**University of Batna 2 Department of English**

**Master 1 (LLA) Promotion: 2022- 2023 Semester: 1**

**Module: Ethnography of Communication**

**Teacher: Dr. MOUAS Handout N°2**

**Basic Terms, Concepts, and Issues**

**Speech Community**

**Defining Speech Community (Review of Related Literature)**

**1-** “ group of people who use the same system of speech-signals is a speech community. Obviously the value of language depend upon people’s using it in the same way…. A speech community is a group of people who interact by means of speech” **(Bloomfield, 1933: 29-42).**

**2-** “ a community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety **( Hymes, 1972: 54).**  
**3-** "All people who use a given language or dialect” **Lyons (1970)**

**4-** “ …..if speech communities are defined solely by their linguistic characteristics, we must acknowledge the inherent circularity of any such definition in that language itself is a communal possession. We must also acknowledge that using linguistic characteristics alone to determine what is or is not a speech community has proved so far to be quite impossible because people do not necessarily feel any such direct relationship between linguistic characteristics A, B, C, and so on, and speech community X. What we can be sure of is that speakers do use linguistic characteristics to achieve group identity with, and group differentiation from, other speakers, but they use other characteristics as well: social, cultural, political and ethnic, to name a few” **(Wardhaugh, 2006: 120).**

**5-**"Participation in a set of shared norms; these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behavior, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage“. **Labov (1972)**

**6-** “a social group which may be either monolingual or multilingual, held together by frequency of social interaction patterns and set off from the surrounding areas by weaknesses in the lines of communication. Linguistic communities may consist of small groups bound together by face-to-face contact or may cover large regions, depending on the level of abstraction we wish to achieve” **(Gumperz, 1968: 381)**

Since the focus of the ethnography of communication is typically on the speech community, and on the way communication is patterned and organized within that unit, clearly its definition is of central importance. Many definitions have been proposed (e.g. Hudson 1980: 25–30), including such criteria as shared language use (Lyons 1970), shared rules of speaking and interpretation of speech performance (Hymes 1972c), shared attitudes and values regarding language forms and use (Labov 1972), and shared sociocultural understandings and presuppositions with regard to speech (Sherzer 1975).

Linguists are generally in agreement that a speech community cannot be exactly equated with a group of people who speak the same language, for Spanish speakers in Texas and Argentina are members of different speech communities although they share a language code, and husbands and wives within some speech communities in the South Pacific use quite distinct languages in speaking to one another. Speakers of mutually unintelligible dialects of Chinese identify themselves as members of the same larger speech community (they do indeed share a written code, as well as many rules for appropriate use), while speakers of Spanish, Italian and Portuguese are not members of the same speech community although their languages are to some degree mutually intelligible. Questions arise in deciding if speakers of English from England and the United States (or Canada and Australia, or India and Nigeria) are members of the same speech community. How different must rules of speaking be to be significantly different? Are deaf signers and hearing interpreters members of the same speech community? Answers to such questions are based on history, politics, and group identification, rather than on purely linguistic factors. It is thus useful to distinguish between participating in a speech community and being a member of it; speaking the same language is sufficient (yet not necessary) for some degree of participation, but membership cannot be based on knowledge and skills alone.

All definitions of *community* used in the social sciences include the dimension of shared knowledge, possessions, or behaviors, derived from Latin *communitae* ‘held in common,’ just as the sociolinguistic criteria for speech community enumerated above all include the word ‘shared.’ A key question is whether our focus in initially defining communities for study should be on features of shared language form and use, shared geographical and political boundaries, shared contexts of interaction, shared attitudes and values regarding language forms, shared sociocultural understandings and presuppositions, or even shared physical characteristics (e.g., a particular skin color may be considered a requirement for membership in some communities, a hearing impairment for others). The essential criterion for “community” is that some significant dimension of experience be shared, and for “speech community” that the shared dimension be related to ways in which members of the group use, value, or interpret language.

While sociolinguistic research has often focused on the patterning of language practice within a single school, a neighborhood, a factory, or other limited segment of a population, an integrated ethnographic approach would require relating such subgroups to the social and cultural whole. There is no necessary expectation that a speech community will be linguistically homogeneous, nor that it will be a static entity which necessarily encompasses the same membership over time or situations – although degree of fluidity will depend on the nature of bounding features and attitudes concerning their permeability.

At any level of speech community selected for study, the societal functions of language will include the functions served by such bounding features, of *separating*, *unifying*, and *stratifying*. The interactional functions which are present will be dependent on the level of community studied, with a full complement of language functions and domains present only at the level defined as including a range of role opportunities. At this more inclusive level, a speech community need not share a single language, and indeed it will not where roles are differentially assigned to monolingual speakers of different languages in a single

multilingual society (e.g. speakers of Spanish and Guaranي in Paraguay, discussed in chapter 3).

An informal typology of speech communities as “soft-shelled” versus “hard-shelled” may be distinguished on the basis of the strength of the boundary that is maintained by language: the “hard-shelled” community has of course the stronger boundary, allowing minimal interaction between members and those outside, and providing maximum maintenance of language and culture.

Speech communities which primarily use one of the world languages are more likely to be “soft-shelled,” because it will be known as a second language by many others, and interaction across the boundary will be relatively easy in both directions. A speech community speaking a language with more limited distribution would more likely be “hard-shelled,” because relatively few outside the community learn to use it. Educated speakers learn a world language for interaction across the boundary, but this is unidirectional,

with outsiders still very restricted in their internal linguistic participation. The most extreme form of a “hard-shelled” community would be one like Mongolia, where members speak a language outsiders do not know,

yet few learn a world language for wider communication; another would be the Tewa-speaking San Juan pueblo in New Mexico, where outsiders are forbidden even to hear the language, and only a few insiders traditionally learn either English or Spanish.

Language often serves to maintain the separate identity of speech communities within larger communities, of which their speakers may also be members. Within the United States, for instance, Armenian continues to function in some areas as the language of home, religion, and social interaction among members of the group. Because the Armenians are bilingual and also speak English, they participate fully in the larger speech community, but because outsiders seldom learn Armenian, the language is a barrier which keeps others from participating in their internal social and religious events. A similar situation exists in Syria, where Armenians bilingual in their native language and Arabic participate in two speech communities; these remain separate entities because of the one-way boundary function the Armenian

language serves. In cases where individuals and groups belong to more than one speech community, it is useful to distinguish between primary and secondary membership.

On the other hand, there is no necessary reason for a speech community to be geographically contiguous. Armenians in California and Syria may be considered members of the same speech community even if they have little interaction with one another, and (especially with widespread access to telephones and e-mail) individuals and groups who are dispersed may maintain intensive networks of interaction. Largely because of the internet, “virtual” communities of interest have been established world-wide. Even with no face-to-face contact, patterned rules for communication have emerged and become codified.

Individuals, particularly in complex societies, may thus participate in a number of discrete or overlapping speech communities, just as they participate in a variety of social settings. Which one or ones a person orients himself or herself to at any moment – which set of rules he or she uses – is part of the strategy of communication. To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to recognize that each member of a community has a repertoire of social identities, and each identity in a given context is associated with a number of appropriate verbal and nonverbal forms of expression. It is therefore essential to identify the social categories recognized in a community in order to determine how these are reflected linguistically, and how they define and constrain interpersonal interaction in communicative situations.

The use of the speech community as a basic social unit for study has been criticized by some because of its implicit acceptance of existing social/political boundaries and categories as legitimate entities. One alternative is a more complex model of “nested” speech communities reflecting expanding fields of individuals’ interactions and networks (Kerswill 1994; Santa Ana and Parodi 1998). Another is the *discourse community*, which is a flexible grouping of individuals who share rules for “discursive practice.” This construct (based on notions from Foucault, e.g. 1972)

creates a group of compelling unspoken historic rules, which in turn determine in a certain social, economic, geographic or linguistic area what can be said, how it can be expressed, who may speak, where, and under which dominant predictions. A discursive practice oversees the distribution of knowledge and arranges certain ways of speaking into a hierarchy. ( Lehtonen 2000: 41–2)

Yet another alternative is the *community of practice*, defined as “a group whose joint engagement in some activity or enterprise is sufficiently intensive to give rise over time to a repertoire of shared practices” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1999: 185; see also Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999). This latter construct seems especially appropriate for the study of processes in the development of norms of interaction within dynamic groups, involving either enculturation or acculturation and sometimes lengthy periods of apprenticeship.

Of particular interest in relation to all of these constructs is how membership involves learning how to use language – the acquisition and extension of communicative competence.

**Reference:** Saville-Troike , M. (2003). *The Ethnography of Communication. An Introduction*

(Third Edition). Oxford : Blackwell .