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**Abstract.** This research paper provides a sociolinguistic analysis of a group of English language learners at a private learning center in Tashkent, in Uzbekistan. It sheds light on proficiency level of students, their background and inspirations. The paper depicts socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic variations within the classroom as well the role of English in this process.

**Key words.** Sociolinguistic factors, Identity, Ethnicity, Gender, Learning context, Multilingualism, Race, Pedagogical implications, Assessment

### **Introduction.**

*“Because language and society are closely linked, it is possible, in some cases, to encourage social change by directing attention towards linguistic reflections of aspects of society that one would like to see altered”*

*Peter Trudgill, Sociolinguistics: an introduction to language and society*

Dialectology was used to depict all alterations in language and society, no other terms were used except it. Although, researches knew that there was a “diamond” hidden under the rocks of knowledge about deeper connection between language and people. Before the name sociolinguistics was born, various researches and projects were based on the facets of this field. First this less-known term appeared in UCLA meeting in 1964 and “the father” was Fisherman with his claims about “sociology of language”. Later, sociolinguistics became “independent” field of research thanks to scholars such as Labov. His works in Martha’s Vineyard and Department stores in New York City depicted how small things can matter so much in language use.

The given paper focuses on multiple facets of sociolinguistics and the target group was chosen to depict their importance in all its glory. We started with a description of the aimed group and factors that can influence the learning context. Next, it is about the learning context and their future goals. Finally, it finishes with assessment tools and future perspectives.

### **Sociolinguistic profile of a group of learners**

*“I have always resisted the term sociolinguistics for many years since it implies that there can be successful linguistic theory or practice which is not social”*

*William Labov.*

The target group has 13 students, 14-15 years old, an EFL classroom. All learners are unique with various interests and motivation. Their linguistic profiles differ as well. 3 learners get private tutoring and speak English at home, 3 learners have limited knowledge about English from schools only, 6 students attend classes to take IELTS exam and move abroad, 1 student is not motivated at all, only due to their parents’ effort participate in the classroom. Based on CEFR standards, their levels vary from B1 and B2. L1 usage is limited in the classroom to minimum, course is targeted at IELTS strategies such as enhancing both receptive and productive skills.

**Socio-economic factor.** Subgroup 1 comes from rural part of our country who are busy with jobs in farming and agriculture. Their prior school curriculum emphasized grammar knowledge over communicative skills so that exposure to English was minimal until recent. Their access to modern English was only through media and social sites. It was a fact that their speeches contain a galore

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number of hesitation and faced difficulties in recognizing and producing written forms of tasks. Due to aforementioned factors these students did not have enough self-confidence. Labov (1966) claimed that “*change from above*” – “*is the product of overt social pressure consonant with social hierarchy. The process is out in the open for us to observe, in public performances, in the attitudes of teachers in the school, and in the conscious reaction of some middle-class speakers.*”

Subgroup 2 students have attended private or international schools and often speak English fluently in addition to Russian and Uzbek (Multilingualism). Their parents are typically professionals or business owners, and learners are familiar with Western cultural norms and global media. Their language skills are strong across all four skills and they have a tendency to dominate class discussions and unintentionally over-speak quieter friends. Their learning is enhanced by early exposure and greater cultural and language exposure, which aligns with the concepts of elite bilingualism and identity performance.

**Home language.** “*A different language is a different vision of life*” – said Frederico Fellini. Subgroup 1, namely Otabek, Jamshid, Elbars, have limited exposure in English at home. The people who surround them can speak only their mother tongue, their access to world knowledges are limited with their gadgets. Meanwhile, subgroup 2, Farzona, Nodir, Saidkhoja, use English to communicate with parents and siblings, they can afford travelling abroad as well. Definitely, this factor affects learning process. Subgroup 2 is broad-minded and creative, they do better at speaking and listening tasks. Subgroup 1 is respectful and obedient they prefer doing reading and writing assignments.

**Language identity.** “*Identity is the social positioning of self and other*” – said Bucholtz & Hall (2005). They stated that “*identities encompass a) macro-level demographic categories; b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles*”. As in their research with Christine and Josie, target group learners Madina and Farzona have the same case: Farzona is trendy girl who is very popular among peers while Madina is self-depicted nerd who appreciates herself for intelligence. It shows that within similar age group can also be different identities. While deciding on dimension of identity over others, we have to take into account multiple facets to see complete picture how identity really looks like. Of course, all the students have rights to choose their own identities. But tutors have to take into consideration that identity cannot be solely discussed, it correlates with other fields such as psychology and linguistics. Of course, choice of identity has a huge impact during the classes.

**Ethnicity.** Bucholtz (2005) stated “*the ideological link between language and ethnicity is so potent that the use of linguistic practices associated with a given ethnic group may be sufficient for an individual to pass as a group member*”. It is non-measurable criteria that can hardly be studied without social variables. Despite the fact that most of the students’ race biologically identified as Uzbek, their exposure to Russian and English is causing “*crossing*” (using language features that you do not belong to). Moreover, it was opined by Gloria Anzaldua – “*So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity. I am my language*”. Cultural ideologies shape the sense of either “*selling out*” or “*having ethnic pride*”. The usage of standard forms is often viewed as a deficit of loyalty to the society. Additionally, as Standard is recognized as only for “*elites*”, higher socio-economic class may face discrimination in minority group by means of linguistic pressure in the community. As a result of it, they have to use *acrolect-mesolect-basilect*. (*Acrolect* is formal, closest to Standard and prestigious variety of a language; *Mesolect* is the mixture of Creole vocabulary and English grammar, mostly used in semi-formal settings; *Basilect* is non-

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standard variety of a language, generally spoken by people with limited access to Standard/prestigious norms of a language).

**Gender.** “*Folklinguistics*” is a term used to depict beliefs about language, including men and women appliance of a language in different ways. Swan (2003) noted potential inequality concerns during classes. Male learners are eager to carry on discussions and competitive, use more vernacular English and ignore Standard English. While female students are less interested in group discussion; try to follow norms of Standardized English. Moreover, girls feel themselves less comfortable in pair works with boys (due to certain religious beliefs). It really affects the learning process. Here we can observe similarities between Labov’s research in New York City Department Stores. Women in the stores showed awareness towards prestige usage of “r” sound (Saks & Macy’s), while men were reluctant to use “r” and preferred more traditional “r”-less pronunciation. The same scenario can be observed in the aimed classroom as well. Girls do their best to cope with “elite & trendy” norms of English. At the same time, boys are more “loyal” to street/informal varieties of the language. They have opposite point of view about prestige – they assume that more informal is your speech, more informal vocabulary and structures you use, the better is your English and the more you are “on trend”.

**Sexuality.** This topic has never been discussed in this educational content due to restrictions such as religion, culture and industries.

**Motivation and Investment.** Norton’s concept depicts motivation as it is influenced by learners’ vision of themselves in the future. Students who are really caring about their future study and career prospects tend to devote more time to acquire English as it is becoming a “door” to the whole world. Those unmotivated learners we can engage by clear instructions and connecting materials to real-life situations to help them to “create” goals.

**Age.** Age is a significant sociolinguistic factor as it can be seen in Labov’s research in Martha’s Vineyard (1963). However, as in our case younger learners are often adaptive in acquiring native-like pronunciation due to their flexibility while older students show metacognitive awareness and analytic skills which benefit them in understanding vocabulary and grammar. Yet, in learning context age cannot be solely discussed without factors such as identity, motivation, cultural background and so on. It is indispensable part of learning, serves as not a barrier, but as a bridge when tailoring instructions. Since the target group does not have huge age gap (all students are 14-15 years old), this factor is not essential in this classroom.

#### Sociolinguistic profile of the learning context

The chosen group consists of 13 learners whose ages are 14-15, in a learning center in Tashkent (Cambridge LC). These students are engaged by academic and personal goals such as applying either to state universities or to study abroad with scholarships. Based on CEFR standards, their levels vary from B1 and B2. L1 usage is limited in the classroom to minimum, course is targeted at IELTS strategies such as enhancing both receptive and productive skills.

**Multilingualism.** A number of students are bilingual applying Uzbek and English, and some of them are multilinguals using other languages fluently such as Russian, Kazakh and Tajik. Being a bilingual or a multilingual provides with a chance to be aware of metalinguistics and vary communicative forms. Meanwhile, it requires tutors to be aware of it, allowing to take all advantages from it.

Some students make *language choice* which means multilingual learners have a choice between languages to speak based on the situation or to show their identity, sometimes to establish solidarity and distance. This subgroup of students uses Russian with other multilingual peers, but with students form subgroup 1, they prefer Uzbek; yet, during discussions to “impress” others, they apply code-

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switching – English and Russian. At the same time, as it was stated by Rampton (1995, 2006) subgroup 1 use *crossing* as well. Crossing can be defined as a playful usage of language in which one has only limited knowledge. This action shows that subgroup 1 learners try to get closer to subgroup 2 and portray their empathy. Meanwhile, subgroup 2 endeavor to have *language attitudes* – in linguistics it means that some people tend to sympathy other language, in our case is Uzbek as it is their heritage.

**Standard & Non-standard varieties spoken.** The term prestige is complicated in sociolinguistics. We have “overt” and “covert” prestige. Overt prestige refers to the status or respect gained using the socially dominant variety of a language (in the UK – Received Pronunciation (RP)). Covert prestige is the status and value given to a language variety within a specific group, even if this variety is not accepted as prestigious by most members of society (African American Vernacular English within African communities). For instance, 2 of learners, Oybek and Abu Bakr, are obsessed with Rap, disliking “whiteness” and AAVE is the best tool to express their objection towards racial ideologies.

**Race.** “Race is not rocket science. It’s harder than rocket science” – said Edley (2001). Race and ethnicity may differ greatly in communication process as well as within and across individuals. However, there are certain agreement on this topic. Firstly, race and ethnicity is both *socially constructed* categories, and does not have any objective measurement tools. Secondly, “ethnicity cannot be studied or understood outside the context of other social variables, like social class or gender” – stated Fought (2011). Furthermore, “*race is gendered and gender is racialized*”. The structure of identity is multifaceted which shows that ethnicity can be more powerful compared to other factors in certain circumstances. Finally, race and ethnicity are *both about self-identification and perceptions of others*.

Moreover, target learners Madina and Dilshodbek apply *code-switching* to index multiple ethnic identities. Suprasegmental features are another variety of language, which show that syllable-timing, such as in the case of Fought (2002) with feature of Chicano English in Los Angeles, is used to reveal their identities. Additionally, *discourse features and language use* also play an important role. Such as turn-taking or direct/indirect questions are signals applied to portray ethnic identity nonetheless speakers share the same dialects.

#### Sociolinguistic profile of the context where English will be used

The target group learners unite the same goal: taking IELTS test. After it, they will be ready to enroll state universities or move abroad to pursue their academic paths there. English plays a crucial role, so they have to be aware of terms such as World Englishes (WE), English as International language (EIL), Global Englishes (GE), English as a Lingua Franca as it has been stated by Selvi (2019). These terms give core meaning to understand English in general, of course it starts within the classroom setting. We should be aware of changes and respectful to other varieties of English. “*All official institutions of language are repeating machines: schools, sports, advertising, popular songs, news, all continually repeat the same structure, the same meaning, often the same words: the stereotype is the political fact, the major figure of ideology*” – Roland Barthes (1975). Lippi-Green’s work (1997) helps us to understand Disney cartoons and how they try to manipulate with minds of children to teach ideologies. So as tutors, we need to be cautious about English varieties and teach sense of respect and admiration towards other varieties of a language to our learners as well.

#### Pedagogical implications

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The importance of differentiated instructions and inclusive practices are inevitable to provide pedagogical implications for each subgroup. It is necessary to implement vocabulary instruction along with sentence starters to support productive language use for first subgroup, which includes students with lower English proficiency and limited exposure to academic discourse. Additionally, providing bilingual glossaries and allowing learners to process ideas in their first language (L1) helps scaffold. Visual aids, such as mind maps, along with chunking strategies for listening passages, can enhance comprehension by breaking down complex input into manageable units. In contrast, second subgroup, composed of more linguistically confident students, may benefit from opportunities to act as peer mentors in jigsaw activities. This strategy not only reinforces their learning through teaching but also fosters collaborative dialogue and mutual support.

Sociolinguistics provides teachers with a chance to enhance their learners' skills. As a tutor, we must understand value of not only linguistic proficiency but also sociolinguistic profile to keep our learners engaged and motivated. Differentiated instruction strategies, such as scaffolding tasks for lower-proficiency learners and incorporating more interactive speaking opportunities, can help bridge the achievement gap between subgroups. Moreover, acknowledging the silent or less active participation of female students due to gender norms can inform classroom management and encourage inclusive participation through small group work or anonymous input methods. \

The best motivation for students without purpose or certain goals is to create ones. By means of real-life based examples and assignments, tutors can portray how language actually works and how it can be beneficial for individuals. Undoubtedly, teacher can also be a role-model. It is clear that our idols after our parents could be our tutors and instructors. They serve as a living sample of how language can help people to pursue both academic and job perspectives.

#### Assessment implications

Fair assessment may only happen when all mentioned above sociolinguistic factors are taken into account. Lower socioeconomic subgroup needs detailed instruction during the lessons and in the tests, and evaluating written tasks should go beyond written set of frameworks. For instance, oral interviews and project-based assessments can improve the communicative competence of students who may underperform in traditional exams due to anxiety or unfamiliarity. Teachers must also be attentive not to let unconscious bias related to gender or ethnicity influence their grading and feedback practices. Formative and summative assignments should promote equity among learners. Additionally, for students with certain handicaps should be provided assessment accommodation.

Modifications of materials and assessment should take into consideration factors such as equity and globalization. Reading texts are adapted to reflect Uzbek cultural contexts for urban learners while integrating global narratives that collaborates with rural students, enhancing a more inclusive learning environment. Assessment practices emphasize growth and learning potential through formative tools such as learning portfolios, rather than penalizing students for existing gaps in their proficiency (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Writing instruction is scaffolded with guided prompts and genre-specific models to support learners in developing structured and purposeful texts.

#### Conclusion

*“There is undoubtedly much to learn about the social uses of language, for communication or for other purposes. But at present there is not much in the way of a theory of sociolinguistics, of social uses of languages, as far as I am aware”* – said Neom Chomsky.

Sociolinguistics have neither beginning nor ending. It is a science which can be alive and actual as humanity exists. For us, it is “unshaped diamond” that people do not have paid enough attention for.

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We cannot even imagine the power that sociolinguistics have, what kind of things it may change completely. So that this paper is food for thought and just a piece of a big research in future. We endeavored to focus on the most prominent sociolinguistic aspects such as socioeconomics, home language, language identity, ethnicity, gender, motivation & investment, age, multilingualism, race, standard/non-standard varieties of speech and so on. Moreover, pedagogical and assessment implications are involved to show how sociolinguistic factors can change learning context. Taking into account all of the aforementioned facets, teachers and authorities can make huge changes in the whole education system itself. Of course, this work is again just a drop in the ocean. Further researches need to be carried out to establish the role of sociolinguistics as a field which can define the fate of education system and it can be driving force towards a brighter future.

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