

Here are some of the differences in approach we might mention b/w formal linguistics & socio-linguistics.

Formal Linguistics

1. Focuses on biological capacity for language, the property separating humans from animals; concentrates on language universals all humans share; asks, "What is Universal Grammar (UG)?"
2. Investigates genetically-programmed ability to learn language structures
3. Takes any normal person as a source of linguistic data on "their" language, through introspection and intuitions
4. Principally concerned with informational/communication function of language
5. Evidence from "marginal" data: child speech, mistakes, 'Genie', deaf/signers; interested in how they shed light on nature of UG

GOAL: *seeks to understand & explain language structure through genetically-shared language universals*

Sociolinguistics

1. Adopts model of social sciences: studies behavior, uses both quantitative and qualitative methods (incl. statistics); ethnographic & sociological research paradigms;
2. Focuses on diversity-- variation-- of language use in different social groups (cultures, ethnicities, societies, nations, genders, ages, occupations, cities, and so forth); asks, "How does social context determine language use?", and "What are the social functions of linguistic diversity?"
3. Investigates socially-constituted and -learned patterns of language use and their interface w/language structure
4. since every speaker has complex social identity, it must take account of social context & history
5. Concerned with both informational and expressive functions of language
6. Evidence from communities and coherent social settings; also interested in "margins" (e.g. deaf signers, minorities); takes their social/historical context and needs into account

GOAL: *seeks to understand & explain language variation through (linguistic & social) context*

TEN (SOCIO-) LINGUISTIC AXIOMS

Peter L Patrick, University of Essex

1. Language is speech, or sign; writing is a secondary technology.
2. Children are biologically designed to become multilingual...
3. ...But acquiring literacy is best done in one's mother tongue.

4. All natural languages are equivalent in their potential value – moral, aesthetic & social – and in their expressive capacity.
5. Language is a primary means for engaging the world, developing & expressing (both individual and group) identity.
7. Standard languages and writing-based norms historically have privileged elite minorities, and continue to do so, necessarily.
8. Bias towards/against a language or dialect stands in for bias towards/against its speakers.
9. Ethnicity and language have complex and dynamic relations.