What is sociolinguistics all about?

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From its term, sociolinguistics is derived from two different disciplines: sociology and linguistics.

A. Sociology à a study about social structure, social organizations, relationship between and within groups of people, and social behaviour. In a broader sense, it sociology studies about groups of people in society (family, clan, tribes, and nations), how they behave and affect each other.

Sociologists assume sociology as a single discipline which is not related at all with any other disciplines and consider that society could be constituted without language.

All scientists (sociologists, psychologists, physicists, biologists, linguists, economists, historians, literary scholars) are all interested in arrangements. Basically, all disciplines try to find patterns of arrangements.

Sociology focuses on three basic arrangements:
1. the arrangement of words and ideas (culture) that we use to make sense of one another and our surroundings,
2. the arrangement of social relationships (social structure) such as those that link authors and readers, parents and children, lovers and enemies, rich and poor, powerful and the weak, spectators and performers.
3. the arrangement of people in physical space (ecology): from how the placement of furniture can affect who emerges as a group’s leader to the differences between life in large, populous cities and life in small, rural villages.

Therefore, sociology is the study of the arrangements through which people know, share and affect one another’s lives.

B. LINGUISTICS (often called general linguistics, or structural linguistics) is a study about phones (phonology), words (morphology) and sentences (syntax). Only very recently, it studies discourses (texts).

Linguistics assumes: (1) language as a single entity, (2) language as a close system, (3) and language as a system of which components are homogenous.
Linguists treat language as an abstract object which can be accounted for without reference to social concerns of any kinds.

C. SOCIOLINGUISTICS (often called a functional linguistics, and a cross disciplinary study) of which terms was first coined in 1950’s to try to bring together the perspectives of linguists and sociologists to bear on issues concerning the place of language in society, and to address the social contexts of linguistic diversity.

Sociolinguistics is the field that studies the relationship between language and society, between the uses of language and the social structures in which the users of language live. It is the field of study that assumes that human society is made up of many related patterns and behaviours, some of which are linguistic (Spolsky, 1998: 3)

Sociolinguistics assumes (1) every language has its own variations (2) every dialect is also varied, (3) human speech is also varied depending on whom he speaks to. (4) language is closely related to social system and social structure, (5) language is a system which is not separated from the characteristics of its speakers, and the sociocultural values applied by its speakers