SOCIOLINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: The article explores the relationship between sociolinguistic diversity and English language learning in a multilingual classroom in Uzbekistan. Based on the observations of eighteen eighth-grade students from Uzbek, Kazakh, Russian, Turkish, Korean, Nigerian and British backgrounds, the study demonstrates how ethnicity, first language (L1) transfer, accent, and cultural norms shape classroom discourse and second language acquisition. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the findings demonstrate how linguistic profiling, gendered expectations and code-switching practices influence both participation and evaluation in the classroom. The article argues that sociolinguistic awareness and culturally responsive pedagogy are essential for equitable English teaching in multilingual classrooms.

Keywords:sociolinguistics, multilingualism, identity, raciolinguistics, English as a foreign language

INTRODUCTION

Language is not a neutral tool. It is closely linked to identity, culture, and power. In multilingual classrooms, like those in urban Uzbekistan, learning English goes beyond just grammar and vocabulary. It also shows social status, cultural interaction, and how students express their identities. The mix of students from different ethnic and language backgrounds turns English into a meeting point for many voices. The differences in pronunciation, grammar, and conversation style reveal larger social and cultural patterns.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars agree that language both reflects and shapes social identity. Wardhaugh and Fuller emphasize that sociolinguistic variation is not random but connected to social norms and power relations [6]. The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis posits that language categories shape our perception of the world. Rosa and Flores argue that ideas about race and language are intertwined, creating judgments that favor whiteness and marginalize others [5]. Fought shows that ethnicity is expressed through how people use language—their intonation, politeness, and discourse strategies [3]. Baecher calls for differentiated instruction to help learners from diverse backgrounds gain equitable access [1]. Gray critiques global ELT coursebooks for reinforcing Western values and gender stereotypes while excluding local realities [4]. Together, these viewpoints lay the groundwork for exploring English language learning in Uzbekistan's multilingual classrooms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study is based on qualitative descriptive observation. The participants were eighteen eighth-grade students aged thirteen to fourteen at a private Russian-medium school in an urban setting in Uzbekistan. The group included students of Uzbek, Kazakh, Russian, Turkish, Korean, Nigerian, and British backgrounds. Their proficiency levels ranged from CEFR A2+ to B2. Data

were collected through classroom observations of student interaction, oral production, and project work, with attention to linguistic transfer, code-switching, cultural behaviour, gender roles, and teacher or peer evaluations.

The scope of linguistic variability in the class was wide. Uzbek and Turkish learners tended to transfer agglutinative word order into English, producing sentences such as "She to school every day goes." They often omitted articles and struggled with consonant clusters, saying "iskool" instead of "school." Russian and Kazakh learners omitted auxiliary verbs, producing "He tired," or carried over Russian word order, producing "To school I yesterday went." They showed variability in vowel stress and phonological interference in the pronunciation of voiced consonants. Korean learners omitted plurals and articles, saying "I want be doctor," and confused the sounds /r/ and /l/, producing "light" and "right" interchangeably. Their syllable-timed rhythm interfered with the stress-timed rhythm of English. Nigerian students brought features of Nigerian English, producing constructions such as "She go come tomorrow," which were corrected as errors despite being rule-governed [7].

Raciolinguistic profiling and identity-informed evaluation were observed among peers and instructors. Colloquial idioms such as "I'll give you a bell" were accepted without correction, whereas Russian-accented English and Nigerian discourse forms were corrected or marked as uncertain more frequently. Korean students' rising intonation was often misinterpreted as a lack of confidence, although in Korean it serves as a politeness marker [3]. These asymmetries support Rosa and Flores's argument that whiteness is privileged as a marker of linguistic correctness [5].

Although formal advocacy for gender equality occurred in the classroom, resistance rooted in culture was still present. The female students increasingly assumed leadership roles in activities, while some Uzbek male students resisted participation in classroom cleaning, labelling it as "girls' work." This required teacher-led discussions on shared responsibility and equity, as gendered cultural assumptions continued to shape classroom roles [3].

Code-switching was a habitual practice, with Russian adopted as the lingua franca. Students were observed clarifying meaning in Russian—e.g., "Что значит challenge?"—and then returning to English. This practice facilitated comprehension and participation, demonstrating that multilingualism functioned as a strength rather than a weakness [2]. Uzbek dialectal varieties such as Tashkent, Fergana, and Karakalpak also appeared in oral communication, confirming that diversity existed even within a single ethnicity.

Culture significantly shaped classroom behaviour. Uzbek and Kazakh students tended toward indirect participation, expressing respect through taciturnity, posture, and refraining from interruption. Korean students adhered to Confucian traditions, bowing before authority and avoiding direct eye contact. Russian students were formally polite, hesitant in speech, and refrained from using colloquial expressions. The Nigerian student employed an expressive, rhetorical style, utilizing proverbs and repetition, which at times was perceived as overly performative. These examples substantiate that ethnicity is performed through classroom behaviour, speech rhythm, and discourse style [3].

Pedagogical implications are clearly drawn from the results. Teachers in such classrooms need to implement differentiated instruction, providing scaffolded support for struggling learners and open-ended activities for advanced ones [1]. Textbooks should be adapted to local contexts—for example, substituting British soap operas with Uzbek equivalents or including references to local

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culture [4]. Multiple English varieties, such as Nigerian English and local British English, should be incorporated into the curriculum to address linguistic bias. Gender equity must be intentionally promoted through rotating leadership, examining stereotypes in textbooks, and encouraging balanced participation. Cultural responsiveness should also be integrated into lessons by including holidays such as Navruz, Chuseok, or Eid in English projects, thereby affirming learners' identities and connecting language learning with authentic cultural practices.

CONCLUSION

Sociolinguistic variation exerts a significant influence on English language learning in the multilingual contexts of Uzbekistan. Factors such as L1 and L2 interference, raciolinguistic profiling, gender expectations, and cultural norms shape how students interact and are evaluated. Teachers should adopt culturally responsive pedagogies, recognize the legitimacy of multiple English varieties, and challenge linguistic hierarchies to foster equitable classrooms. Through such efforts, English language learning can move beyond a deficit paradigm toward resource-based perspectives that empower students as multilingual individuals equipped for global engagement.

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