



## Research Article

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# Sociolinguistic Factors Influencing Language Learning in the Classroom

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**Abstract:** Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society and the ways in which social, cultural, and contextual factors influence language use. This article explores the role of sociolinguistics in language teaching and learning, with particular attention to how learners' sociolinguistic backgrounds and classroom environments affect language acquisition, participation, and communicative performance. It discusses several important sociolinguistic factors, including age, gender, social class, geographical background, and ethnicity, and explains how these variables may create differences in learners' experiences and abilities in using a language. The article also examines key sociolinguistic elements relevant to classroom interaction, including speech community, speech situation, speech event, speech act, speech style, and setting. These elements demonstrate that language learning is not simply the acquisition of grammatical structures and vocabulary but also involves learning how to use language appropriately in different social and communicative situations. Particular attention is given to student-centered teaching, classroom interaction, pair and group work, and exposure to formal, less formal, and informal language styles. The article further discusses language interference and interlanguage as possible outcomes of contact between learners' first and second languages. It argues that teachers who understand learners' sociolinguistic backgrounds can better respond to their needs and create supportive classroom environments that encourage participation and effective communication. Overall, integrating sociolinguistic principles into language teaching can enhance learners' motivation, communicative competence, and ability to select appropriate language according to context, setting, and social relationships. Therefore, sociolinguistic awareness should be considered an essential component of effective language teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistic Factors; Language Learning; Classroom; Language Teaching; Communicative Competence.

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## INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that sociolinguistics relates to studying the impact of society on the way a given language is used; it considers how a given aspect or a bunch of aspects of a specific society, including customs, traditions, expectation, and, most importantly, cultural norms decide the way people use a language. Eastman (1975) argues that sociolinguistics studies various manifestations of language and society or setting interaction; it also investigates the various social functions of that language (Holmes, 2001). This branch of linguistics deals with the relationship between language and society in order to deeply understand the internal structures of a language and how languages work in use (Wardhaugh, 1986). Trudgill (1974) postulates that "Sociolinguistics is the part of linguistics which is concerned with language as social and cultural phenomenon" (p. 32).

It has been argued that the sociolinguistic background of learners will definitely impact their manipulation and use of a language in their daily life as well as inside classrooms when they study a language. It is crystal clear that a learner of English who belongs to a high social class and is accustomed to hearing English by

parents everywhere does not face problems when the teacher uses English in classrooms; while the student who comes from a low social class and his parent barely use English or never use it is very likely to have difficulties in learning the language or cooperating with the teacher during classes.

Learners age is one of the most important factors that affects the learner's ability to learn a language. According to Lenneberg (1967), a language is supposed to be learnt during childhood and before puberty. During adulthood and advanced age terms, learning languages becomes more demanding and learners may face a lot of difficulties and a lot of obstacles. However, age a controversial issue in this respect. For instance, Crashen (19981) suggests that the younger the learner is the better the results in terms of language acquisition. Snow, (1983), on the other hand, postulates that the older the learner is the better things will be as older learners possess more cognitive skills and capabilities.

Another key factor that has a crucial impact on the learner's ability to use a language from a sociolinguistic perspective is gender; there are many

differences between men and women including, but not limited to, physiological, psychological, and linguistic. From a pure linguistic perspective, the term “genderlect” as suggested by Llamas and Stockwell (1975) proves that men differ from women in using a language. Inside classrooms, the gender of learners may impact the way they acquire a language or even the speed they learn that language.

Geography also plays a crucial role inside classrooms. In each language, there may be several varieties or accents. When both teachers and learners come from the same geographical regions, problems will be fewer compared to a situation in which the teacher comes from a region and learners come from a different region. In a classroom situated in Scotland, there will be no problems at all if the teacher is Scottish using the same dialect the learners use; however, if this Scotch class is taught by an English teacher, there might many problems due to the large gap between the British accent and the Scottish one.

Finally, ethnicity can also impact learning outcomes or output. In an occupied country, like Palestine, the adoption of some linguistic aspects of a second language by learners is very likely. Language interference is also possible when learners of English transfer some the linguistic rules of their first language to those of the second language. Furthermore, learners may use terms, expressions and, to some extent, some grammatical aspects of the dominating language when using/ learning a subordinated language. Interlanguage may also arise according to Coder (1967) and Selinker, (1972).

In order for professional teachers to exploit sociolinguistics properly and sufficiently, the teaching learning process needs to have a number of variable. They include: a) a speech community, i.e. a teacher and learners (Plat & Plat, 1975); b) a speech situation which is mostly a classroom; a speech event (e.g., conversation between a teacher and a student or between two students); a speech act that is manifested in the minimal term of speech event (e.g., when a teacher asks a student to read a paragraph loud; a speech style which may take a formal, less formal, or informal form; and finally setting which relates to time and place (Hymne, 1972).

Speech community encompasses, for instance, a teacher and his/her students who have many things in common such as language, linguistic characteristics or features such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and manner of speaking (Salzman et al., 2004); they should also share certain techniques for interpreting and codifying communicative acts. The teacher is supposed to deeply implant correct pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary in his/her students as a n adult language user.

Speech situations which is mostly a classroom is also to be taken into consideration if learning outputs

are to be to the maximum. The environment in which the teaching/learning process take place in will affect learners and the process as a whole. Relaxing, convenient atmospheres promote learning and results in positive outcomes. On the other hand, when learners are stuffed in a small, stingy classroom that lack the basics of healthy environments, the whole process will collapse and the learners may feel frustrated.

It is also important to consider speech events that have tremendous bearing on the teaching/learning process. Students need to be involved as much as possible. Therefore, teachers are obliged to adopt a student-centered approach rather than a teacher-centered approach so that they increase the learning outcomes and stimulate learners to always take part in the process. Professional teacher act as guides who direct learners and show them what to do rather than how to do things.

Speech acts fall in the heart of sociolinguistics; they should be applied and manifested in the minimal term of speech event. For example, teachers may ask a student to read a paragraph aloud; it is better than if the teacher himself/herself reads it. Teachers can also involve all students in the learning process when they incorporate speech acts in the teaching/learning process. Pair work and team work styles are normally recommended when teachers start classes.

There is one further significant element which relates to sociolinguistics in classrooms; it is speech style which may take formal, less formal, or informal form manifestations. Students need to be introduced to the language being taught in all these manifestations. The teacher can, for example, act the role of Prime Minister and a student acts the role of journalist who is supposed to use a formal language rather than a less formal or even informal language. In another meeting, the teacher is likely to force students to use the less formal manifestation of the same language so that he/she trains students to get into contact with all the possible styles of the language.

All in all, it is a truth universally acknowledged that sociolinguistics plays a significant role in enhancing learning outputs and increases motivation in students simply because it relates to the study of the interaction between language and society, linguistic variation, as well as learners attitudes towards the language itself. When learners have adequate sociolinguistic competencies, they tend to be more active and more careful about using the language; they become fully aware when to talk, when to keep pause, and when to refrain from talking; they will be also capable of greeting, apologizing, directing, etc. This branch of linguistics also leads students to use a language appropriately minding context, occasions, settings, etc. Finally, when teaching a language, teachers should take some variables (e.g., age, gender, social class, ethnicity) into consideration if they want to come up with the

utmost objectives they have previously planned to obtain.

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