

Sociolinguistic Typology: Social Determinants of Linguistic Complexity (Oxford Linguistics)

Peter Trudgill



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Peter Trudgill looks at why human societies at different times and places produce different kinds of language. He considers how far social factors influence language structure and compares languages and dialects spoken across the globe, from Vietnam to Nigeria, Polynesia to Scandinavia, and from Canada to Amazonia. Modesty prevents Pennsylvanian Dutch Mennonites using the verb wotte ('want'); stratified society lies behind complicated Japanese honorifics; and a mountainous homeland suggests why speakers of Tibetan-Burmese Lahu have words for up there and down there. But culture and environment don't explain why Amazonian Jarawara needs three past tenses, nor why Nigerian Igbo can make do with eight adjectives, nor why most languages spoken in high altitudes do not exhibit an array of spatial demonstratives. Nor do they account for some languages changing faster than others or why some get more complex while others get simpler. The author looks at these and many other puzzles, exploring the social, linguistic, and other factors that might explain them and in the context of a huge range of languages and societies. Peter Trudgill writes readably, accessibly, and congenially. His book is jargon-free, informed by acute observation, and enlivened by argument: it will appeal to everyone with an interest in the interactions of language with culture, environment, and society.

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