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**INFLUENCE OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC FACTORS ON LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE: A
PRAGMATIC STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between language acquisition and social characteristics of speakers (such as age, sex, socio-economic status, education etc.) has intrigued laypeople for centuries, but it is a general tendency to treat such phenomenon and such studies as marginal or as supplementary. Sociolinguistics attempts to identify the interaction between some of the universal factors involved in the process of learning a language. The context of the situation in which an utterance is said is very important in deciding its overall meaning. Sociolinguistic factors are necessary to understand the process of acquisition of language. The present paper is an effort to find out the influence of sociolinguistic factors on learning of English language. The questionnaire was prepared and the data obtained through the field sampling method was put under various statistical tests. The results establish that there is a strong influence of sociolinguistic factors (both microsocial and macrosocial) on learning English language skills especially speaking.

Keywords-Sociolinguistics, language acquisition, context, society, factors, significance.

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INTRODUCTION

Language and society are so intertwined that it is impossible to understand one without the other. There is no human society that doesn't depend upon, is not shaped by and does not itself shape language. To quote Avrorin:

“ Language cannot exist and develop outside society. The development of language is ultimately stimulated by the needs of social development. But we cannot overlook the reverse dependence either”.¹

Sociolinguistics studies show that people change their language use depending on their social roles and attitudes. Some examples of sociolinguistic studies include gendered language differences, regional differences, and how social class impacts language use. There is, therefore, a very close relationship between society and language. Even though the need for analysis of language in its social context was felt by many authors, linguists, sociologists and even psychologists, much of the work in sociolinguistics was done in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The term 'sociolinguistics' first appeared in 1950 in a work by Haver C. Currie, whose intention was to encourage investigation into the relation between speech behaviour and social status: "The present purpose is

to suggest ... that social functions and significations of speech factors offer a prolific field for research ... This field is here designated sociolinguistics.”²

Currie with his interest in the actual, in the text and its relation to its surrounding, developed the notion of 'context of situation' into a valuable tool for linguistic inquiry. Language and its variations are influenced by several social factors, including socioeconomic status, education, ethnicity, geographic location, and age. These social factors shape and influence the way people speak a language, resulting in language variation and varieties. **Sociolinguistics** is the descriptive study of the interaction between society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context and language and the ways it is used. It can overlap with the sociology of language, which focuses on the effect of language on society. Sociolinguistics influences, and is influenced by pragmatics, and is closely related to linguistic anthropology. In the words of R.A. Hudson- "Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to society”.³

It is the field that studies the relation between language and society, between the uses of language and the social structures in which the users of language live. The focus in sociolinguistic approach to language is on the speech act in all its social dimensions, on linguistic interacting with socio-cultural structures and on the study of language not in isolation but as part of culture and society. Language education involves not only the elaboration of a grammatical system, but also the ability to use language as an instrument for learning and the ability to use language appropriately in varying contexts. It must go beyond language and bring in social context. It must deal with the 'real' texts that make up human communication and the social situation in which they are used.

Need of Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is important for language acquisition because it helps learners understand how language works in society and how to speak and write appropriate. Second language acquisition involves a wide range of language learning setting and learner characteristics and circumstances. The circumstances, under which second language acquisition takes place, sometimes need to be taken into account although they are perhaps too often taken for granted and ignored. Researches show that whatever is learned by the learner helps him in further learning. Learning strategies formed and perfected during first language acquisition are drawn upon to face the challenges of second language learning. It is this 'input' from his first language that goes into the acquisition of the second language.

Sociolinguistics helps learners understand that many factors influence how they acquire and use a language, including geography, age, socioeconomic status, and how they are taught the language. For example, an immigrant learning English in the United States may pick up different vocabulary and phrasing depending on whether they live in a rural area or a city. The process of Second Language Acquisition as languages do not exist independent of the contexts in which they are used, it is logical to assume that they cannot be acquired in isolation. Therefore in addition to individual differences (such as age, sex, attitude, personality etc.) the social milieu, the formal and informal language acquisition contexts play in important role. The most important role of sociolinguistics in language teaching is to provide the learners with the appropriate rules of speaking and writing and raise their sociolinguistics awareness, that's to say, the awareness of the socio-cultural differences across languages. First language acquisition Learning strategies and Second language learning strategies acquisition are often influenced by powerful social, cultural and economic factors affecting the status of the both languages and learners. Hence, one cannot make any major advance towards understanding the mechanism of second language acquisition without a serious study of the social factors which motivate linguistic evolution. Language input to the learner is absolutely necessary for either L1 or L2 learning to take place.

Sociolinguistic factors are necessary to understand the process of language acquisition. These factors can be broadly categorized into two- Macrosocial and Microsocial. Microsocial factors include age, education, occupation and linguistic background of the parents among others. While Macrosocial factors include family, peer group, mass media, neighbourhood, type of school attended etc., each to some extent characterized by its particular set of role relations such as parent-child in the family, child in peer group and so forth. These factors roughly serve as social indices. Language is essentially a social phenomenon. But, there are many facets to be

considered in the study of language and society. We must recognize that there is more to the relationship between sound and meaning than is dreamt of in normal linguistic theory. The meaning of an utterance (sentence, clause, phrase, word etc.) does not depend entirely on its form; it also depends on its function in setting. Therefore we must look at language not only from within but also from without.

Language is the most dominant symbol of the behaviour which influences social factors. It helps to communicate and deliver our point of views for a specific thing such as arguing over politics, talking about economic conditions of a country or giving suggestions for the improvement of the educational system . It is quite a surprising fact that we often judge a person, his background, culture and cast by his or her language. Sociolinguistics is the study of the relation between language and society. The objective of Sociolinguistics is to study the consequences of the language used in societies. In many theoretical perspectives, it has been observed that language and society are mutually constitutive, which means society and language both have an impact on each other and it is not possible to separate and understand the influences . Sociolinguistics is an interdisciplinary subject that combines sociology and linguistics. It mainly studies the linguistic variation produced by various social factors and tries to study the influence of social factors on language and its results .

This paper is an effort to highlight the influence of sociolinguistic factors on the process of learning English language skills. The broad hypothesis for this research study is –There is no significant association between sociolinguistic factors and learning of English language skills .Questionnaire method was used to collect the samples. Various questions based on the sociolinguistic background of the respondents and language skills was asked. Following were the results obtained:

I. Influence of Gender on Learning of English Language Skills:

H01- There is no association between gender and learning of English Language skills.

H11- There is association between gender and learning of English Language skills. After the application of statistical tests, it was found that the gender of the respondents has no significant influence on learning of English Language skills. Hence our null hypothesis gets approved and the alternative hypothesis gets rejected.

II. Influence of Course Type on Learning of English Language Skills:

H02- There is no association between course type and learning of English Language skills.

H12- There is association between course type and learning of English Language skills. The result of the statistical tests clearly demonstrate that the course type of the respondent has significant influence on the learning of English language, writing skills, but it has no significant influence on learning of other three skills i.e., reading, listening and speaking. Hence our null hypothesis gets rejected in the case of writing skills.

III) Influence of Place of Birth on Learning of English Language Skills:

H03 - There is no association between place of birth and learning of English language skills. H13- There is association between place of birth and learning of English language speaking skills. The statistical tests clearly suggest that place of birth of the respondents has significance influence on the learning of English language speaking skills, but it has no significant influence on learning of other skills i.e reading, listening and writing.

IV) Influence of First Language Learnt before Going to School on Learning of English Language Skills:

H04 - There is no association between first language learnt before going to school and learning of English language skills.

H14- There is association between first language learnt before going to school and learning of English language skills. After the application of statistical tests, it was found that the first language learnt before going to school has no significant influence on the learning of English language skills. Hence, our null hypothesis gets approved and the alternative hypothesis gets rejected.

V) Influence of Parent's Educational Qualification on Learning of English Language Skills:

H05- There is no association between the educational qualification of father and mother on learning of English language skills.

H15- There is association between the educational qualification of father and mother on learning of English language skills.

After the statistical tests were applied, it was found that father's educational qualification has significant influence on the learning of English language writing and speaking skills, but it has no influence on reading and listening skills. Thus, the null hypothesis gets approved in the case of reading and listening skills, while it is rejected in the case of writing and speaking skills. Similarly, it was found through statistical tests, that mother's educational qualification has significant influence on the learning of English language reading, writing and speaking skills, but it has no influence on listening skills. Hence the null hypothesis gets approved for listening skill, while it gets disapproved in the case of reading, writing and speaking skills, but it has no influence on listening skills. Hence the null hypothesis gets approved for listening skill, while it gets disapproved in the case of reading, writing and speaking skills.

VI) Influence of Parent's Occupation on Learning of English Language Skills:

H06- There is no association between the occupation of father and mother on learning of English language skills.

H16- There is association between the occupation of father and mother on learning of English language skills.

The statistical tests reveals that father's occupation has significant influence on the learning of English language speaking skills, but it has no influence on reading, writing and listening skills. Therefore, the null hypothesis gets approved for reading, writing and listening skills and disapproved for speaking skill. Similarly, the statistical tests show that mother's occupation has significant influence on the learning of English language reading skills, but it has no influence on speaking, writing and listening skills. Hence, the null hypothesis gets rejected in the case of reading skills, and accepted in the case of speaking, writing and listening skills.

VII). Influence of Medium of Instruction at School Attended by the Respondent on Learning of English Language Skills:

H07- There is no association between the medium of instruction at school attended and learning of English language skill.

H17- There is association between the medium of instruction at school attended and learning of English language skill. The statistical tests show that the medium of instruction at school attended has significant influence on the learning of English language reading ,writing and speaking skills ,but it has no influence on listening skills .Hence, our null hypothesis gets approved for listening skills and rejected for reading ,writing and speaking skills.

Thus, it was found that one cannot make any major advance towards understanding the mechanism of second language acquisition without a serious study of the social factors which motivate linguistic evolution. Each linguistic item is related to some aspect or aspects of society because language is a cultural and social institution.

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