

Toward Literary Sociolinguistics Approaches and Horizons

نحو لسانيات اجتماعية أدبية: مقاربات وآفاق

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Received: 14/01/2026 Accepted: 31/03/2026

Published:01/01/2026

Abstract:

This article explores the potential of applying a sociolinguistic approach to analyzing literary works. We try to follow the connection between the literature and sociolinguistics among modern linguists. Ultimately, this article seeks to explore how the sociolinguistic approach is applied in analyzing literary works and the tools it provides for critics.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, literature, criticism, language, Society.

ملخص:

يبحث هذا المقال في إمكانية استثمار مقاربة اللسانيات الاجتماعية في تحليل الأعمال الأدبية، حيث يحاول تتبع العلاقة بين الأدب واللسانيات الاجتماعية لدى اللغويين المعاصرين. وأخيرًا، يهدف هذه المقال إلى فهم كيفية تطبيق منهج اللسانيات الاجتماعية في تحليل الأعمال الأدبية، والأدوات التي يمكن أن توفرها للنقاد.

كلمات مفتاحية: اللسانيات الاجتماعية، الأدب، النقد، اللغة، المجتمع.

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1. Introduction

Humans express themselves through language, a tool that reflects the nature of their thinking, their way of life, their coexistence within their society, and the characteristics of their culture. All of this is fused into language, which is the subject of a science called linguistics. With the development of linguistics, various branches and fields have emerged, including sociolinguistics. The latter studies language and its social interactions.

When discussing this topic, it is essential to focus on several key aspects.

Especially since this topic is multidisciplinary, it is between:

A-Linguistics.

B-Sociology.

C-Literary studies.

When studying language in text or speech, it is closely connected to society, especially since humans are a product of their environment.

So will also focus on three terms:

A-Language.

B-Society.

C-Literature.

Since language and society influence each other, the term Literary Sociolinguistics was created.

We will address these questions in this article:

-What are the benefits of using sociolinguistics perspectives in analyzing literary works?

-What tools can the sociolinguist provide to read literary texts?

This answer is at this point:

A-Definition of sociolinguistics.

B-Studies on sociolinguistics.

C-Connection between language, society, and culture.

D-Historical approach to utilizing literature in sociolinguistic studies:

E-Literary Sociolinguistics.

2. Definition of sociolinguistics:

When we discuss this term and aim to provide a clear definition, we encounter many different definitions because of:

a-A-The importance of the term.

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b-The study of language starts with communication.

c-The term is multidisciplinary.

Whatever the case, we will provide several definitions that can describe it:

1-First, sociolinguistics is a branch of the field of linguistics, alongside psycholinguistics and cognitive linguistics...

2-It's a study of language, in fact, as used by society.

3-Sociolinguistics is the study of our daily lives, how language functions in our informal conversations, and the media to which we are exposed. (Wardhaugh, 2015, p. 1)

4. It is the study of language in relation to society.

5-It is the study of the social uses of language in real-world settings. (Emike, 2021, p. 36)

6-Sociolinguistics is the study of language in its social contexts and the study of social life through linguistics.

7-It is a field of study that relates social problems to linguistic/language problems (Emike, 2021, p. 37)

8-Sociolinguistics is the study of the social aspects of language. (Macmillan., 1973, p. 22)

9-Sociolinguistics is an orientation to the study of language that stresses the interrelationship between language and social life, highlighting the communicative competence of the speaker. (Macmillan., 1973, p. 24)

10-Sociolinguists also study how social, geographic, cultural, and personal factors influence how people worldwide use language, both individually and collectively. Studying language variation and change, from the past to the present, offers insight into how people communicate, interact with one another within their communities and societies, and interpret the world around them.

After defining sociolinguistics, we conclude with a set of points:

1-It is a linguistic study.

2-It is an important branch

3-It focuses on language in the context of use.

4-The proper role of language is communication.

5-It explores the relationship between language and society

6-It draws on the cultural aspects of communication.

7-A language is not only a system, but also an interaction.

8-The function of language is communication.

9-This function makes a special relation between human and the cultural context

To conclude, the term of sociolinguistics is defended by a set of terms, which are in the following table:

Table 1.The function of language in light of Sociolinguistics

Study	social
Language	Contexts
Communication	Culture
Branch or field	social contexts
Competence of the speaker	Linguistic diversity
Men/ women	Function of language

3. Studies on sociolinguistics:

Sociolinguistics is not just a study or branch within linguistics research, but rather a broad field that encompasses many topics and areas of specialization. We summarize them in the following points or, alternatively, as "subfields."

A-A part of pragmatics.

B-Language and Gender Studies.

C-Pidgin and creole studies.

D-Language planning.

E-Language and policy studies.

F-Education of linguistics minority studies. (Bratt, 1988, p. 1)

G-social dialectology.

H- Social semantics.

I-Socio-historical linguistics.

J-Sociology of Language. (Swann, Deumert, Lillas, & Mesthrie, 2004, p. 283)

K-Language and Society.

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Language and culture.

M- The role of speakers in the conversation.

N-Sociolinguistic competence.

O-Language of men in society.

P-Multilingualism.

Q-Bilingualism.

4.The Connection between language, society, and culture:

The connection or relationship between the three, and even others, is an inseparable syndrome because "the words people utter refer to common experience. They express facts, ideas, or events that are communicable because they refer to a stock of knowledge about the world that other people share." (M, 1998, p. 3)

Because, from a sociolinguistic perspective, language, culture, and society influence each other in ways that are inseparable and manifold. Therefore, sociolinguists examine how people use language in its various forms, with different styles and patterns, both consciously and unconsciously, across social contexts and in multiple domains.

As an explanation for this, "words also reflect their author's attitudes and beliefs, their point of view...in both cases, language expresses cultural reality." (M, 1998, p. 4)

This is because the speech that a person produces is only influenced by the culture in which he coexists, and based on the society in which he lives; thus, we find "Sociolinguistics has its root in branches of linguistics as well as in anthropology and sociology" (Stone, 2000, p. 6)

In conclusion, the three points are interconnected because this relationship is reflected in both written and spoken communication.

5. Literary Sociolinguistics:

This term, when we discuss it, really refers to the reality of speech and its true composition in literature. This is because the literary text reveals the truth about human beings, their thinking, their history, their culture, and how society influences them. The text can only be the product of the speaker's environment.

This term can only be defined by examining how the text interacts with the cultural and social context in which it was written, or, in other words, how language interacts with society within the literary text.

This term refers to the study of social interactions and their evolution within literary texts.

So, we will provide points that define the term:

- 1-It is a new field and one of the latest studies.
- 2-It is a study of the relationship between sociolinguistics and literary language.
- 3-Really connect language, literature, and society in the text or speech.
- 4-New area of study in sociology.
- 5-It is, literally, the environment. (Stone, 2000, p. 7)
- 6-The literary text reflects human culture, thoughts, and knowledge.
- 7- Literature is always influenced by society.
- 8-This study focuses on literary language and its interaction.
- 9-9- Reveals the connection between literature and society.
- 10-The goal of this study is to uncover the truth about man through his literary works.

As literature uses language, it seems crucial to explore different perspectives of sociolinguistics

The language in literary works extends beyond being a mere means of communication to become a medium for individual and cultural identity, social values, beliefs, and political circumstances.

Sociolinguistics examines how language interacts with society in various literary works.

This study can focus on dialects and their role in literary texts, rather than just poems or novels. The sociolinguistic analysis of literary works can reveal various phenomena, including polyglossia, diglossia, code-switching, bilingualism, and others.

Then, any sociological approach to literary work can be helpful in understanding the connection between literature and cultural identity, which is expressed through language.

Mostly, the literary text incorporates diverse linguistic features, such as bilingualism and diglossia; therefore, it is interesting to analyze the role of these phenomena throughout the entire literary work and to explore the aesthetic dimension of their use, as seen in multilingualism (Muwashshah), which reflects the diversity of Andalusian society.

In another direction, sociolinguistics can also draw on examples from literature, such as an Algerian novel serving as a witness to the development of Algerian dialects, showing how they differ from the seventies to the nineties, and illustrating how Algerian authors used bilingualism to reflect the everyday life of Algerian citizens through their writing.

Therefore, literary expression is no longer limited to classical Arabic as the universal vessel for culture. Instead, a conscious wave of experimentation has emerged, aiming to evoke local dialects as expressive mediums that mirror reality in all its fragments. This trend not

only demonstrates artistic openness but also highlights a new awareness of language as a carrier of identity and a tool for revealing social classes and cultural differences within a society. As a result, dialect is no longer merely a marginal linguistic element but has transformed into a key narrative component that conveys characters' brokenness, nostalgia for places, and the authentic rhythms of daily life.

In symbolic usage, dialect becomes more than just a means of communication; it represents a symbol of identity, resistance, or even alienation, depending on the story context. Here, dialect is seen not only as a language but also as an ideological, class, or cultural statement, adding further interpretive layers to the text.

It becomes clear that the presence of local dialects in Algerian narratives does not aim to weaken the status of classical Arabic or confuse the reader, but rather to reshape the text's relationship with its reality and audience. Novelistic experiments have demonstrated that dialects can serve as a vital bridge between characters and readers, provided they are used with aesthetic awareness and significance.

With the growth of cultural and linguistic diversity in Arab societies, it has become essential to see dialect as a valid artistic element, one that carries the collective memory and endows texts with a profound human dimension. Despite the challenges of reception and the richness of expression, using dialects remains a test of the writer's skill in managing the narrative rhythm without losing the spirit of the language. The novel remains a free art form, its language broad enough to encompass everything that touches on reality and creates meaning.

6. Historical approach to using literature in sociolinguistic studies:

The literature has long been present in linguistic studies. This is because linguists recognize the importance of literary texts in linguistics; this awareness is reflected in the earliest works of philology. For example, François Raynouard Manuel, a French Romance philologist and playwright, and Milà i Fontanals, a philologist and expert in Spanish poetry, are notable. However, there were philologists and grammarians who separated linguistics and literature directly and focused their attention on human language, like August Schleicher and Franz Bopp. (Marcos, 2020, p. 62)

It is well known that De Saussure's courses brought about a radical transformation in modern linguistics. How this influenced the relationship between linguistics and literature is explained by the Spanish scholar Francisco García Marcos in the following paragraph.

“Academic linguistics, therefore, remained within the Saussurian canon, with the relevant literature separated. It is true, and some of this has been pointed out above, that this canon was more radical in its following than in its design. As had already happened with external linguistics, the subsequent configuration of the proposal founded in De Saussure did not exactly correspond to the literalness of the Cours. In fact, there he had raised the convenience of projecting linguistic studies within a broader framework, of a general theory

on signs. Of course, it is impossible to venture the extent of that projection or the implications it would have had.

De Saussure limited himself to raising this possibility, without further ado. In any case, the study of signs over time also included literature, with one of its most vigorous branches during the 20th century, literary semiotics.” (Marcos, 2020, p. 63)

Linguistic studies after de Saussure (like Bloomfield) continue to break away from literature and focus more on language as a system and structure.

Until the emergence of Russian formalism, which bridged the gap between linguistics and literature, this openness allowed literary criticism to apply linguistic analysis to approach narration like the model of Propp. (Pavel., 2001, p. 65)

This relationship between literature and sociolinguistics has clearly been revitalized with Michael Halliday, who defined the seven functions of language (Interpersonal, Ideational, Textual, Instrumental, Regulatory, Interactional, Personal). (Macmillan., 1973, p. 9)

and he concluded the literature as a component of these functions, even though he recognized that it is the most elaborate use of language, in other words:

Halliday's literary proposal was part of one of the fundamental models of contemporary linguistics. However, it had no impact among linguists either. Even the author himself did not implement it. It is true that the literary question does not form part of the core of his model of human language either. (Marcos, 2020, p. 65)

Returning to sociolinguistics, which is the main focus of this article, we can say that in its early days, sociolinguistics didn't pay much attention to literature. Instead, it was more focused on the relationship between language and society. Even literary critics were more interested in sociolinguistics and its perspective for analyzing texts, as seen with Mikhail Bakhtin, who, although not a linguist, was a literary critic primarily working on the philosophy of language and literary theory.

“Bakhtin develops a comprehensive research program.

This program begins with language and ends with culture and its products, including literature. Bakhtin reacts immediately to the Course—and he insists on the ideological character of the linguistic sign. Languages, in his opinion, are primarily phenomena of communication. Therefore, the main objective of his study must be focused on speech, in stark contrast to the preeminence of the system on which structuralism will rely. As we engage in speech, the first thing that becomes clear is the connection between language and ideology. This is what preserves languages, while simultaneously sustaining and reproducing ideology. Consequently, analyzing language necessarily involves analyzing the ideological mechanisms within societies.

First, he determined the conditions of social ideology. Then he proceeded to examine them.

From that moment, Bakhtin began to introduce concepts—such as ethical acts and aesthetic acts—that would eventually shape a comprehensive literary theory. (Marcos, 2020, p. 66)

7. Application of Literary Sociolinguistics:

The application of Literary Sociolinguistics involves using various sociolinguistic perspectives and tools to analyse literary works. For example, the article by B. Fennell and J. Bennett titled "Sociolinguistic Concepts and Literary Analysis" discusses their choice of analysing "A Confederacy of Dunces," published in 1988 and written by John Kennedy Toole. This choice is highly relevant from a sociolinguistic perspective because it focuses on how Ignatius, the central character of the novel, attempts to linguistically distinguish himself from his social peers, rebelling against the dominant linguistic variants within his speech community.

The authors of the article provide numerous examples of the use of different dialects in the novel, accompanied by sociolinguistic analyses. They focused more on Ignatius's dialogue, illustrating how it has evolved since the novel's beginning.

“These observations suggest that, as an author, Toole was able to exploit his conscious knowledge of the restrictions that membership in a particular speech community places on linguistic behavior in order to characterize his chief protagonist as an outsider. That Ignatius is in a community of one is already suggested by the title of the novel, of course. His qualitative difference from the other characters is based on professed superior knowledge, morals, and education. What the linguistic analysis enables us to do is give credence to the mechanism by which the author is able to convey and maintain this difference, that is, by the manipulation of basic sociolinguistic factors in speech“ (Benne, 1991, p. 377)

This analysis demonstrates how the author's tools in the novel "A Confederacy of Dunces" are aware of the importance of the dialects used by different characters, as they reveal the complexity of identity within society through speech.

This article concludes with the possibility of applying sociolinguistics to the analysis of literary works, which is highly beneficial for reading literary works from a different perspective.

Another recent study titled "Exploring Sociolinguistic Dimensions: Analysing Sociolinguistic Elements in The Selected Literary Texts" presents different analyses of various novels, highlighting sociolinguistic phenomena such as code-switching, language ideology, and multilingualism within the narrative. The authors examine examples from multiple novels to demonstrate the multicultural and multilingual characteristics of contemporary society. The common feature among these analyses is that they are brief and to the point, citing examples, but they are useful because they show one aspect of the application of Literary Sociolinguistics to narrative works. (Mittal S. Vashist, 2004, p. 2640)

The first example from this study is *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a novel by American

writer Zora Neale Hurston, which is an excellent text to illustrate Harlem society and its conflicts and challenges. It follows Janie Crawford, a marginalized teenage girl who becomes a strong woman. The scholars in the article above analyse the presence of dialects in this novel, which is notably clear, as mentioned in the following paragraph.

“The characters in this novel use dialects or speech patterns that reminisce about their cultural contexts and social backgrounds. The protagonist, Janie, is often seen operating in distinct linguistic styles tailored to the social setting... The novel apprehends the affluence of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The work reveals diverse dialects within the African-American community. The novel investigates the diversity of language within a precinct and its linkage to identity. This symbolizes sociolinguistics by demonstrating how language variations, such as speech patterns and dialects, are concatenated with social factors like class, race, and community.” (S Mittal, 2024, p. 2642)

Thus, the authors establish a connection between the choice of different dialects and race, gender, and intellectual level; this connection is at the core of Literary Sociolinguistics, referring directly to the relationship between language and society.

Another intriguing example mentioned in this article is “The Cairo Trilogy” by Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz in 1988. The scholar highlights diglossia, the coexistence of two varieties of the same language, throughout the three novels (Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, and Sugar Street), which describe the evolution of Egyptian society and family at the beginning of the 20th century. This is what the scholars comment on from a sociolinguistic perspective.

“The Cairo Trilogy offers insights into sociolinguistic investigation, contributing discernment into the intricacies of language use and societal standards within the context of diglossia in Egypt during that span. The novels portray the cultural dynamics and linguistic discourses in the setting of Cairo, accentuating the coexistence of two linguistic miscellanies. The community uses Classical Arabic, or Fusha, as the formal language and Colloquial Arabic, or Amiyya, as the informal language. This duality in language recollects the diglossia disposition of Egyptian Arabic. Analysing the roles and languages of multiple characters in the novel sheds light on linguistic diglossia, where different types of Arabic are employed depending on the context. Naguib Mahfouz excellently exemplifies classical Arabic in formal backdrops, such as literature, religious discourse, and education. It distinguishes itself from the everyday use of colloquial Arabic in domestic and informal interchanges.” (S Mittal, 2024, p. 2645)

8. Conclusion

This paper highlights the importance of sociolinguistics in understanding the diverse linguistic environments found in literary works and how the term “Literary Sociolinguistics” can be applied in literary analysis as a valuable perspective on various linguistic phenomena, such as diglossia

and bilingualism. However, it is acknowledged that this term remains understudied.

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