

SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF VERBAL INTERACTION: EXPLORING LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES AND SPEECH PRACTICES

ASPECTOS SOCIOLINGÜÍSTICOS DA INTERAÇÃO VERBAL: EXPLORANDO COMUNIDADES LINGÜÍSTICAS E PRÁTICAS DE FALA

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ABSTRACT

The study of language communities, where language practices are subordinated to social behavior and shaped by linguistic innovations and traditions, opens up a wide area for research in sociolinguistics. For this reason, focusing on and studying language communities and implementing language practices as a means of learning is relevant for linguistics. The study aims to establish the effectiveness of incorporating sociolinguistic achievements into the work with students in linguistics. In particular, it includes an investigation of the specifics of verbal interaction and studying the communicative behavior of language communities and speech practices. It involves an analysis of the effectiveness of involving students in the research process and innovating their motivation to study sociolinguistics. The research methodology is based on a comprehensive approach, utilizing observation, descriptive methods, analysis, and synthesis. The main method employed is an experiment. Also, an assessment of the implementation of the new methodology includes surveys conducted at the final stage. The main hypothesis of the study assumes that using sociolinguistic theories during research and educational work with students is an effective academic practice. Furthermore, applying the study of language communities and speech practice models is necessary for a specialist in linguistics. Further research would be promising to consider the experience of successful students' research projects, as well as studies of the linguistic aspects of social interaction within university educational practices. In particular, the process of preparing and implementing team projects in education is the key to ensuring a friendly environment for all participants of the educational process.

Keywords: Higher education, Innovation, Language community, Motivation, Sociolinguistics, Speech practice.

RESUMO

O estudo das comunidades linguísticas, onde as práticas linguísticas estão subordinadas ao comportamento social e moldadas por inovações e tradições linguísticas, abre um amplo espaço para a investigação em sociolinguística. Por esta razão, focar e estudar comunidades linguísticas e implementar práticas linguísticas como meio de aprendizagem é relevante para a linguística. O estudo visa estabelecer a eficácia da incorporação de conquistas sociolinguísticas no trabalho com estudantes de linguística. Em particular, inclui uma investigação das especificidades da interação verbal e o estudo do comportamento comunicativo das comunidades linguísticas e das práticas de fala. Envolve uma análise da eficácia de envolver os alunos no processo de pesquisa e inovar sua motivação para estudar sociolinguística. A metodologia de pesquisa baseia-se em uma abordagem abrangente, utilizando observação, métodos descritivos, análise e síntese. O principal método empregado é um experimento. Além disso, uma avaliação da implementação da nova metodologia inclui pesquisas realizadas na fase final. A hipótese principal do estudo pressupõe que a utilização de teorias sociolinguísticas durante a pesquisa e o trabalho educativo com os alunos é uma prática acadêmica eficaz. Além disso, a aplicação do estudo das comunidades linguísticas e dos modelos de prática da fala é necessária para um especialista em linguística. Mais pesquisas seriam promissoras se considerassem a experiência de projetos de pesquisa bem-sucedidos de estudantes, bem como estudos dos aspectos linguísticos da interação social nas práticas educacionais universitárias. Em particular, o processo de preparação e implementação de projetos de equipa na educação é a chave para garantir um ambiente amigável para todos os participantes no processo educativo.

Palavras-chave: Ensino superior, Inovação, Comunidade linguística, Motivação, Sociolinguística, Prática de fala.

Introduction

Language is used in communication between people, between a person and a group, and within a society (Milroy, 2003; Arbol del, 2018). Linguistic units of various levels are generally used to convey life realities and emotions. Communication is facilitated by auditory signals (voice sounds), gestures, facial expressions, and written symbols. People, communities, nations, and others are participants in speech processes. The society is a large social grouping with common cultural constants, subordinated mainly to one political authority and living on a common territory. The society is no exception in participating in speech processes. In these terms, language is a social phenomenon, a society's tool. It is subject both to influence and to be influenced. Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics and is an essential component of language learning, as well as of studying the interaction between language and society (Jackendoff et al., 2002; Shu, 2019).

Sociolinguistics is a subject of scientific interest that examines speakers' ability to adapt their speech behavior to specific situations (Herk, 2015). Language has been a tool for using and influencing the balance or imbalance in communication as a product of speakers' collective activity. Verbal communication is understood as a socially determined and organized activity that analyzes how communicants interact and facilitate an exchange, how they use expressions, how they employ linguistic resources distinctly and in different situations, and how they pair discourse practices or perform speaking roles, as well as participants' expectations (Bruin et al., 2014).

A wide range of scientific issues of sociolinguistic research helps to comprehensively consider the interaction of both language and human, the linguistic expression of individuality determined by society. The point of mastering the entire range of tools and theoretical principles of sociolinguistics remains relevant. The ability to apply in practice the skills of analyzing and describing language communities and speech practices as forms of verbal interaction significantly affects the professional development of a specialist and requires close attention from researchers.

The study aims to determine the effectiveness of using the achievements of sociolinguistics to work with students majoring in linguistics. This aim requires solving the following research tasks:

- to assess the evolution of the success in mastering project skills;
- to describe some social factors that shape speech practices in the sociolinguistic aspect;
- to identify the effectiveness of involving students in innovations, as well as increasing their motivation for studying sociolinguistics;
- to determine the participant's assessment of the learning outcomes of the new methods.

1- In addition, it involves identifying the ways and step-by-step development of an experiment to improve the effectiveness of training specialists in linguistics.

Materials and Methods

The data was collected from September 2022 to December 2023 (1st academic semester) at Khmelnytsky National University (Ukraine). The experiment involved (62) Ukrainian-speaking students of humanitarian specialties studying linguistics. The participants were learning English, German, and the Ukrainian languages. All participants volunteered to participate in the experiment. The students were divided into 4 groups and were asked to participate in projects within the discipline of "Sociolinguistics" to study language communities and the speech practices implemented within such groups. Beforehand, each group was assessed on their initial performance at each stage of their group research activities.

This study has a comprehensive nature, thus combining both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods. The research employs a descriptive approach to describe the theoretical material. However, social research also requires other statistical methods, such as observation, analysis, and synthesis, since the results will be just a bunch of digits without evaluation. The experiment involved employing questionnaires and surveys to obtain relevant data.

Overall, the research included three stages. In the first stage, the research team assessed students' academic performance. At this stage, the respondents were asked to fill out a questionnaire containing their personal data. All students agreed to provide their data, and the research team guaranteed its confidentiality. Any private information obtained during the study will not be made public.

In the second stage, the research team used observation and survey methods, collected and analyzed data, and adjusted the project activities. The information obtained is subsequently used as data to answer the questions posed in the study.

In the third stage, the research team collected and analyzed data from the research projects and recommended further studies of speech behavior in language communities. Additionally, the research team analyzed the data obtained. Their conclusions and answers to the study's research questions were formulated. The results of the description and presentation of the questionnaire and survey data are presented in the form of a statistics description.

The difficulties in conducting the study include the short timeframe of the pedagogical experiment. There was no opportunity to conduct in-depth interviews and understand the reasons for the changes in respondents' answers.

Literature Review

The study of the interaction between language and society has a long tradition and includes a large number of areas that are well described in linguistic research. The sociolinguistic space of verbal interaction has been considered in many aspects:

- globalization processes and their impact on language and speakers (Blommaert, 2010; Swanwick et al., 2022);
- changes in marginalized language communities, the age and gender specifics of immigrants' language (Ahlgren, 2020);
- linguistic challenges and language planning in groups of people with disabilities, the development of language learning models for people with special needs (De Meulder, 2017);

- language as a national treasure, as a cultural and national phenomenon that helps to preserve national identity even in unfavorable conditions (Zschomler, 2019);
- a corpus of theoretical studies in sociolinguistics and anthropology investigates the forms of practical implementation of sociolinguistics tools in foreign language teaching (Bergen, 2010);
- sociolinguistics is presented as a practically oriented discipline, the study of language communities and the specifics of their speech behavior (Rydell, 2018; Napier et al., 2007).

A separate study is devoted to sociolinguistics and its possibilities in language teaching. It primarily examines the language policy of governments, as well as the analysis of the basics of informal education (Goh, 2012; Ko et al., 2013; Gasparri et al., 2021). There is a series of studies on autonomous educational institutions, their work with specific language communities, and how they are researched and supported. The preparation of curricula is based on adaptation to students' needs and is well-systematized (Gilakjani, 2016; Duggan, 2022).

In the future, it is worth paying attention to the sociolinguistic dimensions of linguistic education, its practical aspects, and methods that facilitate foreign language learning.

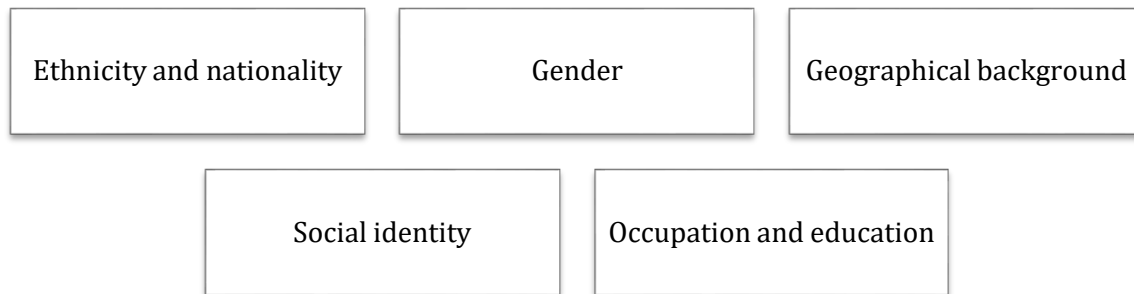
Results

The presentation of experimental data on teaching new approaches to the study of speech communities and practices at Ukrainian universities should be based on certain basic theories and aspects of sociolinguistics.

The sociolinguistics theory presents a set of factors that form the basis for forming speech communities and determine the nature of speech practices. Such knowledge should be integrated into the process of language teaching and contribute to successful communication at the level of frame creation. Therefore, the process of teaching languages and studying linguistic theory considers all the

components and conditions for the realization of speech practices in language communities.

Figure 1 – Social factors of speech practices formation from the perspectives of sociolinguistics



Source: compiled by the authors.

Ethnicity determines whether speakers or a language group belong to a certain ethnic origin. It can manifest in the emergence of significant linguistic variations at the expression level. Such changes are typical for ethnic minorities as linguistic communities, where the language of the dominant group prevails in vocabulary and the subordinate language in grammar. Pidgins are the same kind of changes as a consequence of colonization.

The gender aspect refers to the differences that exist between the linguistic behavior of men and women. First and foremost, it is a series of linguistic variables called "genderlects," where the expectations and stereotypes of society influence the perception of the speech behavior of different genders. These can be grammatical and lexical differences, as well as prosodic features.

Geographical background demonstrates a certain genesis of languages and regional differences (dialects) that can be very noticeable. Among the exciting cases are industrialized societies, where intensive migration contributes to the formation of new groups and types of linguistic behavior. These include an accent as a model of pronunciation, as well as grammatical and lexical variations from the language standard.

Social identity. Social standards and boundaries between different social groups can cause significant differences in language behavior. In some cases,

language communities use a language to separate themselves from mainstream society. It can be either a determination of their priority (the upper classes) or the need for survival and group closeness. The notion of a social standard works in terms of a division into jargons and standards. The latter are accepted by society, while jargons are "wrong", socially determined, marginalized, and perceived as an undesirable deviation from the standard.

The level of education and occupation. The language scenarios that make communication possible in society are realized through professions and a person's role as a specialist or worker in a particular sphere. All society members form their own unique style of speech based on their occupation. Unlike gender, geographic, and social class variations, occupational ones are a variable component. Such speech behavior is typical during the performance of work-related duties and may change in leisure time. However, there are variations in language behavior between people of different professions due to additional language training, knowledge, and deterministic formal and sectoral variations.

Given these parameters of the formation of language communities and the speech behavior of such community members, several research projects have been implemented as part of the "Sociolinguistics" course.

In the first stage, the following types of activities were involved in the educational process of the sociolinguistics project:

1. Organization of group work in pairs or small groups. An essential condition within the studios is an active discussion in finding the right research direction, formulating the project's goal and expected results, and searching for a research subject and object. Communication is constant between project participants.

2. Creation of a questionnaire, methods of collecting, and systematizing language materials for analysis. The group work in sociolinguistics as a factor of interactivity is a conscious part of the project. The consideration of specific and general features in the speech behavior of language community members is essential. Moreover, it should be noted that students can see differences in language

culture, understanding and interpretation of the text, and speakers' intentions as an outcome of their research.

3. Preparation of a report and writing a scientific paper based on the project results. Time limitations and the ability to study certain language communities can dictate conditions for students, making it challenging to plan research, process, and systematize their results. All these factors contribute to the development of operational and systematic research skills and teach students to formulate conclusions briefly and clearly.

At the end of the first stage, an open preliminary presentation of the projects was held, and the students' performance was evaluated.

Table 1 – Evaluation of project activities and students' performance during the first stage, %

| | Unsatisfactory | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
|---------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Group 1 | 10 | 33 | 47 | 10 |
| Group 2 | 9 | 30 | 45 | 16 |
| Group 3 | 10 | 44 | 36 | 10 |
| Group 4 | 12 | 42 | 33 | 13 |

Source: author's elaboration.

This means that project activities related to the study of the speech behavior of language communities are quite difficult for students. The number of "unsatisfactory" and "satisfactory" grades equals 48%, and the number of positive ones equals 52%. The results are actually almost equal. The project activity is intended to intensify the process of mastering knowledge and practical skills in sociolinguistics in a limited time frame. It allows students to develop the ability to approach the issue systematically and facilitates the process of acquiring new skills and knowledge. All the cognitive and interactive teaching methods make the linguistic discipline more effective.

Several methods were added to the learning process in the second stage of the experiment. These included creative research approaches to the study of language communities and the specifics of implementing factors that shape speech practices. This stage aimed to discover a language community's main features and

new stylistic and speech behavior. It is a way to rebuild theoretical knowledge, develop professional skills, and expand knowledge through practical activities.

An essential part of this methodology is the constant discussion of the results and analysis of future research steps, the development of collected materials, and the detailed elaboration of the project. In this way, students can use these classes to improve their grades.

According to these results, overall student performance improved by 8%, and the number of unsatisfactory grades decreased by 4%. Moreover, the number of "good and excellent" grades increased by 10%. As we can see, the experience of working on a research project makes it easier to master sociolinguistic tools. However, for the freshmen, the research and analysis of the obtained data is a difficult job that requires a high level of language proficiency and an orientation to the social aspects of speech activity.

Table 2 – Evaluation of students' performance in project activities at the second stage, %

| | Unsatisfactory | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
|---------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Group 1 | 5 | 28 | 52 | 15 |
| Group 2 | 7 | 26 | 50 | 17 |
| Group 3 | 7 | 30 | 48 | 15 |
| Group 4 | 8 | 37 | 40 | 15 |

Source: author's elaboration.

The final (third stage) of the experiment aimed to show how positively the respondents accepted the project-experimental activities in the field of sociolinguistics. The research team conducted a survey among students. The participants had to answer the questions and agree or disagree with the statements presented in the questionnaire.

The way of monitoring and evaluation makes it possible to determine what the student has learned and experienced in the previous stages. This is precisely the purpose of the questionnaire. The answers will help students to give an informal assessment of their preferences and vision of their career. In general, this will help

to increase the level of knowledge, further prospects in increasing the efficiency of work with complex research tasks, and self-education.

Each group assessed the importance of each criterion. The answers are presented as a percentage according to each group.

According to the survey results, respondents consider sociolinguistics to be the most valuable component of linguists' education (73% of respondents).

As confirmed by the respondents, the study of language communities and speech behavior as an educational technology will contribute to effective learning. The project work on the specific features of language communities improves the ability to analyze creatively and systematically, activates intelligence, and expands the knowledge of language and society.

Table 3 – Evaluation of the project work results in "Sociolinguistics" by the participants of the experiment, %

| Statement | G1 | G2 | G3 | G4 |
|---|----|----|----|----|
| Sociolinguistics is a necessary component of linguists' education | 72 | 72 | 85 | 66 |
| Sociolinguistics is a tool for improving speech skills | 29 | 56 | 42 | 32 |
| An ability to conduct projects and high-quality language research from a sociolinguistic perspective is mandatory | 35 | 29 | 31 | 35 |
| It is possible to gain knowledge of the culture, traditions, and mentality of native speakers | 20 | 14 | 14 | 15 |
| The study of the language communities' specifics is a part of a philologist's education | 62 | 52 | 68 | 40 |
| The knowledge of linguistic theory influences the professional level | 40 | 65 | 34 | 71 |
| Continuous work on personal speech helps to improve professionalism | 22 | 26 | 23 | 15 |
| Project work helps to understand the sociolinguistic and sociocultural constants of a language | 20 | 15 | 18 | 11 |

Source: author's elaboration.

Discussion

The importance of mastering the methods of sociolinguistics in pedagogical terms is, first of all, the ability to communicate effectively. In other words, it is the ability to "give credit to every person." It is the ability to give compliments, to

apologize, and even to remain silent. According to the scholar (Leong, 2016; Faizin, 2019), sociolinguistics cleverly encourages a person to speak according to the social context. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce the possibilities of sociolinguistics into the educational process. Only in this case students will have an idea of social contexts. In fact, a significant part of language knowledge and communication skills depends on more than just vocabulary and grammatical skills. It is necessary to consider speech behavior in general as complex. As our studies have shown, active work on sociolinguistic research improves academic performance and reduces the number of unsatisfactory grades. Moreover, 73% of respondents showed positive results when it came to understanding the need to study linguistic theory.

Modern studies in sociolinguistics (Kostusiak et al., 2023) have identified that language structures are rather in a consistent and manageable state in language groups' behavior than in the behavior of a single person. The research has shown that the community dominates separate persons and their speech actions. Furthermore, the development of standard linguistic practices takes place in their conscious association, communication, and collaboration.

Special attention should be paid to the linguistic identification of a personality. In particular, research was conducted on the linguistic behavior of certain public figures and celebrities who had a wide range of linguistic resources and discussed communications and contexts, as well as used a wide range of linguistic resources (Köktürk, 2012). The approach focused on personal identity also accounts for a set of factors that determine the main aspects of speech practices. In our opinion, the speech features of a personality develop more expressively and comprehensively in a group, where speech interaction is activated, and different communication scenarios are used.

Conclusions

Verbal interaction as a sociolinguistic phenomenon is based on many factors, features, and conditions of its realization with its own specificity. The study of speech practices performed within certain language communities should be based on the following factors:

- Geographical location;
- Gender aspects of representation;
- Sociocultural practices;
- Occupational and social determination, as well as its role in society.

In practice, sociolinguistics-related studies and practical assignments are aimed at mastering complex and diverse theoretical material and demonstrating their practical application possibilities. An essential part of a successful and high-quality project in the field of language community research is to understand the motivation and pragmatics of building speech practices as one of the manifestations of speakers' socialization in a group.

The study revealed that students' success in mastering sociolinguistic practices is based on the use of interactive teaching methods, language studies, and modern linguistic achievements. According to our research, the introduction of such projects helps to increase students' academic performance by 10% overall. At the same time, the number of unsatisfactory grades decreased by 4%.

Innovative teaching methods in the field of sociolinguistics aim to make the study of linguistic theory more effective and high-quality. They should account for modern achievements in the field of interactive teaching methods, project work, and group work. It is also important to collect, systematize, and interpret various discourse practices. Students should be taught to perceive lexical innovations as a creative process and the translation of even an author's novelties from English as the standard for university education.

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