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

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ABSTRACT

Language is basically a human phenomenon and it is as complex as human relationships in a society. Learning a second language is a long and complex undertaking. It involves a wide range of language learning settings and learner characteristics and circumstances. The relationship between language acquisition and social characteristics of speakers (such as age, sex, socio-economic status, education etc.) has intrigued lay people for centuries, but it is a general tendency to treat such phenomenon and such studies as marginal or as supplementary.

Sociolinguistics makes an attempt to identify the interaction between some of the universal factors involved in the process of learning language. It studies language as it is used and of society as it communicates. Language is generally studied devoid of its context. However, the context of situation in which an utterance is said is very important in deciding its overall meaning. Therefore process of language acquisition should also be studied by taking social context into cognizance.

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 speaking skills .Questionnaire was prepared and the data obtained through field sampling method was put under various statistical tests. The results clearly establish the influence of sociolinguistic factors (both microsocial and macrosocial) on learning of English language skills specially speaking .

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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. Human society cannot do without language, as it is the most important, most perfect and

universal means of communications, which aids in the formation of thought and accumulation and transmission of expression.¹

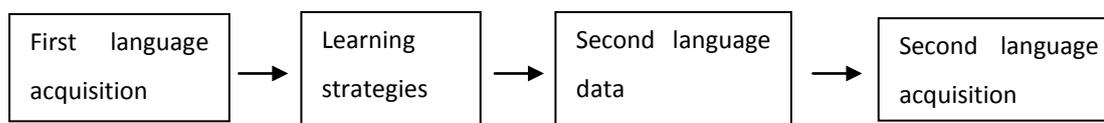
There is therefore, a very close relationship between society and language.

A concern with language and social man has for a long time been one of the perspectives of modern linguistics. 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. He was greatly influenced by the notions of 'context of culture' and 'context of situation' developed by Firth and Malinowski. Language from this point of view was a range of possibilities, an open ended set of options in behaviour that were available to the individual in his existence as social man. At first Currie's formulations projecting an interdisciplinary field of research remained merely a program. But later on, the pioneering work done by Labov, Bickerton, Halliday, Trudgill, i.e Page, Gumperz, Fishman, Hymes etc. has irrevocably changed the face of linguistic science.

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 and society interaction form the main field of sociolinguistics. The close intertwining of linguistic and social facts is crucial to a sociolinguistic approach. Sociolinguists believe that study of language must go beyond the sentences that are the principal focus of descriptive and theoretical linguistics. 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. A sociolinguist is interested in the way members of a speech community can, and do identify and respond to fine differences in language usage that are associated with in a speech community with social or economic or political or religious or cultural or other divisions of the society. Sociolinguistics studies the characteristics of language varieties, the characteristics of their functions, and the characteristics of their speakers as these three constantly interact and change both within and between speech communities. The existence of patterned variation in language makes it possible to identify ourselves and others as belonging to certain groups .

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.



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.

What is learned in acquiring a second language, as well as how it is learned, is often influenced by whether the situation involves informal exposure to speakers of other languages, immersion in a setting where one needs a new language to meet basic needs, or formal instruction in school and these learning conditions are often profoundly influenced by powerful social, cultural and economic factors affecting the status of the both languages and learners.

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. In addition to individual differences (such as age, sex, attitude, personality etc.) the social milieu, the formal and informal language acquisition contexts play an important role. 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. Language is not simply a formal system of sounds, words and syntactical structures; language also reaches into the domain of human interaction, which for its own part follows certain rules. In other words, 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.

This paper is an effort to find out the influence of sociolinguistic factors on the process of learning English language skills, specially speaking and writing. 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. The results obtained were tested after the application of statistical tests such as SPSS(Software Programme for Social Sciences)with Chi Square Test, t-Test and One Way Anova (with 0.05 level of significance and 95% confidence level).Following were the results obtained:

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

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

H₁₁- There is association between gender and learning of English Language Speaking 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 speaking skills. Hence our null hypothesis gets approved and the alternative hypothesis gets rejected.

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

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

H₁₂- There is association between course type and learning of English Language speaking 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. However, it gets accepted when the other three skills-reading, listening and speaking are taken into consideration.

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

H₀₃ - There is no association between place of birth and learning of English language speaking 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. Hence, our null hypothesis gets rejected in the case of speaking skills and accepted in the case of reading, listening and writing skills.

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

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

H₁₄- There is association between first language learnt before going to school and learning of English language speaking 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 Speaking Skills:

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

H₁₅- There is association between the educational qualification of father and mother on learning of English language speaking 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 Speaking Skills:

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

H₁₆- There is association between the occupation of father and mother on learning of English language speaking 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 Speaking Skills:

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

H₁₇- There is association between the medium of instruction at school attended and learning of English language speaking 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 proficiency in English was influenced more by factors such as place of birth, course type, parent's educational qualification, type of school attended, parent's occupation and the medium

of instruction at school attended. However factors such as gender, first language learnt before going to school and linguistic background of the family members has no significant bearing upon the informant's proficiency in English language.

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. When such speculations are made, we may come to some broad understanding between language items and society without trying to be very rigid or highly predictive or too scientific.

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