

## Sociolinguistics exercise in *register*

This exercise was designed to show the students what they already knew; that the same people will use language differently depending on the social situation they are in. I began by writing on the board the neutral piece of information: *What you want me to do I may not be able to do. I wish you would not ask me about it.*

Then I again divided the students up into groups and gave each group a slip of paper with a 'situation' in which they were to imagine themselves trying to communicate that piece of information. The situations included the following:

*You are a politician being interviewed by the press.*

*You are a lawyer addressing another lawyer or a client.*

*You are reporting to your boss about a project you have been working on.*

*You are at a ballgame in a screaming crowd.*

*You are a tired waitress in a busy, noisy restaurant.*

The students had great fun with this, in the process of demonstrating to themselves how much they knew about social conventions of using language. The waitress group came up with two versions: one for a classy restaurant and one for a truck stop. The politician group came up with: *No comment.*

The basic observation that people use language differently in different situations seems rather obvious to state, but I think the exercise brought it home to the students in a way they had not previously realized.

And this exercise was great good fun.