

Relevance of Sociolinguistics in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

Sociolinguistics is an interdisciplinary science and field of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and society. It also studies the social factors that affect the language learning and language teaching process. The present paper is depicting the significance and relevance of Sociolinguistics in English language teaching. It also investigates the relationship between sociolinguistic and ELT. Social factors like Ethnicity, Gender, Education, social status influence language teaching. It outlines the benefits of amalgamation of language with culture and tradition. The paper gives an account of how these factors affect the language of a learner. It also draws the importance of ELT in the modern era. It also looks into the variation of language that occurred due to social variation.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Language Teaching, Language Variation, and Social Factors.

Introduction

Language is an agency for thought, ideas, feelings, experience, and emotions. Language is the primary medium for conveying ideas and social interaction. The circumference of language includes all the body posture, gesture, written and printed symbols, verbal and non-verbal instructions. Language is a means of mutual social communication. Language is a central social interaction to any and every society. Language and social interaction establish reciprocal relationships. Language contours social communication and social communication helps in the formation of language. According to A.S. Diamond, the anthropologist Malinowski thinks that 'language is an indispensable instrument for unified social action' (12). Thus language can be called an ultimate gift of God and the core of human social relationships.

A language is an efficacious tool that made human civilization and culture. Many decades back, the language was primarily in spoken form. After the printing system developed, its writing medium too helped people in understanding minds. Man is a rational animal. It is the language that sets him apart from animals. Men have language by which they can speak and understand and animals do not have such quality. Language is necessary in order to become rational animal language is a social activity that grows and develops with the development of society.

Society is a group of people living together. Society includes people, places, social structures, and social systems. Maciver and Page called it "Web of social relationships" (5). Language is social in nature and it develops in society. The existence of language depends on the existence of society, and the growth of society is depended on language. The relationship between language and society is a wide topic for discussion. A lot has been said and discussed this inseparable connection. The speaking structure and the language of an individual can reveal the information about the social structure he/she belongs to.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the paper is to find out if Sociolinguistic is useful in ELT in India.

The Relation between Language and Society

Language and society serves an inseparable and deep relationship. Language is a linguistic behavior as well as social activity. Both depend on each other for their existence. There is no language without society. Both have an "intertwined connection" (Chaika 2). 'The relationship between man and society is too profound that it is very difficult to isolate him from the social environment in which he born, nurtured and grown to be a man' (McIver 45). Trudgill thinks that 'language can reveal



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the information about the speakers'. Language can give a 'clue' for understanding the social factor of the speaker (14).

Hudson expressed that this relationship between language and society is very deep. According to him, 'speaking is a social behavior and language cannot be studied without the reference of society' (5). Ronald Wardhaugh also outlined this relationship between language and society. For this relationship, he gave four possibilities. 'The first possibility is that social structure may either influence linguistic structure. Second is that the linguistic structure may either influence social structure. The third is that both influence each other and the fourth is that there is no relationship between both' (Wardhaugh 10). The relationship can be better understood by the following ray diagram-

1. Social Structure \longrightarrow Linguistic Structure
2. Linguistic Structure \longleftarrow Social Structure
3. Social Structure \longleftrightarrow Linguistic Structure
4. Social Structure \longleftrightarrow Linguistic Structure

The interest of linguists gradually increased in studying more about the relationship between language and society. This study leads to the birth of the principle called 'Sociolinguistics'. Sociolinguistics is the field of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and society. It examines how the social factors (such as age, gender, social status) and the geographical factors affect and determine the language. It also studies how language variation exists due to social variation.

The separate field of study for sociolinguistics was developed in the last quarter of the 20th century. The word 'Sociolinguistics' was apparently coined already in 1939 in the title of an article by Thomas C. Hodson, 'Sociolinguistics in India' in *Man in India* (1939). It was first used in linguistics by Eugene Nida in the second edition of his *Morphology* (1949), but one often sees the term attributed to Haver Currie, who himself claimed to have invented it. Earlier it was not a topic of interest, but later on some sociolinguists made it worth reading. In the western countries, around the 1960's, it is pioneered by linguists such as Basil Bernstein in the U.K. and William Labov in the U. S. Basil Bernstein makes a significant contribution to the study of Communication with his sociolinguistic theory of the language codes. Within the broader category of language codes are elaborated and restricted codes. He described that the relationships established within the social group affect the way that group uses language, and the type of speech that is used. This theory examined the relationships between social class, family and the reproduction of meaning systems.

In the words of Homes, 'sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society' (1). Spolsky on the other hand believes that 'sociolinguistics not only studies the relationship between language and society but it also studies the social structure of language' (1). This definition is supported by Hudson who believes that sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society and social factors such

as class, gender, age and ethnicity. Yasemin in a paper expressed that it is a science that investigates the aims and functions of language and society (70). Peter Trudgill thinks that 'sociolinguistics studies any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations and context, on the way language is used' (32).

With the aforementioned definitions, it is clear that sociolinguistics is a link between language and society. It studies how social variables such as ethnicity, religion, age, gender, education creates different social groups. The primary task of sociolinguistics is to find out how people use variations of language in different social environments.

English Language Teaching (ELT)

In the present era, ELT has become a significant phenomenon. Students learn English for their personal and professional use as well as for foreign education, communication and travel. ELT is very important in India not only because it is a global language, but also because of domestic and international communication. Teaching English is a symbol of a better life in India. English teaching needs knowledge of sociolinguistics concepts such as language varieties, context, registers, and all. English language teaching in a wider sense needs successful and appropriate communication skills.

Sociolinguistics studies the cultural and social related language. The social factors (age, gender, class, ethnicity, education) that affect the language are deeply investigated. It is the field that helps the English teachers to teach beyond the set of words and grammar. They can understand the context and convey the exact meaning to the students of the text. It leads them towards the path of effective communication. With the help of the incorporation of local culture and local language, ELT can become more effective. Knowledge of sociolinguistics can make the ELT classrooms more effective.

Language teaching is affected by some social factors. A language teacher should consider these individual factors for effective teaching-learning process such as age, social and educational context. The knowledge and ability of attainment of the second language is highly dependent on age factor. It is believed that learning a second language is easier before puberty. Some adults would fail the fluency over language where children can learn easily and can speak it as their native language. Environment also plays an important role in language teaching. The encouraging and supporting language environment can make it easy for the students. Krashen believes for language teaching that "older is faster but younger is better" (63-74). Young learners can probably acquire the language efficiently whereas elders can find it difficult. Thus it is clear that age does have an influence on language learning.

Learning a language is also affected by social context. The first school for a child is home and family. Social settings such as neighborhood and classroom help the learner in the second language acquiring. Social setting shapes the chances for learners and the use of speakers for the use of the

second language. This can maximize their learning skills. The speech community related to a target language is also very important in language learning.

The Relevance of Sociolinguistics in English Language Teaching (ELT)

English language teaching in a country like India, where it is not the first language, is not an easy task. The first language or the mother tongue in India is Hindi. The teachers of ELT not only have to be proficient in teaching methods or pedagogy but they must also have knowledge of sociolinguistics. The students of India have already the set of values and culture of their mother tongue. Thus for teachers, it is very hard to break this mindset and motivate them to learn new language. They have learned, used, and understand the first language throughout their life before the acquaintance of a second language. The English teacher here must have cognizance of Indian culture and societal norms for making the communicative competence better.

Sociolinguistics studies the relationship between language and society. It also deals with the situation that plosive the process of language learning. It studies how a language adopted and how it grows. It also studies the different social factors that force an individual to change the language according to the situation. The knowledge of conventional value can only be gained by sociolinguistic study. Thus sociolinguistics is a constitutional component in a language learning process. The feature of the first language influences the acquisition of a second language. The teacher must have to maintain a fine balance between the need and the purpose of teaching English.

English language teaching is not just a set of rules and vocabulary, it is more above this. The learner of this language must have an understanding of its communication compatibility. They must know how and where they can use it. Thus they must be aware of appropriateness and cultural relevance of the language. A language can be used in many contexts, with different kinds of people and for distinguishing reasons. So a learner must know all these communicative factors for getting it utmost. The teachers as well as the language learners must have consciousness of sociolinguistics.

Sociolinguistics is an integral part of teaching English as a second language. The use of sociolinguistic devices in teaching English can make the teaching learning process effective and interesting. A teacher can use the mother tongue, regional words, local culture related description for describing a particular situation. This will not only enhance their understanding but also boost them for learning more. They should know the connection between language and society because the activity of using a language is social.

A teacher, with the knowledge of sociolinguistics, can teach the students about the social factors present in society. The teacher can also make them aware of the social cultural background of the characters in their textbooks. The students will find themselves associated with the text and thus they can correlate with the given language.

This process will increase their interest in language learning and they can motivate themselves for exploring more.

With the incorporation of societal factors in language teaching, students can learn and understand about the social discrimination present in the society. They can understand the hierarchy of society where the language of poor and rich, educated and uneducated, male and female is different from one and other. A language teacher can teach the students about cooperative and politeness strategies of speech used by the speaker while interacting with superior or younger.

An English teacher can use sociolinguistic devices during classroom interaction for teaching the language. The use of devices like code-mixing, code-switching, hybridization of words, transliteration, and use of Hindi words will improve the interest of the learner in learning a language. These kinds of language deviations are highly used by the students in their day to day life situations. They use mixing and switching of codes while using social networking sites or during conversations with friends. Thus the sociolinguistics seems to be a very helpful device in the field of English language teaching.

An ELT textbook is also get influenced by sociolinguistics. The authors of a language textbook make abundant use of sociolinguistic deviation. They use it because they want to connect the learner with the society in which he lives. They represent the culture and society through the language of textbooks so that the students can associate with it. Students can make a view about the good and the bad factors present in society they can give judgment about this. This will help them in developing a perspective on society. These kinds of perspectives are very much helpful in their future development.

In ELT, there are other sociolinguistic factors that influence the language learning such as- Ethnicity, Gender, Regional variations, social status, and education.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a sense of belonging to a common group of people. Language teaching and learning is affected by ethnic nations where their first language is not English. They adopt English as their second language, just like India. Then with the passage of time, they modify it as per the situation. Sometimes it results as Pidgin. So the ethnicity of a nation or a particular person affects the process of language learning. It can result in significant language variation.

Gender

The language use of male and female is different. **Gender** is also an important factor in language variation. The difference between the language of male and female is on the basis of speech and intonation and choice of words. They speak differently thus they want to learn differently. Society has different linguistic expectations from these two opposite sexes. Language variation on the basis of gender is a vast topic of discussion. ELT is also affected by regional variation of a learner.

Regional Variati

Regional variation can be strong or subtle. A particular region may have a definite set of values, culture and accents. It is difficult to impart the language from its regional variation.

Social Status

Social status of an individual also affects language learning. Their different occupations and different roles in society are evidence of their language variation. A doctor may speak differently than a taxi driver. Their social background and status will also affect the language they use in society. These variations can be called as "put on" variations as while going to the work, a person put on this and can "take off" after returning. Education is also an important factor in language learning. A highly educated person will use the standard language on the other hand uneducated people use regional and local language.

Conclusion

Based on the aforementioned discussion, I sum up that sociolinguistics is proved to be a useful device in English language teaching. It affects and motivates the language learning process in many ways. It gives a suitable perspective on language learning. It allows the learner to speak appropriately in a social context. Thus it is important for the language teachers to introduce sociolinguistics through language teaching so that students can understand the connection between language and society.

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