Sociolinguistic profile research paper

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Abstract: This paper explores the sociolinguistic profile of a group of learners aged 15–16 preparing for the IELTS exam at an educational centre. The research analyses key learner variables such as language background, socioeconomic status, gender, and parental involvement, as well as the sociolinguistic context of their learning environment and the domain in which English will be used. Pedagogical and assessment implications are discussed to suggest tailored teaching strategies and tools that address the learners' needs. The study highlights how understanding learners' sociolinguistic profiles can inform more equitable and effective language instruction.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, multilingualism, IELTS, language assessment, learning context, second language acquisition, classroom diversity, pedagogical strategies

Introduction

Sociolinguistics is the study of language as it functions in social contexts, examining how language is shaped by and used within various social environments. This research investigates how language is employed across diverse settings, with particular attention to the sociolinguistic factors that influence language learning and use. Effective language instruction requires a comprehensive understanding of both the learners' sociolinguistic profiles and the contexts in which they acquire language.

This paper focuses on the sociolinguistic profile of a group of language learners aged 15–16 enrolled in an educational centre. The term "sociolinguistic profile" in this context

refers to a range of learner characteristics, including language background, proficiency levels, learning styles, age, gender, and additional sociocultural variables. The learning context encompasses the educational environment, as well as relevant social and cultural influences.

The study also considers pedagogical implications—namely, instructional methods and strategies suited to this group—and concludes with an analysis of assessment practices, outlining tools and techniques for evaluating language proficiency. By understanding learners' sociolinguistic backgrounds and their educational settings, educators can more effectively tailor instructional materials, learning activities, and assessment methods to meet the specific needs and goals of their students.

Sociolinguistic profile of a group of learners

"IELTS rocket" group was chosen as a target group. In the educational centre where this group formed the "rocket" group, students have already passed their official IELTS exam but got a low score. And they are studying here to improve their weak sides. This group consists of 15 students aged 15-16 (9-10grade). 5 of them are girls while others are boys. 7 of these students got 4.0 form IELTS while 5 of them got 4.5. The rest of the students have 5 from IELTS. Most of the studetns in this group come from public russian medium schools and are multilingual. While a few of them are from Uzbek public schools. And there are 2 boys from private school. These 2 students have higher IELTS scores than others. This may be attributed to their school education. Because as they study at private school, all school subjects are taught in English, which makes them easy to use language outside the classroom, both in academic environments and real-life communication. And also these 2 students are confident in speaking even though they have minor mistakes. They usually don't pay attention to their mistakes while speaking. 13 students in this group began studying in our educational centre from the beginner level, while the other 2 came from different educational centres. All of them are good at receptive skills, while most of them

had difficulties in productive skills. There are different kinds of students with different types of character, ability, learning curiosity and so on.

For example, one of the students, who is called Anvar, can be called "super" multilingual. His mother tongue is Uzbek, and he was born in Uzbekistan, but he spent most of his childhood in Russia (his mother`s hometown) and got Russian education in kindergarten. So he is fluent in Russian. And because of his father's nationality, who is from Kazakhstan, he knows the Kazakh language very well. As he says, at home his father uses both Kazakh and Uzbek, while his mother only uses Russian. And from his fifth grade, he has been going to an international private school in Tashkent, so he has very good English language knowledge. Anvar represents a strong example of Type 4: Double non-dominant home language group, which is defined by Deumert (2011) as his parents speak different languages at home. And these languages are also used in their society, and Anvar acquires the socially dominant language from his father, the neighbours and friends. And nowadays he is studying the Korean language and has basic Korean language knowledge. Code-switching is frequently observed in his speech, especially when they have a debate in English; if he is angry, he unconsciously uses Russian words in his English speech.

Another student, who is Dildora, is very motivated to learn the language. At the same time, she is an autonomous learner. She finds new ways of learning vocabulary and does extra homework. One of her characters is worth mentioning. She comes education centre earlier than the time of her lesson and takes 3-4 students from beginner groups and explains to them the topic they ask about. She shows confidence in class discussions and never hesitates to ask questions to clarify something unclear.

Unlike Dildora, there is another student who is very shy. He is Akbar. Even his speaking is quite good; he is very shy in group work. He doesn't like any discussions and debates. He works well individually or in peer work. Despite his shyness, he asks questions without any hesitation and is very motivated to learn something new. One unique thing of

his is his dedication to writing. He likes writing very much. If the students are given to write one essay, he brings at least 3 essays.

Except for these, there are several social factors which can impact these groups of learners.

Language background

According to their language background, this group can be divided into 3 subgroups: The 1st group (10 students) consists of students who got their formal education at a school where the Russian language is used to teach all subjects. And they were taught English in Russian until the 6th grade, and from there they got English instructions in English lessons, but not the whole lesson. The Russian language is still being used in their English lesson when complex grammar is taught. These students find grammar easy due to the similar grammar structure between Russian and English. Their exposure to English is high, as they have English lessons 4 times a week. The 2nd group includes 3 students from Uzbek public schools where all subjects, including English, are taught totally in Uzbek. They are taught using the grammar translation method, which is often seen in Uzbek public schools. They struggle with both receptive and productive skills as they acquire language only in this educational centre during the lesson and other speaking and debate events. The other 2 students, who are from an international private school, make 3rd group. They got English instructions from all subjects, not only English. They have the opportunity to experience authentic input both during class and inside of the school. They are highly exposed to English and are confident in all types of tasks. As their school has the American teaching system, while acquiring the language, they also acquire a piece of American culture. Tawfiq (2020) supports this view, stating that acquiring a second language also involves acquiring a second culture. It can be seen in their pronunciation and speech speed. Even if they speak fluently, they have minor grammar mistakes. These students are good at all skills. Due to their school settings, they like to challenge themselves with extra tasks.

Socioeconomic background

In terms of socioeconomic status, this group can be divided into 2 subgroups: students from low-income families and from high-income families. The first sub-group with students from low-income families includes 5 students. This factor limits the students' use of technology at home. In class, they are paired with other students who have access to mobile phones, but at home they usually use their parents` device. These limitations impact their learning process, as they have very little or no exposure to English outside the classroom. As Wardhaugh and Fuller (2014) state, having access to both social and educational resources plays an important role in language acquisition. Moreover, they struggle with speaking fluently or listening skills as they don't have access to authentic resources. Compared to these students, 2nd group students are experiencing more exposure to English, as they have access to all types of technology outside the classroom. Except for technology, students from high-income families often travel around the world, especially to English-speaking countries, where they will have the opportunity to apply what they have learnt. Due to private tutoring some of them acquire more knowledge and practice than others. And one thing which I noticed here is working students. Students from low-income families work after their studies, which makes them isolated from extra classes which are dedicated to discussion, debate and writing. At the same time, students from high-income families have plenty of time after lessons, which enables them to practise the language outside the classroom.

Gender

In this instructional context gender also plays a significant role, especially in classroom interactions. As this target group has a few girls, men usually dominate in this group. Girls in this group hold our Uzbek "tradition", which weakens the voice of girls in our society. Most of the girls in Uzbek families are taught the view of being one step behind the men. Due to this view, girls in this group share their opinion or even participate in group

discussions with hesitation. This aligns with Schilling's (2011) statement about women's biological or historically societally weaker position, and also Schilling's (2011) "weak" linguistic features can be seen in girls` speech in the form of tag questions. This weakness sometimes makes assessment difficult during group discussions and group work. As it was mentioned above, during the language acquisition at school, students also acquire some cultural traditions of that language. For example, girls from Russian public schools sometimes feel themselves equal with boys and can have arguments on all topics. But this situation occurs rarely.

Ethnicity

As language and culture are interconnected, they impact each other mutually (Tawfiq, 2020). Even this group are ethically the same, which means that all of these students are from one culture; they have different opinions and views. What does this mean? All of the students are from Uzbekistan, Tashkent. They all live near to each other. But their educational settings at school really impact their learning. In terms of ethnicity, this group can be divided into 3 subgroups: students from Uzbek public schools, students from Russian medium public schools and students from international private schools. Uzbek public school students tend to be not so much argumentative compared to students from Russian and international schools. And they hardly accept critical feedback from their peers, while students from international schools accept this as a useful experience in order to develop their knowledge. Here schooling teaches these students the culture of that language they are using. And students are transmitting this culture. Difference can be seen even in students' opinions and ideas about the same topic. For example, Uzbek school students have limited knowledge about different topics, as they only have English language lessons, which are taught in English, and the Uzbek school system doesn't cover teaching critical thinking. At the same time, private international schools offer a variety of lessons which are taught in English, and they have special subjects to develop students' critical

thinking and other subjects which inform students about society, economics, politics and so on. If we rate Uzbek school 3 from 10 and international school 10 from 10, Russian medium school lies somewhere around 5 from 10. Russian students are also confident while giving arguments, but as they have also limited subjects at public school, they also struggle with discussing different topics. For example, if this group is asked to talk about "The best holiday of mine", Uzbek school students will definitely say that it is New Year. Russian medium school students are likely to say New Year, but students from international schools will tell something about Halloween and Easter and even describe how to celebrate it. This is one example which I experienced during my teaching years. But this is a droplet from the ocean. Another difference can be seen in their pronunciation.

Age

Age is also one of the main factors which influences language acquisition. According to Lenneberg (1967), language acquisition best happens at younger ages, mainly until the age of puberty. The age of these group learners is at the late phase of the "critical period" (CP) and the beginning of the "sensitive period" (SP). In terms of SLA, CP includes the period between 2 and 14 and sometimes 15 (Siahaan, 2022). In this period, the human brain has a higher level of neuroplasticity, which enables learners to acquire new things quickly and adapt to different situations. At the early stages of CP, automatic acquisition happens often, but at the later stages, it disappears, and learning acquisition begins by conscious learning, which informs the beginning of SP. And this target group of learners are experiencing this period. They have developed their cognitive skills, which means they think logically, reflect on language, and learn language by comparing it to another language. They are at the age where they know what to do, and each of them has clear future goals; each of them understands their own weak sides. One factor which impacts the age of these learners is peer influence. They are highly influenced by their peers. Anvar's shyness also may be due to peer judgement, which is normal at this age. Motivation can

also be another factor, especially intrinsic. Dildora is a good example of a student who has an intrinsic motivation.

Parental involvement

Parental involvement, or home literacy, is another factor which can influence this target group of learners. This factor divides this group into 2 subgroups: In the first group, there are students whose parents are fully involved in the students' learning process. In their family at least one parent knows the language and gives a chance to their child to practise language at home. Even if they don't know the language, they control the child's study. They find time to talk with their children about their study, about the topics they covered and everything they had in the classroom. This raises students' attention to the lesson, and these students do all given homework on time. While the second group of students have no control at home. The teacher every time pushes these students and encourages them to do tasks. As they are mostly ignored at home by their parents, they often feel themselves not so much important in the classroom also. To avoid this awkward situation, individual attention is given to these students during the lesson.

Sociolinguistic profile of the learning context

The sociolinguistic profile of the learning context in this classroom is very diverse. The educational centre where these students study have different levels with different ages. They offer a wide range of language courses, each including their own goals. For example, people who want to learn English just for communication purposes when they are abroad will have certain courses which are only dedicated to this purpose. This group doesn't learn any academic language. This target group have already determined their weak sides, so they are working on them. All four skills are taught in this group. Except for regular lessons educational centre offers a variety of clubs, including the debate club, writing club, speaking club, movie club, public speaking clubs and so on. It has a lot of coworking zones which help students to work with their peers after the lesson. And also the educational

centre has many academic support teachers who help students to cover what is learnt in the lesson. These groups cover different topics from IELTS, like environment, music, interests, education, technology, sport and so on. Teachers are also highly qualified, with IELTS scores ranging from 8 to 8.5. Except these, we have another factor which contributes to this learning context. One of the main factors is multilingualism. Almost all of the students in this group are multilingual. They share different language backgrounds and different cultures. As a result of multilingualism, code-switching is often noticed in their speech, especially when they are angry or when they are arguing about an interesting topic. According to Myers-Scotton (1993a), this situation is considered an "unmarked choice" for multilingual speakers.

Another important factor is about using standard and nonstandard varieties of English. While all schools in Uzbekistan promote the use of Standard English, students from international private schools often use nonstandard varieties of English as they have informal communication after the lesson with the students from different countries around the world. And this group often has narrow diglossia (Deumert, 2011), which means that students from public schools who acquired the language in a school setting use high variety, while students from international private schools use low variety, as they have daily communication with different people all around the world. The race and ethnicity are not so much important in this learning context, as the population in this centre are local students with minorities from regions, but they don't affect each other much. But socioeconomic group plays a very important role in this context. All of the teachers in this centre are modern and qualified, and they always use technology in their lessons. Access to technology can impact the learning process and the motivation of the students to learn the language. For example, students are given online quizzes to do at home. In this case, students with low-income families who don't have enough access to technology cannot do

it and, because of it, can be demotivated. Teachers must take into account these factors while planning their lesson.

Sociolinguistic profile of the context where English will be used

All of the students in this group are learning English in order to take the IELTS exam and apply to universities. Which means they are transitioning from secondary school to universities. Most of them aim to study abroad, while the rest plan to study at international universities within Tashkent. In both situations, English serves as both a medium and an instructional language in international universities. Except for IELTS, they will use this language in both informal and academic settings. For example, they will use language to communicate with fellow students, to listen to lectures or to present at lessons, to participate in group discussions, and to read texts or write essays or research papers. Unlike the students who want to study in Tashkent, students who want to study abroad will face some difficulties when studying there. First, they will come across a new sociolinguistic context, a new, different culture and different language varieties. Language varieties used in their hometown can be different from the one they have abroad. So knowing different accents and dialects can be very useful. Also, almost all international universities offer students different language classes to help them. Such classes include academic writing, public speaking and so on. From these sources students can improve their language skills and practice them in real-life environments. As they communicate with people all around the world, except for language skills, they also can improve their communication skills. Students who are studying in Tashkent will need to adapt to some institutional policies which prioritise Standard English (Bailey & Villareal, 2018), mainly in writing and speaking. As Canagarajah (2006) states, except for learning English, students have to adapt their language use according to the purpose. For example, students use informal language while talking with fellow students and need to switch into formal language in the classroom.

Pedagogical implications

As this group have different types of students, planning teaching materials should be done very carefully, taking into consideration all factors. Not only materials but also methodologies and approaches must be carefully chosen. Each student has a different learning style. Most of the students in this group are visual learners, so incorporating videos or teaching using technology will have a positive effect on learning. Technology is used to make different quizzes to check homework or vocabulary. And in these activities students who don't have access to a mobile phone are paired with the ones who have access. In terms of language features and text, topics and text which include higher-order vocabulary, articles with some cultural topics or global issues, which is often seen in IELTS exams, are used. According to their learning style, text is prepared in a printed version for students who like doing reading on paper, and text is organised using platforms like Rewordify (https://rewordify.com/) where students can scan QR codes and do the reading there. TED Talk videos can be used as a listening task, which makes students work with different English accents and contexts. While making the text, the language background of the studentis usually considered. If the reading task requires production like speaking or writing, students with limited language exposure are given a sheet with discourse markers or transitional words or other structures to support their learning by scaffolding. According to Yildiz and Celik (2020), this approach helps students to become independent learners. With students who have enough exposure to language, Krashen's input hypothesis is used, giving them materials slightly above their current level (Gregg & Krashen, 1986b). And also, in order to meet shy students' needs, small group work or pair work is organised in order to create a safe and free learning environment. This approach can be suitable for girls in this group, as they often hesitate to argue with boys. For them additional support is provided for their voice to be heard by others.

In terms of methodologies and approaches, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is definitely used, which includes different phases. This approach makes students actively engage in the process in order to complete the task. During the task students combine knowledge and skills, developing their problem-solving skills and communication skills. According to Li (2023), if TBLT is used under the guidance of teachers, it gives the students an opportunity to think independently and participate in discussions, which increases their logical and critical thinking abilities. Another approach that can be used with this group is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). In this approach students are given authentic materials such as readings, taped interviews, and news reports to allow them to engage in real-life communication. According to Horwitz (2008), activities which promote CLT can be role-plays, discussions and debates which allow learners to take on very active roles.

Assessment implications

To assess the students, formative assessments afre mainly used to check their current progress. Both internal and external assessment are employed. Internal assessment includes presentations and debates which include certain criteria and video summaries. The main objective of this task is to build critical-thinking and collaborative skills. For external assessment, the Cambridge IELTS series is used in the form of the mock test. After each formative assessment constructive feedback is provided to explain to students where they made mistakes and how it can be improved. In order to keep assessment reliable and valid, the official IELTS criteria are used to assess students. Both holistic and analytic rubrics are applied, depending on the task. For example, in speaking tasks, a holistic rubric that reflects the IELTS band descriptors is often used, while in writing, an analytic rubric based on the four criteria: task response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy is implemented. Before each assessment each part of the rubric is explained to students. It helps them to know what they exactly should do in this assignment

(Ayhan, 2015). Peer feedback and self-assessment are sometimes to reflect on their own work and share ideas with each other.

Conclusion

In a linguistically and socially diverse classroom like this, a teacher's role is not only to deliver the content but also to ensure that each learner, despite their gender, language and socioeconomic background, has equal opportunities to succeed. Teachers must design lesson plans and assessments to prepare students not only for certain exams but also to make them confident users of this language. If we hold this responsibility with intention, we do more than teach: we change the life trajectories of young people. I hope this reflection encourages other teachers to look critically at their assessment practices and reimagine them as tools for equity and transformation in their own contexts.

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