

THE ROLE OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS IN LEARNING ENGLISH*Toshmatova Dildoraxon Axmadjon qizi*

Annotation: This article explores the role of sociolinguistics in learning English, highlighting students background knowledge, potential and express the effects of multilingualism and bilingualism. In addition, it covers how to teach students who comes from various regions and places and working out each of their skills.

Key words: communication, productive skills, language aspects, vocabulary, grammar

As for the teaching approach in the school, it is mainly based on the communicative language teaching as in the classes, the students are provided with more communicative opportunities to acquire the target language. For example, in the lessons, different techniques like role-plays and short discussions are applied to engage students to express their ideas in English. Moreover, TPR is one of the oft-applied methods in language classes since it gives more chances for the learners to learn through actions. According to Brown (2007), TPR is one of the most effective methods to teach a foreign language to the students of younger age since they love acting. Furthermore, most lessons are conducted in an inductive way to give some time for the learners to deduce the forms or notions on their own. Yet, in some occasions, especially, when explaining any challenging grammatical rule, the deductive instruction is applied. This can be justified by Chalipa (2013) who claimed that there is less misunderstanding in the deductive classes.

When it comes to the language skills and aspects, all the 4language skills are integrated in the classes. For instance, as for reading, the students read some short stories and summarize the main points by adding their own personal experiences. Or as for writing, they are engaged in making short narrative stories on the past experiences they have had. In this regard, other language aspects like vocabulary and grammar skills are also involved in language classes.

Regarding the motivation, all the students have extrinsic motivation to acquire the language since their parents and other relatives put an urge to learn the English language as fast as possible. The main reason has closely to do with the common trend occurring in the country as even most young learners at the age of 13-14 have already secured their C1 proficiency levels in several standardized exams like IELTS and CEFR.

With regards to their investment in the target language learning process, the learners have been investing most of their time in honing their skills. For instance, they read several adopted stories to improve their reading comprehension and vocabulary

knowledge whereas they listen to short podcasts which are suitable for their level. Besides that, every month the school organizes a book club meeting where the language learners share their ideas and insights taken from a certain book. However, despite so much effort, some students have challenges in productive skills as they feel anxious to express their ideas. Moreover, most students have issues in giving their ideas in a written format since they forget about supporting their opinions in some cases.

Sub-groups

It is important to analyze the social factors like age, social status, regions of origin, ethnicity, language background and others to find more relevant information about sociolinguistic profile of language learners (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014). Thus, I have analyzed my learners based on these features and tried to find out more distinguishing aspects. As for age and social status, the learners do not differ since the learners are at the similar age (11-12years old) and of the same class (middle-class). Even though all the learners are mono-ethnic or having the parents of the same ethnic background, their ethnicity differs as some learners are Uzbek while the others are Tadjik. Similarly, their language background is also different based on their native language even though all the learners are multilinguals knowing 3 different languages. Moreover, their regions of origin are different since the learners come from 2 different regions of Uzbekistan like Bukhara and Kashkadarya.

According to Mesthrie et al. (2009), social group is more essential to be focused than the individuals to find the reasons for language varieties that language learners have. Thus, I decided to divide my learners into 2 subgroups based on 2 social factors I have analyzed above.

As Fought (2011) highlighted some possible impacts of different ethnic background on language learning, it is also worth considering language learners' ethnic background. Based on their ethnicity, the group is divided into Tadjik learners (Shahzod, Sevara, Sarvar, Umidjon and Ruslanbek) and Uzbek learners (Umida, Dilshoda, Hamid, Nargiza and Sunnat).

Macro-level factors like cultural and local positions represented by social roles can influence on how a learner demonstrates his social or individual identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). As for my learners' positionality, the Tadjik learners tend to be more direct to express their ideas in language classes and they do not wait for their turn to speak. They are eager to dominate the class activities. For instance, Sarvar and Umidjon as the Tadjik learners tend to be first to finish all the assigned tasks even though they do not think of whether they have done correctly or not. Their first mission is to finish in advance to the others. However, the Tadjik learners in the class are not adaptable to changing their groups if there are more Uzbeks in their group. They mostly want to work with the ones of the same ethnic background and try to back up their ideas even though these opinions are not well-supported. On the other hand, the Uzbek

learners are quite shy to start conversation and wait for their turn to speak. For example, once Hamid stayed silent until I reached him to give the answer to a question even though he knows the correct answer. Similarly, other Uzbek learners in my class are more adapt at working with others since they are more friendly and ready to help those in need. These personality traits can affect how they behave in language classes. For instance, the Tajik learners have difficulties in working with others in small groups as they tend to dominate the class discussions. However, the Uzbek learners are good at scaffolding others, which are important in language acquisition.

Another important aspect has to do with how the ethnic background of learners can impact their choice of linguistic forms as Bucholtz and Hall (2005) noted that learners tend to change linguistic forms based on their social settings. As for the Tajik learners, they tend to use more Tajik phrases with their peers in and out the class. For instance, “xushro’y” is used mostly by the students to mean “beautiful” or “nag’z” is for “good”. In this regard, code-switching is more common among the Tajik learners. As Fought (2011) stated, code-switching can give clues for the others how a speaker is trying to follow his ethnic heritage in a bigger community. Moreover, they use both short and long vowels skillfully. In this sense, these indexical features can impact the learners’ language acquisition. For instance, the Tajik learners are more skillful in distinguishing short and long vowels than the Uzbek learners.

According to Methrie et al. (2009), the place of origin can affect how people behave or what language features they demonstrate. Thus, another social factor is the regions of origin that helped me to divide the learners into 2 subgroups. The first group of learners (Umida, Dilshoda, Hamid, Nargiza and Sunnat) are from Bukhara whereas the second group of learners (Shahzod, Sevara, Sarvar, Umidjon and Ruslanbek) come from Kashkadarya.

As Bucholtz and Hall (2005) claimed, the students’ regions of origin can impact on their social or individual positioning in the process of language learning. For instance, those from Bukhara tend to be more reserved to give their personal ideas while discussing a certain thing in class. Unlike the Bukharian students, those from Kashkadarya tend to be more sociable and they sometimes keep a simple and direct communication style to express themselves. Besides that, the Kashkadaryanian learners tend to show more resilience to accept one’s ideas whereas those from Bukhara are more agreeable compared to those from Kashkadarya. These personality traits can influence a lot in organizing class discussions and group works as there may be some misunderstandings among the learners.

Moreover, the linguistic forms speakers use can alter based on the regions of origin (Labov, 1963). For instance, those from Bukhara tend to use more short vowels and they have difficulties in pronouncing vowels like /o/. Unlike them, those from Kashkadarya can easily differentiate the long and short vowels but they have

challenges in pronouncing /e/ sound. As for the word choices, those from Bukhara and Kashkadarya tend to use different words to mean the same thing. For example, “broom” is often called as “jo’rob” by the Bukharian children while it is “supurgi” by the Kashkadaryanian children. In terms of their grammatical skills, both groups of learners tend to confuse sentence structure in the target language since it is not the same with the one they use in their language. These features pose several linguistic challenges for the learners.

Gender and sexuality

As gender is another major social factor affecting the positionality and indexicality of a learner, it needs to be addressed in this sociolinguistic profile. As Eckert (2003) identified that gender is more about social roles reinforcing social positions, two genders like female and male are classified even though Cameron (2005) claimed that these two can be regarded as cisgenders while there are more genders to consider. In my paper, only two cisgenders are addressed.

As Bucholtz and Hall (2005) stated that gender can also influence how learners behave, I analyzed the positionality of my learners. As for the male learners, they tend to be brave in all aspects since they do not feel any fear to express their opinions. They also have deeper voices which can easily be heard. Moreover, they tend to be more inclined to compete with others. The most common topics they like discussing are related to sport and cars. On the other hand, the female learners tend to be calmer and more sympathetic as they try to help the others in need. They have comparatively slower tone of voice. When it comes to the topics of their preference, they mostly like to talk about fashion, music and household issues. These positionality differences can impact the class learning since it is a bit challenging to hold both the male and female students’ attention at the same time.

Similarly, the female and male learners are also different in their choice of linguistic forms (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). For instance, the female learners tend to use more adjectives compared to the male ones who do not want to sound emotional. The male students use mostly more direct versions of words instead of using more polite ones. In contrast to the female learners who range their intonation according to the situation they are in, the male students in my class tend to sound more monotonous. Moreover, the male students tend to make more grammatical mistakes, which can influence their language performance.

Sexuality is another important social factor in this paper and it is pertinent to one’s sexual orientation. Despite Cameron’s (2005) classification that sexual orientation is not restricted to only being a man or woman, in our social setting with Islamic cultural beliefs, it is about being a man or woman. In this regard, the learners’ sexuality and its influence on the positionality and indexicality of the learners are the same with the ones of the gender factor.

Race and ethnicity

Race is a social element and it is usually identified with certain features like physical appearance and social behavior (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Thus, it is important to address this notion in sociolinguistic profiles to find the linkage between language and race (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014). In my paper, the learners are of the same race, Asian race, and their positional and indexical aspects will be discussed below.

As Thai et al. (2020) described, Asian people usually have a bit light complexion, dark hair and brown or dark eyes, which can be seen in my learners as they are all light-skinned, darkish-haired and brown-eyed. Moreover, a bigger nose can be easily noticed in all the learners. Their height is like other Asian children. As Asian children tend to be more studious, this can be observed in my learners since they want to learn the target language at a proficiency level despite their young ages. Besides that, all the students respect the elderly, which is a commonly expected personality trait in Asian countries.

The race can also impact the linguistic choices a learner is making (Rosa & Flores, 2017). For instance, as Asian children, my learners tend to use words and phrases to express a polite tone like “iltimos” (please) or “rahmat” (thank you). Moreover, they differentiate the degree of politeness based on “siz” or “sen”/ “tu” or “shumo” (you in English). This is a common feature for Asian people.

Similarly, ethnicity is one of the central social factors in identity construction (Fought, 2011). As for the ethnicity of my learners, they are either Uzbek or Tajik, and the influence of their ethnicity on their positionality, indexicality and language learning process has been discussed above (Refer to the first section of sub-groups).

Pedagogical implications

Having analyzed my learners from different social perspectives, I made some pedagogical choices to integrate in my language classes. As for the topics, it is important to include more cultural issues like equality and communication styles, and other pronunciation features like intonation in language classes of the students. The main reason has to do with that they have challenges in identifying what the formal and informal style are, or how a sentence is articulated in a connected speech manner.

As for teaching methods, the audiolingual method is much more suitable for teaching pronunciation as it incorporates instructional techniques like drills and phonetic games (Brown, 2007). Moreover, the learners can be engaged in meaningful tasks like role-plays based on the situations. According to Ellis (2003), task-based instruction is far more important in language classes since it stimulates learners' authentic language use even in sociolinguistic issues like traditions, speech styles and equality. Besides that, a number of communicative activities like short interviews and group discussions can be applied to give the young learners enough chances to share their ideas and improve their communicational abilities.

As for the other skills integration, all the language skills can be integrated in class tasks since the young learners are quite eager to develop their abilities. For instance, to hone their listening skills, the learners can be administered tasks which ask them to focus on certain articulation, voice features and tones (Brown, 2007). Moreover, their reading skills can be linked with their writing skills by giving them a cultural topic to explore and asking them to summarize the main details in a written format (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Regarding the technological tools to be integrated in the class, some applications like “ElsaSpeak” or “Speakit” can help students to practice their pronunciation and learn how phrases are pronounced connectedly in a speech. Moreover, certain podcasts available on YouTube can help the young learners to differentiate various English accents like British and American. Besides that, to assess their gained knowledge, various interacting testing platforms like Kahoot or Nearpod can be applied since they give joy and fun to the young learners (Khonke & Moorhouse, 2022).

Assessment

Assessments are essential to decide on whether a student is making progress or not. In this sense, language instructors apply two types of assessments like formative and summative. The former one is on-going and checks students’ language performance during the classes to give constructive feedback for improvement whereas the latter one is conducted at the end of a unit or term to evaluate their overall performance (Hughes, 2002). As Brown and Abeywickrama (2004) highlighted several assessment methods, using a self-checklist or peer-checklist can be more advantageous in teaching intonation to the learners as they realize their own mistakes and correct them once they are provided with correct articulation forms. Similarly, using a quiz or a short oral presentation as a summative assessment can provide more detailed evaluation of the young learners and can be helpful to find out how well they have acquired a certain cultural notion (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2004).

As Hughes (2002) highlighted the importance of rubrics in assessing students’ language learning process, it is also essential to address this aspect of language assessment in my work. According to brown (2004), there are two types of rubrics like holistic and analytic. The former one is to assess overall language performance while the latter is to evaluate them in terms of several linguistic and non-linguistic components by providing specific and detailed feedback. In this sense, both rubrics are used in the class of the target students. For instance, as O’Sullivan (2012) mentioned, in speaking activities like short presentations, it is more rational to use analytic rubrics to give more constructive feedback on the learners. In the case of quizzes, a holistic rubric is much more suitable (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2004).

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