



**ULUSLARARASI BEŞERİ VE SOSYAL
BİLİMLER İNCELEME DERGİSİ (UBSBİD)
INTERNATIONAL HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL
SCIENCE REVIEW (IHSSR)**

Volume: 6 Issue: 2 Year: 2022

SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS
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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received: 10.12.2022
Revised : 28.12.2022
Accepted :28.12.2022
Orcid Number:
0000-0001-7197-8979

Keywords:
Sociolinguistics,
foreign/second language
learning, verbal schema,
discourse, speech acts,
critical age, gender

ABSTRACT

The study examines the relationship between sociolinguistics and English speaking skills, focusing on sociocultural aspects within a target community and its verbal communication, as well as the benefits of integrating social values into interpersonal interaction to form socially appropriate and constructive relationships with others. The study also investigates the significance of critical age in language learning when a foreign language turns into a native language, with a further highlight on the interplay of gender in social interactions. It also adds to the discussion that sociolinguistics facilitates contextual learning that enables them to efficiently communicate in line with given situations and at an appropriate level of language. This leads us to the significance of communicative competence for daily acts, including inviting, ordering, congratulating, and so on. Parallel to this, the paper additionally suggests that English belongs to everyone rather than being a sole possession of Britain; thus, there should be no widely accepted variety in pronunciation, and instead, the focus of the billions of English (as lingua franca) speakers is to adopt an understandable, clear accent. With its significant points addressed on the interplay between sociolinguistics and spoken language acquisition, the study on the related literature offers a brief but comprehensive review for researchers.

TOPLUM DİL BİLİM VE İNGİLİZCE KONUŞMA BECERİLERİNE KATKISI

MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Makale Tarihiçesi:
Başvuru: 10.12.2022
Revizyon : 28.12.2022
Kabul : 28.12.2022
Orcid Numarası :
0000-0001-7197-8979

Anahtar Kelimeler:
Toplumdilbilim, yabancı/ikinci versiyonu olmamalıdır ve bunun yerine, bu çağın dili olan İngilizce konuşan milyarlarca kişinin odak dil öğrenimi, özel şema, söylem, söz edimleri, kritik yaş, etkileşime değinen bu önemli noktaları ile ilgili alan yazın üzerine yapılan bu çalışma, araştırmacılar için kısa ama kapsamlı bir inceleme sunmaktadır.

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, hedef topluluktaki sosyokültürel yönlere ve İngilizce sözlü iletişime odaklanarak, toplumdilbilim ve konuşma becerileri arasındaki ilişkiyi ve diğer konuşmacılarla uygun ve yapıcı ilişkiler oluşturmak için sosyal değerleri kişilerarası etkileşime entegre etmenin faydalarını incelemektedir. Bunlara ek olarak, sosyal etkileşimlerle cinsiyetin etkileşiminin nasıl olduğuna vurgu yaparak, yabancı bir dilin anadile dönüşebileceği kritik yaşın dil öğrenimindeki önemini altını çizmektedir. Çalışma, toplumdilbilimin bağlamsal öğrenmeyi nasıl kolaylaştırdığı, verilen durumlar doğrultusunda ve uygun bir dil seviyesinde etkili bir şekilde iletişimin nasıl sağladığı tartışmasına da katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu bizi, davet, sipariş, tebrik vb. gibi günlük işler için iletişimsel yeterliliğin önemine götürmektedir. Bu doğrultuda, makale İngilizcenin, tek varlık sahibi olarak Britanya'nın değil de, herkese ait olduğunu öne sürmektedir; bu nedenle, herkesin kabul ettiği tek bir telaffuz noktası, anlaşılır ve net bir aksan benimsemektir. Toplumdilbilim ve konuşma dili edinimi arasındaki ilişkiyi araştıranlar için kısa ama kapsamlı bir inceleme sunmaktadır.

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Research Article/ Araştırma Makalesi

Cite As/ Alıntı: Kurt A. (2022), " Sociolinguistics And Its Contribution To English Speaking Skills ", Uluslararası Beşeri ve Sosyal Bilimler İnceleme Dergisi , 6 (2), 145-152, <https://doi.org/10.55243/ihsr.1217248>.

1. Sociolinguistics and its Contribution to Foreign Language Learning

Sociolinguistics is a broad and integrated field of study that examines the perspectives of a particular society, together with its culture, how the target language is used, and the consequences of language on that society. The relationship between Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) and sociolinguistics is significant in various ways.

1.1. Discourse and Speaking

Sociolinguistics is related to second language acquisition (SLA) to the extent that it emphasizes an understanding of the process of language acquisition. This can be accomplished by providing a broader and more comprehensive aspect of language, at a verbal or non-verbal level (Rogen, 2002) because what a native speaker says may be above the actual meaning. Thus, understanding with whom, where, when, and how to communicate (discourse) is a critical conceptual issue for learners to uncover the underlying meaning behind what is spoken (Kramsch, 1991). This leads the learner to decipher the implications, resulting in a more sophisticated comprehension of what is presented.

Discourse analysis is a comprehensive analysis that explains what people do unconsciously in daily life: language use patterns and the circumstances, including interlocutors, situations, and aims, with which these are typically associated (Trappes-Lomax, 2004). In other words, discourse analysis is a general term that focuses on communicative events with the underlying assumption that linguistic meaning is dependent on more than just the sentence's literal meaning. It also includes contextually oriented and observable conduct, speech acts, written texts, conversation, and gestures. What are the favorable effects of grammar teaching and discourse analysis on English language learners' speaking skills?

Grammar itself assists with how to begin a sentence, get into the topic or theme, and maintain it throughout, either in speeches or written formats, by using connectives such as "well, then, moreover, what is next?" and so forth. Therefore, in order to apply these transition words, one should initially master them from grammar class, and then discourse, in turn, helps the learner reinforce their usage in the right context. A further benefit of the integration of discourse into grammar classes is that it adds one more dimension to the sentence level of language: implications – what the speaker exactly intends to say. For instance, when a learner hears 'How brilliant you are!' he may struggle to understand the relationship between the exact implication and the utterance itself, as the context in this specific example does refer to irony. Thus, discourse highlights the communicative aspect of learning. Briefly, discourse provides an explicit description of grammatical structures.

Discourse also helps a learner to have ways of choosing what structure to use when, with whom, and how to use it (for instance, can vs. could) when communicating with others. So the learner can realize what is grammatically correct in a more appropriate context. This enables one to obtain "replicable analysis," which encompasses the ability to interpret what message each speaker intends to convey (Gumperz, 2001). Thus, it reinforces cultural awareness as contextual assumptions should be attentively analyzed by the speaker and spoken properly.

All in all, discourse analysis while learning a foreign language enables a learner to go through a dynamic process, which is an intrinsic and compulsory step not only to fully comprehend utterances but also to use the right language (Thomas, 1995). It also helps put grammar rules into more real-life situations, as well as focusing on the hearer and the social, cultural, and linguistic context, so that the learner will eventually know the exact meaning of the given structured grammar sentence and be more competent in the spoken and written languages of the target language.

1.2. Speech Act and Speaking

Sociolinguistics also highlights another key concept, 'culture' where a language comes alive. So, this discipline offers learners a high degree of awareness of 'sociolinguistic competence', through which a foreign language learner gets exposed while acquiring values and beliefs in a particular society.

Speaking skill is seen as a productive ability that enables the learner to interact with native speakers and thus target cultures. As an international language, English enables its learners to make contact with many nations and cultures over the globe. Some desire to work or study by achieving near-native behavior; others may wish to gain "recognition" in the target society, or some at least to survive (Fantini, n.d.). This section aims to look into how intercultural communicative competence and speech act theory practices assist learners to boost their communication skills.

Speech Act theory suggests language is not only used to inform or to describe things but is often used to do things or perform acts. Intercultural communicative competence refers to the use of the linguistic system effectively in the target language and culture. This also implies that perfect knowledge in four skills only provides communication at the sentence level. However, language is mostly above what is uttered. Even in the Turkish language, it is common to communicate through indirect meanings and implications. This process of interaction at societal and individual levels is necessary so that students will be able to speak perfectly grammatically correct English, but this may not be enough; the learners hence should know the process of interaction, otherwise, communication will be a failure (Parmenter, 2003).

To be a competent language user, Curate and Swain (1980) classified competencies into four sub-categories: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. However, language is not limited to language codes, for instance, when an older or more status person comes to a place, the rest is expected to stand up and greet the elder in Turkish culture. This is a sociocultural rule in Turkish culture (the sociocultural aspect of language). The speaker then initiates a speech by asking how that elder person feels (a strategic competence), while he is expected to use kind language (e.g., a second plural pronoun in Turkish), which builds discursive competence. Without these last three kinds of competencies, it is really difficult to convey a proper message to the listener and thus create efficient illocutionary communication. Acquiring such knowledge does not occur overnight: the learner must get exposed to the language in real contexts or take university-level cultural studies.

In conclusion, while it is quite imperative to acquire the basic competencies such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and four major skills to interact with native speakers, all this does not suffice to carry out real communication. In addition to this fundamental linguistic knowledge, language use also entails using the above-mentioned skills effectively and efficiently to convey what we mean to the listener in a target language. L2 learners should thus be able to appreciate and practice the other competencies.

1.3. Fragility in Social Contexts and Speaking

This part highlights the fact that sociolinguistics enables foreign language learners to acquire a target language realistically and functionally, not only at the word and sentence levels but also at contextual levels. Hence, sociolinguistics allows learners to interact with native speakers through oral and written communication with more confidence.

Speaking ability itself is a complicated ability that requires the interlocutors to establish the content of the speech in their minds, formulate it in an accurate and meaningful way to make sense, and immediately react back to the interlocutor. To achieve good communication, there are many factors to take into consideration, including the status of the speaker or listener, the content, courtesy, and more. The concepts introduced by Brown and Levinson have expanded the notion of kindness; faces; negative and positive faces, and face-threatening acts. Here are some suggestions of how a teacher could teach the strategies of positive and negative face-threatening activities, keeping in mind cultural differences and different strategies and skills.

Every person develops a face, which essentially is a social image, according to Brown and Levinson (1987). Brown and Levinson also coined the terms "positive face" and "negative face" in the related

literature. Positive face is defined as "the desire of an individual that his want is appealing to at least some others," while the negative face is "the want that one's action is unimpeded by others" (p. 62). To put it simply, the negative face is the ability of a person to behave as he is asked to behave, while the positive face is the ability to be approved through his self-expression. Both faces, which come alive during social interaction, exist in distinct ways in every culture. This is referred to as "face-threatening conduct" when one's face conflicts with the desires of another speaker.

When one's wish is obstructed by one another -in such cases as request, refusal, or denial-, negative face is then threatened. To exemplify this, when one can't find his favourite colour of t-shirt at a store, he experiences a negative face threatening case because his wish is hindered by the unavailability in the store. So the shop attendant is expected to sympathize with the customer since he could not carry out the order (as discussed in the Speech Act reaction paper). In a second example of a negative face threatening act, suppose one person offers to accompany another to the shop. If he refuses to go, he is expected to clearly articulate his relevant excuses. To do so, he may need to be taught how to talk in such situations, which would be a responsibility of a teacher. The same applies to such cases as promises, advice, threats, warnings, and so forth. Moreover, one's positive face may be threatened when a desire is not taken seriously by the speaker or listener addressed to. This may even hurt his feelings; the speaker's indifference toward the listener, insults, disrespect, and belittling comments are just a few examples of this kind of face-threatening activity.

Some strategies are set up to minimize these face threats. For instance, when one says to someone, "You look down," "Is there anything I can do?", such a statement aims to minimize the threat to the listener's face. So, a language learner should figure out how to receive the message implied in a certain context indirectly. For instance, when one asks for some money from one of his close friends, he may prefer to make it sound more kind by simply saying, "You know I really hate bothering you, and it is somehow a lot to ask, but could you please lend me some money till my pay day?". This will probably not end in disappointment, and it is a more efficient way than saying, "Can you lend me some money for a while?" because the speaker gives relevant reasons and shows empathy toward the person. So, a language learner should be aware of and competent with these kinds of strategies to be able to communicate with others effectively. Finally, a speaker should also take into consideration the status (lower vs. higher status) and power of the listener in certain contexts to address him/her more appropriately.

Consequently, positive and negative faces and face threats are of great importance, as the politeness theory reveals how language is flexible and complex, requiring much more effort to properly respond according to specific situations. Hence, a teacher is expected to raise students' awareness of the topic.

2. Sociolinguistics and Verbal Schema

A majority of English learners strive to learn the target language for years; however, they fail to accomplish this most of the time (Dharma & Selvi, 2011; Getie & Popescu, 2020; Sabboor Hussain et al., 2020). There are many reasons to discuss this long-lasting problem. This section aims to investigate the reasons for these failures concerning disequilibrium from the perspective of reading comprehension and to discuss some beneficial aspects of nativization.

Schema (plural: schemata) is a conceptual understanding of knowledge and how knowledge is both presented and used in both spoken and written English (Song, 2011). It plays a vital role in comprehension as it represents a description of the item and its relationship or actions and reminds the speaker of his own experience with that item. Learners have some schemata for many issues before they begin school, and they continuously develop more schemata as new information is introduced. It is doubtless that while listening and speaking, many different sources (the oral text, the listener, the environment, background information, and so forth) are highly active in the construction of meaning.

According to Ruddell and Ruddell (1998), comprehension as a process highly involves meaning negotiation within an oral text; the listener, environment, community, and even sociocultural factors

and settings are at play. Schemata are not static, but, rather, a dynamic and transactional process as the conversation imposes upon the speaker to transform. However, while this transaction may sometimes result in the speaker achieving a higher degree of interactional comprehension, sometimes it does not. In the latter cases, verbal communication turns out to be empty and meaningless. "What if the speaker is not able to combine the message to be conveyed with his available knowledge of the world?" (Grabe, 1988:56). Such a case mentioned above creates disequilibrium in the listeners: they cannot draw any meaningful information from the speech. One of the most common causes of this condition of inability is some new concepts and, or terms that are introduced in the text. When the learner is not in balance with the new situation, the speaker may minimize the number of new unassociated items in the verbal text, creating more smooth-flowing but equivalent ideas in the learner's own culture in parallel with the ones in the original message.

Such familiarity with the concepts improves the learner's degree of verbal comprehension, which is of considerable value. Because in most cases, the unassociated terms or concepts to the native culture may be the names of places or people in the target language, there is no harm in changing Santa into Hızır or Manhattan Street into Taksim Square. Through this simple exchange, the learner's schema will not face any difficulties; their schema will be able to function within their cultural elements. In the long run, the learner will simply concentrate on the verbal message's main ideas and supporting arguments rather than exerting additional effort to comprehend the unfamiliar cultural items, and they may not feel uneasy or end up struggling with the conversation.

All in all, some verbal concepts may not fit into the learners' personal view, moving them into disequilibrium. The learners may finally make a shift toward the new concepts. New things fit in the learners' schemata when the speaker, as a facilitator, should eliminate unfamiliar cultural items by means of nativization, which is of great value as this whole process facilitates foreign language learning.

3. Sociolinguistics, Language Acquisition and Age

There are certain periods in one's life span to perform some tasks, and if one fails to do these duties then, it would be a really hard nut to crack them afterward. This simple rule also applies to language learning—both first and second languages. Because this certain period—the "critical age"—triggers a learner's sensitivity and capacity to generate the right stimuli, without which it would be difficult or futile to acquire any foreign language. This section attempts to address the question of whether there is an ideal age to start learning a foreign language.

The problem of finding out the correlation between age and mastering a foreign language has always captured the attention of linguists. According to Bialystok and Hakuta (1999), there is an observational co-occurrence between the two. Bialystok and Hakuta also state that "the age at which a person starts learning a second language corresponds in some way to the ultimate success that the person will attain after years of having used that language" (p. 162). The Critical Age Hypothesis finds a proper explanation for different levels of achievement in foreign language acquisition by younger and older learners. But the question at this point raises, 'What is the most appropriate age to acquire a second language?'

Johnson and Newport (1989) attempted to seek a correlation between the effects of maturation and the ability of a person concerning their second language learning. They sampled 46 Korean and Chinese speakers from different age groups (3-39), who migrated to the United States, in order to determine the relationship between the age when a learner is exposed to English and the level of accurate morphosyntactic competence in English. Their conclusions, as expected, the youngest age group was observed with the most consistent level of native-like performance, while the older learners performed not as high as the age group of 3- 7 did. And they concluded that "success in learning a language is almost entirely predicted by the age at which it begins" (p. 81).

A plateau of studies has proven that if one language is not attained before puberty, it may not be fully acquired. In early research, Oyama (1978) and Patkowski (1980) focused on the ultimate language attainment of immigrants in the United States and concluded that the only factor that contributes to a supreme acquisition is the age at which an immigrant gets exposed to English. They also found that language acquisition would turn into "language learning" if the learner starts to learn a foreign language after the critical age. According to Eugene et al. (2009), this whole special part of the brain would become inactive due to the failure of the effective utilization of cortical areas designated for learning acquisition. And over time, the underused/unused brain parts will adjust to carry out different functions.

In conclusion, it is widely accepted that young learners of a second language achieve more native-like competence and perform to a greater extent than older learners. David Singleton (2005) summarizes that "the younger, the better," since a younger age for acquisition enables the learner to master the target language more accurately and fluently. However, there is controversial evidence regarding what this critical age exactly is, but there is a consensus that this critical age is "before the close of puberty period."

4. Sociolinguistics, Gender, and Language Assessment

Foreign language learners' abilities vary from one society to another society, age to age, and even from one city to another. This also applies to both genders: males and females. Assuming that they have even similar capabilities between both genders, they have various tendencies derived from their sex-oriented identities. This section examines some vital aspects of gender issues in the assessment process.

In communities, certain tasks are carried out by different genders as society assigns some particular tasks and responsibilities exclusively to boys or girls (Flintan & Tedla, 2010). This type of bifurcation has been shared and practiced this way for ages. Girls, for instance, are expected to do babysitting while boys tend to play rough games in the streets. As for formal education in a designed learning environment, nations initially set up their own curriculum, taking into consideration the needs of their society and determining specialized methods to implement the objectives.

It is important to stress, however, that the curriculum designers do not discriminate against or favor any gender. Thus, they set up standardized objectives and goals for genders, regardless of their sexual identity. In the language learning process, it would be quite bizarre if some different objectives were set and stated in a national curriculum in such a way that girl language learners are expected to say "Would it be impolite if I kindly asked you to hand in the document soon?" and boys are expected to utter 'Get it here as soon as possible'.

In most societies, girls are encouraged or even forced to use elegant language, while boys are rewarded for using rough language. But a systematic language learning curriculum and process entails both male and female learners acquiring a common language, at least at a proper level for negotiation. Hence, one cannot advocate that politeness is limited to only girls. To request something politely is a plus, and even, may bring a female learner more marks. Nevertheless, the argument is that preparing a different rubric would be significantly unfair when assessing the students' speaking skills. Because there is a reliability principle in the assessment process that states an evaluator should give a fair chance to the assessed to demonstrate their abilities (Dochy, 2009), preparing a different rubric implies that the teacher has different expectations of both groupings in a standard environment. To exemplify, suppose that both groups are taught the structures 'can' and 'could'. Deciding which one to use in a context does not depend on either group for its usage. Both genders are expected to use 'could' in a new setting – a universally accepted norm.

Such language use does not normally change for males and females. It is worth pointing out that differentiating some speech utterances between sexes is tremendously beneficial. For instance, teaching the learners to use "OMG" (referring to Oh My God!) is a girlish saying, and boys had better avoid using it. But this does not have anything to do with assessment criteria or preparing a different rubric to assess both groups.

To sum up, the teacher should set and follow a standardized assessment framework, no matter how elegantly and politely the girls talk. In this manner, the teacher expects the learner to speak based on the topics covered. The objectives should not vary from one gender to another. Otherwise, it may be seen as favoring or disfavoring one gender rather than the other, which contradicts Assessment's Validity and Reliability Principles.

5. Sociolinguistics and English Accents

English has been in the latest century a widely-spoken language through especially British public diplomacy and long-lasting colonization, with an approximate number of 1.5 billion people over the globe (Crystal, 2003). This pioneering academic language has some varieties in accordance with the regions where it is used: British English, American English, Australian English, Chinglish, and so forth (the first two ones function as main varieties of English). To learn and speak either of those two is generally based on the region where the learner lives or works: for instance, Turkey, Europe, and the Middle East predominantly prefer to learn British English as the mentioned countries are geographically close to Britain.

The requirements and interests of the learners are also a factor in which pronunciation variation to adopt. According to research (Friedrich, 2000) done in Brazil, over 80% of respondents picked American English in response to the question "What variation best matches your needs?" This is due to the learner's belief that they would be exposed to it more frequently and should thus be able to respond quickly. The same holds for British English if a student wishes to study in the United Kingdom or American English if they are interested in business English, which is predominantly created and, or influenced by American English. Thus, in parallel with this desire, the instructor is expected to select such resources.

In addition, if one's sole objective is the social connection with a particular English-speaking population, such as the African-American community, one should prefer learning non-standard English over standard English to "pick up" on what people say and, or mean. Consequently, the curriculum and, consequently, the course should be designed with this objective in mind.

English Language as a tool for worldwide communication has numerous dialects and varieties, which are derived mainly from the different and far regions from its origin land. So, people's preference on which variety to learn is their homeland's geography close to that variety, for instance France to the UK, Mexico to the USA. Another reason for people to learn standard or non-standard English may be due to their personal needs or interests, but there is no doubt that whatever the reason is, the coursebook selection should be done according to the English variety chosen.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how sociolinguistics and speaking skills interact, specifically concerning the immediate and key role of sociocultural influence on verbal communication and the benefits of the integration of social values into the interaction to make socially proper and constructive connections with others. The study also investigated the significance of age in language acquisition and the intermingling of gender in social interactions as well as in the language assessment process, emphasizing that English belongs to everyone and there is no need for concerns regarding which accent to adopt. This is because understanding and being understood are the primary interests among lingua franca speakers.

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Uluslararası Beşeri ve Sosyal Bilimler İnceleme Dergisi,
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Volume: 6 Issue: 2 Year: 2022
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