

## **Language and Social Differentiations**

اللغة و التمايز الاجتماعي

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Received:31/03/2022

Accepted:10/05/2022

Published: 09/06/2022

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### **ABSTRACT:**

In most countries of the world, language use in any society is distinguishable and it is based on certain sociological parameters. The present paper thus attempts to examine language codes in social class and language prestige in order to reveal language use in relation to societal classes. It also casts light on monolingualism and bilingualism in order to unveil the differences in various sociolinguistic settings. Moreover, it examines the main distinctions between the concepts of diglossia and polyglottism. It studies language contact, multilingualism, and characteristics and types of multilinguals in order to understand these phenomena in sociolinguistics. The current paper comes to show the links between language and social interaction, and language and action in order to understand the perception of language use in interaction.

### **KEYWORDS:**

language use, society, monolingualism, bilingualism, diglossia, polyglottism.

ملخص:

يمكن تحديد استخدام اللغة في أي مجتمع في العالم ويستند هذا إلى معايير اجتماعية معينة. و لهذا تحاول هذه الورقة البحثية دراسة رموز اللغة في الطبقة الاجتماعية وهيبتها من أجل الكشف عن الاستخدام اللغوي فيما يتعلق بالطبقات الاجتماعية و كما تلقي الضوء أيضاً على ظاهرتي أحادية اللغة وثنائية اللغة لإبراز الاختلافات الموجودة في مختلف البيئات اللغوية الاجتماعية. علاوة على ذلك، تبحث هاته الدراسة في الفروق الرئيسة بين مفاهيم ازدواجية اللغة و تعدد اللغات، كما تدرس الاتصال اللغوي و خصائص و أنواع تعدد اللغات و هذا من أجل فهم هذه الظواهر في علم اللغة الاجتماعي. و تأتي الورقة الحالية لإظهار الروابط بين اللغة والتواصل الاجتماعي، واللغة و الأداء من أجل استيعاب كيفية استخدام اللغة في التواصل.

كلمات دالة: استخدام اللغة، المجتمع، أحادية اللغة، ثنائية اللغة، ازدواجية اللغات، تعدد اللغات.

## 1. Introduction

Most varieties of any language are an offshoot of certain social situations, which result in language types (Trudgill, 2000). This makes a given class to use a certain language to create linguistic boundaries that isolate them from the general linguistic forms in use by the target society (Spolsky, 2010).

Sociolinguistics was pioneered through the study of language variations in urban areas (Hudson, 1996). Whereas dialectology strictly studies the geographic distribution of language variation, sociolinguistics focuses on general sources of variations, including class (ibid.). Class and occupation are among the most important linguistic markers found in society (Bell, 1976). One of the fundamental findings of sociolinguistics, which has been hard to disprove, is that class and language variety are related (ibid.).

Members of the working class tend to speak less standard language, while the lower, middle, and upper middle class will in turn speak closer to the standard (Gardiner, 2008). However, the upper class, even members of the upper middle class, may often speak ‘less’ standard than the middle class (ibid.). This is because not only class, but class aspirations are important.

## **2. Language and Class**

Studies, such as those by William Labov in the 1960s, have shown that social aspirations influence speech patterns (Trudgill, 2000). This is also true of class aspirations. In the process of wishing to be associated with a certain class (usually the upper class and upper middle class), people who are moving in that direction socioeconomically will adjust their speech patterns to sound like them (Gardiner, 2008). However, not being native upper class speakers, they are often hypercorrect, which involves overcorrecting their speech to the point of introducing new errors (ibid.). The same is true for individuals moving down in socio-economic status.

### **2. 1 Social Language Codes**

Bernstein (1964), a well-known British sociolinguist, devises a social code system which he uses to classify the various speech patterns for different social classes. He claims that members of the middle class have ways of organizing their speech which are fundamentally very different from the ways adopted by the working class. In Basil Bernstein’s theory, the restricted code is an example of the speech patterns used by the working-class. He states that this type of code allows strong bonds between group members, who tend to behave largely on the basis of distinctions such as male, female, older and younger. This social group also uses language in a way which brings unity between people, and members often do not need to be explicit about meaning, as their shared knowledge and common understanding often bring them together in a way which other social language groups do not experience (Bernstein, 1964). The difference with the restricted

code is the emphasis on ‘we’ as a social group, which fosters greater solidarity than an emphasis on ‘I’ (ibid.).

Bernstein (1964) also studies what he named the elaborated code, explaining that in this type of speech pattern the middle and upper classes use this language style to gain access to education and career advancement. Bonds within this social group are not as well defined and people achieve their social identity largely on the basis of individual disposition and temperament (ibid.). There is no obvious division of tasks according to sex or age and generally, within this social formation members negotiate and achieve their roles, rather than have them there readymade in advance. Due to the lack of solidarity, the elaborated social language code requires individual intentions and viewpoints to be made explicit as the ‘I’ has a greater emphasis with this social group than the working class.

## **2. 2 Language and Prestige**

Crucial to sociolinguistic analysis is the concept of prestige (Meyerhoff, 2006). Certain speech habits are assigned a positive or a negative value, which is then applied to the speaker (Wardhaugh, 2010). This can operate on many levels. It can be realized on the level of the individual sound/phoneme as Labov discovered in investigating pronunciation of the post-vocalic /r/ in the North-Eastern USA (ibid.). An important implication of sociolinguistic theory is that speakers choose a variety when making a speech act, whether consciously or subconsciously (Meyerhoff, 2006).

It is generally assumed that non-standard language is low-prestige language (Wardhaugh, 2010). However, in certain groups, such as traditional working class neighbourhoods, standard language may be considered undesirable in many contexts (Meyerhoff, 2006). This is because the working class dialect is a powerful in-group marker, and especially for non-mobile individuals; the use of non-standard varieties expresses neighbourhood pride and group and class solidarity (ibid.).

### **3. Monolingualism and Bilingualism**

Everybody has a language he acquired from his immediate environment after birth. The language could be his mother tongue or the language he was immediately exposed to because his immediate family speaks such a language. However, there are speculations by sociolinguists that no one speaks just a language.

Languages are the most complex products of the human mind; each differing enormously in its sounds, structure, and pattern of thought (Bell, 1976). Each language is indissolubly tied up with a unique culture, literature, and worldview; all of which also represent the end point of thousands of years of human inventiveness (ibid.). Communication does not absolutely require us all to have a single language.

Bilingualism is practiced especially by minority language speakers whose languages are not spoken by many people, and who learn majority languages (Trudgill, 2000). Minorities struggling to preserve their languages ask only for the freedom to decide for themselves—without being excluded for exercising that freedom. Given that people do differ in language, religion, and ethnicity, the only alternative to tyranny or genocide is for people to learn to live together in mutual respect and tolerance. Many countries that practice linguistic tolerance find that they can accommodate people of different languages in harmony. There is nothing inevitably harmful about minority languages, except the nuisance of bilingualism for the minority speakers. Young people in search of economic opportunity abandon their native-speaking villages and move to mixed urban centres, where again they have no option except to speak the majority language. Even their parents remaining in the village learn the majority language for its access to prestige, trade, and power. This invariably leads to language endangerment.

Monolingualism is the condition of being able to speak only a single language (Trudgill, 2000). In a different context, unilingualism may refer to language policy which enforces an official or national

language over others (ibid.). Native-born persons living in many of the Anglosphere nations such as the United States, Australia, United Kingdom and New Zealand are frequently typecast as monoglots, owing to a worldwide perception that English speakers see little relevance in learning a second language due to the widespread distribution of English and its competent use even in many non-English speaking countries in Europe, Africa and Asia. Many Spanish language countries in Latin America are also considered to have substantial proportions of the population who are monoglots. Monolingual or unilingual is also said of a text, dictionary, or conversation written or conducted in only one language, and of an entity in or at which a single language is either used or officially recognized.

Bilingualism is the ability to master the use of two languages (Gardiner, 2008). Although bilingualism is relatively rare among native speakers of English, in many parts of the world, it is the standard rather than the exception (ibid.). Bilingualism often involves different degrees of competence in the languages involved. A person may control one language better than another, or a person might have mastered different languages better for different purposes, using one language for speaking, for example, and another for writing. Even if someone is highly proficient in two languages, his so-called communicative competence may not be as balanced. Linguists have distinguished various types of multilingual competence, which can roughly be put into two categories:

*a. Compound Bilinguals*

Words and phrases in different languages are not the same concepts. That means ‘un chat’ and a ‘cat’ are two words for the same concept for a French- English speaker of this type. These speakers are usually fluent in both languages.

*b. Coordinate Bilinguals*

Words and phrases in the speaker’s mind are all related to their own unique concepts. That means a bilingual speaker of this type has different associations for ‘un chat’ and for ‘cat’. In the case of these individuals, one language, usually the first language is more dominant

than the other, and the first language may be used to think through the second language. These speakers are known to use very different intonations and pronunciation features, and sometimes assert the feeling of having different personalities attached to each of their languages. A sub-group of the latter is subordinate bilingual which is typical of beginning second language learners.

The distinction between compound and coordinate bilingualism has come under scrutiny. When studies are done of multilinguals, most are found to show an intermediate behaviour between compound and coordinate bilingualism. The distinction should only be made at the level of grammar rather than vocabulary. Coordinate bilingual as a synonym has also been used for someone who has learned two languages from birth. Many theorists view bilingualism as a spectrum or continuum of bilingualism that runs from relative monolingual language learner to highly proficient bilingual speakers that function at high levels in both languages.

Receptive bilinguals are those who have the ability to understand a language, but do not speak it. Receptive bilingualism may occur when a child realizes that the community language is more prestigious than the language spoken within the household, and chooses to speak to his parents in the community language only. Families who adopt this mode of communication can be highly functional although they may not be seen as bilingual. Receptive bilinguals may rapidly achieve oral fluency when placed in situations where they are required to speak the heritage language. Receptive bilingualism is not the same as mutual intelligibility, which is the case of a native Spanish speaker who is able to understand Portuguese and vice-versa due to the high lexical and grammatical similarities between Spanish and Portuguese.

Bilingual interaction can even take place without the speakers switching (Wardhaugh, 2010). In certain areas, it is not uncommon for speakers to consistently each use a different language (Meyerhoff, 2006). This phenomenon is for example found in the former state of Czechoslovakia, where two languages (Czech and Slovak) were in common use. Most Czechs and Slovaks understand both languages although they would use only one of them (their respective mother

tongue) when speaking. For example, in Czechoslovakia it was common to hear two people talking on television, each speaking a different language without any difficulty understanding each other.

#### **4. Language Contact and Multilingualism**

It is only when languages are in contact that the individual develops the ability to use them fluently or sparingly. It has been postulated by many linguists like Hymes and Labov that it is impossible for an individual to have a complete mastery of more than one language even though he speaks them (Wardhaugh, 2010). Multilingualism is the mastery of multiple languages (Spolsky, 2010). A person is multilingual if he knows several languages.

The term ‘multilingualism’ refers to an occurrence regarding an individual speaker who uses two or more languages, a community of speakers where two or more languages are used, or between speakers of different languages. Multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers in the world’s population. A multilingual person, in the broadest definition, is anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading). More specifically, the terms ‘bilingual’ and ‘trilingual’ are used to describe comparable situations in which two or three languages are involved. A generic term for multilingual persons is polyglot.

Multilingualism can be rigidly defined as being native-like in two or more languages (Trudgill, 2000). It can also be loosely defined as being less than native-like, but still able to communicate in two or more languages (ibid.). Multilingual speakers have acquired and maintained at least one language during childhood, the so-called first language (L1) (Hudson, 1996). First languages are acquired without any formal education. Children acquiring two first languages since birth are called simultaneous bilinguals. Even in the case of simultaneous bilinguals, one language usually dominates over the other. This kind of bilingualism is most likely to occur when a child is raised by bilingual parents in a predominantly monolingual



environment. It can also occur when the parents are monolingual, but have raised their child in two different countries.

### **5. Diglossia and Polyglottism**

If there is a structural and functional distribution of the languages involved, the society is termed diglossic or polyglot (Bell, 1976). Typical diglossic areas are those areas where a regional language is used in informal contexts, whereas the state language is used in more formal situations (ibid.). Some linguists like Labov, Halliday and Chomsky limit diglossia to situations where the languages are closely related, and can be considered dialects of each other (ibid.).

Diglossia is the existence of a formal literary form of a language, which is considered more prestigious, along with a colloquial form used by most speakers (Hudson, 1996). It is a language with high and low forms (ibid.). The term 'diglossia' has tended to be defined in a number of ways. Fishman (1967), for instance, distinguishes it from bilingualism, which refers to an individual's ability to use more than one language. He defines diglossia as the distribution of more than one language variety to serve different communicative functions in the society. This implies that he differentiates the two concepts on the basis that bilingualism relates to an individual's linguistic ability to control or command two different language varieties, and diglossia is the functional distribution of more than one language variety. In the various studies on polyglottism, it is concluded that the development of competence in the native language serves as a foundation of proficiency that can be transposed to the second language.

The term 'diglossia' has been restricted to cases in the middle range of relatedness (Bell, 1976). Diglossia exists not only in a multilingual society which officially recognizes several languages, but also in societies that employ several language varieties (ibid.). Fishman (1967) further claims that the criterion for identifying diglossia is the degree of individual bilingualism found in a society in such a way that the linguistic differences are functionally distinguished within the society. Diglossia can be used to refer to the functional distribution of high and low varieties of a language within the society (Bell, 1976).

It is commonly assumed that language often develops varieties used to carry out different functions language is meant to perform; it is also an assumption that a bilingual in a speech community usually shares the same pairs of language which often results in the evolution or development of a new system of communication by means of hybridization of the hybridized or the newly evolved mode of communication (Bell, 1976).

A person who speaks several languages is called a polyglot. However, there is no clear definition of what it means to speak a language. A tourist who can handle a simple conversation with a waiter may be completely lost when it comes to discussing current affairs, or even using multiple tenses. A businessman who can handle complicated negotiations in a foreign language may not be able to write a simple letter correctly.

In addition, there is no clear definition of what a language means. The Scandinavian languages are so similar and thus a large part of the native speakers understand all of them without any trouble. On the other hand, the differences between varieties of Chinese like Cantonese and Mandarin are so big and thus intensive studies are needed for a speaker of one of them to learn or even to understand a different one correctly. A person who learned five closely related Romance languages like French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese accomplished a less difficult task than a person who learned Hebrew, Standard Mandarin, Finnish, Navajo and Welsh since they are not remotely related to another.

Reasons for native language literacy include sociopolitical as well as sociocultural identity arguments. While these two camps may occupy much of the debate behind which languages children will learn to read, a greater emphasis on the linguistic aspects of the argument are necessary. In spite of the political turmoil precipitated by this debate, researches continue to espouse a linguistic basis for this logic. This rationale is based upon the work of Jim Cummins (1983).

In sequential model, learners receive literacy instruction in their native language until they acquire threshold literacy proficiency. Some researchers regard age three as the age when a child has a basic

communicative competence in L1. Children may go through a process of sequential acquisition if they immigrate at a young age to a country where a different language is spoken, or if the child exclusively speaks his heritage language at home until he is immersed in a school setting where instruction is offered in a different language. The phases children go through during sequential acquisition are less linear than for simultaneous acquisition and can vary greatly among children. Sequential acquisition is a more complex and lengthier process although there is no indication that non language delayed children end up less proficient than simultaneous bilinguals, so long as they receive adequate input in both languages.

In bilingual model, native language and community language are simultaneously taught. The advantage is literacy in the two languages. However, teacher training must be high in both languages. Coordinate model posits that equal time should be spent in both instruction of the native language and the community language. The native language class focuses on basic literacy, but the community language class focuses on listening and speaking skills.

## **6. Language Use in Interaction**

Since language is a way by which an individual expresses his worldview, there are various forms of expressions that are applied in interactional situations. Every human applies language to suit himself at various times and situations. Sociolinguists believe that language used in interaction reveals unique language forms.

Language is a form of social artifact (Bell, 1976). Most sociolinguists have been urging the examination of language practice. Wittgenstein (1958) argues that language, rather than being a vehicle for naming items, conveying information, or even enacting intentions according to rules, is an activity in its own right. A number of philosophers and sociolinguists regard the view of language as primarily communicative in function as the “conduit metaphor” (Reddy, 1979). This metaphor is rooted in the commonsensical notion that, through speech, one person conveys information by inserting it into words and sending them along a communicative channel (ibid.). People receive

the words at the other end and extract the encoded thoughts and feelings from them (ibid.). The conduit metaphor reinforces the idea that problems of meaning in human society are essentially referential or concerned with how concepts correspond to or represent reality, and that language operates to make propositions about the world (Pitkin, 1972). Instead of using the conduit metaphor and referential approach to meaning, scholars recently have approached language as a medium of organized social activity, in which words are performatives (Austin, 1962) or deeds (Meyerhoff, 2006). It is partly through language that humans do the social world, even as the world is confronted as the unquestioned background or condition for activity.

The title of John Austin's famous book, *How to Do Things with Words*, conveys the essence of speech acts theory. Austin (1962) questions an old assumption in philosophy. Sentences that convey referential information, in Austin's words, form locutionary acts, but many utterances do not describe, state, or report anything and cannot be evaluated for their truth, but rather they are illocutionary performances. Such utterances do not report or describe what a person is doing; they achieve a designated activity, such as promising, naming, or betting. The lesson for the communicational view of language is that the locutions through which persons provide information about their thoughts, feelings and ideas occur as part of some context of acting.

Austin (1962) also discusses perlocutionary acts, or utterances that are consequential in particular ways for the behaviour of persons to whom they are directed. The distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts is clear. One of Austin's successors, Searle (1969), states that the unit of linguistic communication is not the symbol, word, or sentence. It is rather the production of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of a speech act, and that a theory of language, therefore, needs a theory of action. For Searle, this theory is one in which a set of underlying, constitutive rules specifies how speech acts can be accomplished. In this case, both Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) attempt to come to grips with the well-known problem,

that in every language, a sentence with a given reference and predication can have an assortment of meanings.

### **6. 1 Language and Action**

The theory of ‘conduit metaphor’ implies that language is largely a vehicle whereby interactants make propositions about the world (Wardhaugh, 2010). From this perspective, which is explicit or implicit in traditional social psychological research on language, problems of meaning involve how well linguistic concepts refer to, correspond with, or represent reality, including internal thoughts and feelings. A different idea that language is a site of social activity stems from developments in what is called ordinary language philosophy. Many scholars, including Austin, Ryle, Searle, and Wittgenstein, take the position that problems of meaning and reference in traditional philosophy can be fruitfully recast through investigation of ordinary language. This means avoiding the abstracting and generalizing process whereby words serve to reference or point to objects and situating words in orderly contexts to appreciate how words achieve actions. Consider the word ‘hello,’ which we might define as a greeting. However, its status as a greeting depends on where, in a developing conversation, the item occurs. When a party uses the word after picking up a ringing telephone, the activity it performs is answering a summons rather than greeting the caller. Subsequently, there may be an exchange or sequence of salutations, and in that context, ‘hello’ does perform greeting. To discover the meaning of a word, then, it is not possible to rely on ostensive or demonstrative or any other fixed definitions; one must examine the contexts of use. When contexts of use are similar, then words may be said to share what Wittgenstein (1958, p.67) called “family resemblances.” It is in the actual practice of placing words in particular contexts that such resemblances can be traced and the lexical and other components of language appreciated as a social form.

### **6. 2 Language, Action and Social Structure**

The study of language use in interaction suggests how people use language in an immediate sense to perform joint endeavours of all sorts. People talk and gesture to one another, and this means that

questions regarding social structure come to the fore. Studies of the relationship between language and social stratification are related to numerous comparisons of speech practice which are based on cross-cultural, gender and ethnic differences.

The social structure involves the outcome of spoken interaction; language is the site of the production and reproduction of cultural, institutional and organizational forms of the overall society. It is therefore important to know both the local and broad contexts in which utterances occur. A reflexive analysis of language, action and social structure makes out the interaction order and the institutional order having complex interrelationships. The interaction order is comprised of mechanisms of turn taking and other sequential organizations, which provide the resources for producing and understanding what is being said and done.

The language that humans use can help to constitute an infinite variety of social actions. Austin (1962) suggests that there can be more than a thousand actions, while Wittgenstein (1958) proposes that there are innumerable activities in which language plays a part, including but by no means limited to ordering, describing, reporting, telling a story, requesting, asking, criticizing, apologizing and objecting. This list can be indefinitely extended and it shows that the communicative function of language, wherein people refer to objects and report their thoughts or feelings about them in a verifiable way, is only one of the many modes of linguistic usage.

## **7. Conclusion**

In multilingual societies, not all speakers need to be multilingual. When all speakers are multilingual, linguists classify the community according to the functional distribution of the languages involved. There have been consistently identified characteristics of multilinguals in sociolinguistic studies. Multilingualism seems to be a choice of some people, but to some others it is a result of migration. Thus, the present paper examined these concepts of multilingualism, monolingualism, bilingualism, diglossia, polyglottism and the theories that led to their emergence in sociolinguistics.

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