

LANGUAGE AND SITUATION

Language Varieties and their
Social Contexts

Michael Gregory
and Susanne Carroll

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MICHAEL GR
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General editor's preface

When the linguist has described the structure of a language and has codified its vocabulary, he has not touched the heart of the mystery. Of course, without grammatical and phonetic descriptions, we should understand nothing of languages. But these analyses in themselves do not reach the point where language, in serving the needs of human life, becomes part of the ceaseless flux of human existence. For we choose our utterances to fit situations, and the parts of a text are therefore inter-related parts of a whole. In communication cannot be comprehended without reference to its mutual dependence. The mystery of language lies in its endless ability to adapt both to the needs of the individual and to the needs of the community, without imprisoning either.

This is no new insight. Past scholars have recognized the close links with the study of social anthropology. Malinowski and J. R. Firth, have noted the intimate and necessary relation between the language and the life of the community. Further

—language and context—are each v
ways, and each requires delicate anal
inter-connections between them is a
sensitive 'way of looking', as well
structured taxonomy of linked categor
be found to the intricate relationship
and observable patterns of human b
action.

Michael Gregory, now Professor o
lege in Toronto's York University, b
to this problem fifteen years ago wh
of Leeds. Since that time, as his sub
cate, he has continued to explore t
connection between language varia
Initially, the mainspring of his wor
that derived particularly from Ma
which stressed the relevance for mea
plete understanding of language—o
In a sense he still remains in that
doubtedly refined and widened it, ma
and more catholic. Throughout his
relate his own investigations of lang
well as in Britain and West Africa, t
of other scholars from Europe, the U

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in a broad range of human disciplines
stimulating perspectives. It is the pu
brief, readable and scholarly introdu
and topics covered by current socio-

