us that the disciplinary positioning of sociolinguistics should, for the moment, be affirmed as a science of language (or linguistics, depending on usage) while being affirmed as a socio-anthropological science (of language), that is that is, not as an interdiscipline and/or a marginal complement (even as a soul supplement) to structural-linguistics, but as a solid, contradictory and alternative scientific project.

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