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The Interplay Of Language And Social Identity: A Comprehensive Sociolinguistic Review

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Abstract

This paper seeks to discuss the role of language in defining social identity and as the paper shall bring out this argument, it shall give an overview of sociolinguistic theories and empirical evidence that shall underline the work of language in defining social identity. To do this the social identity concepts of ethnicity, gender, class and age are examined to consider how these are linguistically policed and sustained through communicative practices. Thus, by demonstrating how the linguistic choices support or disrupt the existing power relations, the paper reveals the interaction between language and social organizations. The review also reviews the multilingual and multicultural contexts thus investigating identity processes ¹ such as code switching and language mixing which underscores the dynamics of identity in a global society. In addition, the paper also provides a reflection of the significance of the aforementioned the findings towards the improvement of relating and integrating of people in the newly asserted diverse societies thus stressing on the fact that language is both a mirror and a tool of people's identity.

Keywords: Language and identity, sociolinguistics, ethnicity, gender, class, age, codeswitching, multilingualism, social structures, identity negotiation, inclusive communication.

I. Introduction

It thus became a common focus of sociolinguistic research how language and social identity are intertwined, how language practices index society, in other words how they osmotically shaping society and how society shapes language. This review goes a long way in exploring issues of this interplay by focusing on how language is an operational mechanism in efforts to perform identity across the different social contexts. In the light of recent studies it can be clearly seen that the language is not just a tool that is passively used by the people to convey certain messages but it can also be seen as a socially constructive force that helps to shape the identities of individuals as well as the society (N. Edwards , 2009). A sociolinguistic analysis of language variation has also always shown that dialect, code-switching and style are certainly indicators of social identity (Gumperz 1982; Eckert 2000). For instance, associating regional accents with the wider community denotes a person's association to a certain region or culture while code-switching common among multilingual speakers describes the social and cultural fluidity that such persons exhibit (Milroy & Milroy, 1992). Also, new developments in the field

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contributed to enhance our knowledge of how technology modify identity and positioning proposing that, through the use of new technologies, people are reinventing more classical media language rules and, as a result, changing their social identity (Danet & Herring, 2007). Trying to sum up these notions, this chapter offers the reader the general insight into the essence of language as the versatile and context-bound means of social identity construction. The discussion also consider the these implications in the context of sociolinguistic theory and practice as it pertains to questions of power, resistance and social transformation (Blommaert, 2010).

Social identity is one of the most popular concepts in the sociology and psychology exploring the mechanism whereby people define themselves as well as others in different social settings. It involves the individual's frame of reference based on the perceived groups membership which includes nationality, ethnic group, religion, and/or occupation (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Social identity is the dynamic and contextual construct that can be constantly changing due to the individual's interactions with other people and his/her personal transformations. When in different social circumstances, people can change their identity to subscribe to the culture of the group (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). This dynamic process underlines a number of processes and show that social identity is vital for comprehending people's behavior within the context of social structures.

Language is proving to be very central in the formation of social identity since it is both a symbol and resource of forming group identity. There is a clear and unambiguous understanding in sociolinguistic works that language acts as a marker where spaces-of-variation of accent, dialect and linguistic style signify different social, ethnic, and cultural origins (Labov, 1972; Fishman, 1999). The manner in which people speak also tends to help them assert membership of certain social circles as well as mark their difference from other circles. It is not constructed as a result of the identities one has but as an ongoing accomplishment which people engage in while interacting with others (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Further, language is be a major site for the construction of identity when social groups' boundaries are ambiguous or modifiable; thus sociolinguistics and social psychology cannot overlook language.

Thus, the aim of this review is to describe various aspects of the interaction between language and social identity based on the literature of sociolinguistics. To achieve the mentioned purpose, the review seeks to review the relevant theories together with empirical data that explores the role of language as a badge and a builder of the social identity in different settings. In so doing, it aims at offering a theoretical elaboration of the ways in which language use impacts on the developmental processes of social categorization and identity. The sociolinguistic issues of this paper will analyze language variation, bilingualism, code switching and new media and technology which all play roles in defining language as an element in the construction of social relationships. In addition, this review also incorporates the analysis of the key psychological theories that concern the subject of sociolinguistic analysis because this approach achieves a more comprehensive perspective of the ways language construct social identity in various social contexts.

II. Theoretical Foundations

Sociolinguistic theories give a paradigmatic view of the connections that exist between language and identity, stressing how language systems and practices are rooted in social contexts. Linguistic variation is one of the earliest theories that have been proposed in this area by Labov (1972) which clearly stated that language variation is far from being random; they are socially relevant and have a clear correlation with factors such as class, ethnicity, gender and so on. This theory has been helpful in showing the ability of language to be used as a

mechanism of identifying social classes and groups. Furthermore, Gumperz (1982) Interactional-sociolinguistic theory established that interactional context plays a major part in determining linguistic conductance as a direct reflection of social personality of the interactants and their social bond with others. These theories have been further advanced by other scholars including Eckert (2000) whereby she rejected the concepts of style and accent to come up with "community of practice" where identity is shaped through social practices that involve language. Such theoretical frameworks emphasize language use as a sociocultural asset for building, negotiating an asserting identity, and can form a sound theoretical background for studying the relations between language and social identity across various cultural and social contexts.

SIT baselines its foundation on the work of Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposing elaborate theory that explains how groups are formed, how individuals classify themselves or others and how they act, react and identify in relation to a certain group. In terms of applicability to linguistic study, SIT is particularly useful since it provides understanding of how language works as a sign of group identity and as the tool of group inclusion or exclusion of particular individuals. It is noteworthy to mention that the choice of the dialect by a communication partner, code switching, as well as use of certain language in one or another situation can be viewed as strategic actions through which people build and negotiate the social identities they want to embrace as well as reject (Giles & Johnson, 1987). According to SIT, part of a person's selfimage comes from an understanding of ones social identity and this is evident in Language. This theoretical construct has been helpful in sociolinguistic research especially in those involving identification of correlations between variability of language and social characteristics as well as the ways in which individuals are able to reply to linguistic complexity of social situations (Coupland, 2007). SIT has enriched the understanding of the relationship between language and identity, when linked with the linguistic approach, the researchers described how the use of certain language features fosters the construction of particular identities, as well as how the language used influences identity.

Intersectionality, first coined by Crenshaw in 1989, can be best described as a method of analyzing how two or more axes of oppression—most commonly race, gender, class and sexuality—operate simultaneously in the context of an individual's experience and society. Beyond sociology and political contexts, intersectionality is a helpful theoretical framework for analyzing how these multiple aspects of individuals shape language and/or linguistic practices. People do not live in vacuum, they work, study, socialize and communicate in environment where their self is not a single entity but is constituted by multiple facets and so it is with their language. For instance, a woman and an immigrant who is also a bilingual may speak a particular language or accent to reflect on her gender, race and immigration status at the same time (Mesthrie et al., 2009). In this regard, it is possible to investigate how precisely linguistic practices may be subversive both of structures of structure of oppression as well as hegemonic in its nature (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Thus, the sociolinguistic perspective that takes into account the multiple identities' influences on language will help to elucidate properly the role of language as one of the crucial elements of social identity performance.

III. Language as a Marker of Group Identity

Ethnicity is a very important factor when it comes to language, as language has the potential of being used to define ethnicity. The identify of ethnic groups has been significantly described by sociolinguistic in how ethnic groups have embraced the use of language to express their ethnic values and distinguish their selves from other groups (Fishman, 1999). Ethnolinguistic vitality was defined by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) as the dynamic strength of an ethnolinguistic group and its ability to sustain and employ its language which reflects its

involves the group's identity. For instance, the continued utilization of AAVE by the blacks serves both the interest of ethnicity by keeping them together and the interest of language by resisting the prompting of the mainstream society (Morgan, 2002). To this extent, it is by speaking a particular language that the process of defiance and the safeguarding of the local culture are executed. That immigrant groups continue to speak ethnic languages at home even though their children are likely to grow up an Anglophone society supports the close relationship between language and ethnicity (Zentella, 1997). They flow show the connote of language as a definite symbol of ethnicity of the people besides representing social constructs of differentiation and unity among the Gacaca tribunals.

Gender has a great impact on the language and many sociolinguistic studies show that each gender identity has some specific phonological and syntactic patterns. Thereby stating that language helps in creating gender because different genders use language to portray their roles and act in a certain way during their interactions with others (Butler 1990). For instance, studies conducted by Lakoff (1975) have established that, while using a language, women and men may differ since women are known to be more proper than men and as such they are likely to use polite forms of the language, hedges and tag questions. Still, these linguistic practices are not simply the way in which women and men perform gender norms but a way by which people engage gendered positions within a given culture on an active basis (Cameron, 2005). Furthermore, recent trends in sociolinguistic would suggest that sociolinguists' awareness of gender as a variable is broadening to include more than just that binary between male and female; sociolinguists are beginning to understand gender identities as something that exceeds this binary; there is, albeit somewhat minimally, recognition of non-binary and trans-identities; people also recognize how gender identities are constructed and performed through language (Eckert & These implications underline language as another significant weapon in the creation of gender and the formation of gendered identities and thus an important focus of sociolinguistic inquiry.

Hence socio-economic status and social class are strong factors of variation within language and within the structure and practice of language. This social factor has been evidenced by sociolinguistic studies where it is clear that the language which is used by different people in society is tagged according to social classes (Labov, 1966). These patterns are not only indices of SE status, but are also the ways in which exclusion and segregation are organized and reinforced. For instance, Trudgill (1974) pointed out that while using the English language, upper class tends to stick to the formal English than the working class whose pronunciation may be seen to be substandard. At the same time, however, these non-standard forms act as markers of belongingness to a particular group and thus reflect working-class solidarity, which also proves that there is a strong connection between linguistic variation and social class (Milroy & Milroy, 1992). What makes SES relationship with linguistic variation even more complex is things like; education levels, types of employments and migration. Consequently, these findings demonstrate the importance of confining social class whenever evaluating linguistic variation.

This paper will therefore seek to compare the use of language among the different generations based on the age factor as the key determinant of the variation in languages used by people in the society. In accordance with sociolinguistics studies, it is proved that language is a dynamic process; changes are most often initiated with young people (Eckert, 1997). This characteristic can be observed in such processes as formation of new lexis, phonological innovation and grammatical innovations as they all work to set the younger generations apart from the previous ones (Tagliamonte & Roberts, 2005). The seen generational differences in language use are not a question of language change alone, but also a social change a question of culture, technology and diverse sociological identities. For instance Crystal, (2008) noted that technologies of new-

generation communication have produced fresh linguistic forms among the youthful people in the society including the textisms and emojis. It is therefore important for the analysis of age related linguistic variation to unravel how language influences and is influenced by generational identity.

IV. Language and the Construction of Personal Self.

Code-switching – the use of two or more languages or dialect in the context of discussion is a significant part of the construction of the position of the individual. This linguistic practice is not simply an indication of the learner's linguistic knowledge but the way speakers use language to manage and cope with intricate social realities and to perform diverse roles and selves (Gumperz, 1982). According to Myers-Scotton (1993), in multilingual situations, people switch codes in order to fit into a certain social group, to establish their identity or to regulate interpersonal interaction in different ways. For example, a bilingual person may switch to the ethnic language to feel close to their group members or to mark the difference from the others while in the status-oriented situation, he or she may use the language of power (Auer 1998). In this way, code-switching allows the person to constantly define her/himself depending on the situation and meeting the requirements of different interactants. The dynamic process shows the process through which language constructs and/or performs the act of identity, thereby underlining the importance of code-switching as a research interest in sociolinguistics and identity studies.

Therefore, while monolingualism has identity management approach that often responds to stereotypical notions, approaches, or representations in singular cultural forms of identification, multilingualism offers identity transformation, a flexibility wherein one can manage and/or negotiate multiple forms of identification in more than one cultural setting. The high level of flexibility that is observed in the code-switching process allows the people, who are developing multilingual, to regulate the way of their language behavior depending on the context of the current social interaction, thus, they express various aspects of their personality whenever it is necessary (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). This variability of the language choice is especially noticeable in multicultural societies, where people switch between languages in the process of "acts of identity" in which languages are selected which are most appropriate to the observer culture, prior roles, or specific context (Leung, Harris & Rampton, 1997). For instance, the same person may use a given language for cultural purpose in a family and another language to meet societal expectations while at work. Besides, this gives people a chance to make themselves heard and to change their roles according to the current social contexts. Multilingualism therefore provides important understanding of the process of identity and its function and also the function of language in the representation of identity.

Thus, language is an essential component, which can be regarded as a mediator between young people and their roots as well as it is the tool for accommodation to new conditions of a new society. Concept also to many diasporas communities' preservation of language dialect is very important because of the social and cultural, so members of this community feel that they belong there (Fishman, 1991). However, language may also be a source of conflict, in which peoples have to live in between respecting their language and culture and the need to acclimatize to conform and use the language of the host country (Garcia, 2009). This fine line leads to the creation of such hybrid linguistic behaviors through which a person uses more than one language to embody or signify a dual or a multiple form of culture and life practice (Rampton, 1995). Language is cultural capital in diaspora context in which people factors individual and group identity and navigate the spaces of ethnic and social imaginary. Language is a central component in these processes since it not only mirrors but also engulfs the processes inherent in the construct of diasporic identities.

V. Case Studies and Empirical Evidence

It has been ethnography which has given a real insight into the complex roles, which language plays as a signifier of social status across different cultures. These studies afford detailed contextually grounded understanding of how people and cultures employ language to build, manage and perform their selves. For instance, in her book, Heller (1992) draws on the ideological model to analyze how language is used to build up nationalism in the French-speaking part of Canada as well as how code-switching and bilingualism are used in management of multiple identity politics. Along the same line, Rampton (1995) explores language crossing in multiracial cities where the people use language to cross ethnic divisions and therefore perform identity that undermining ethnocentrism. The ethnographic concepts show significant real life account in the fluctuating relationship between language and social identity: employment of language is not solely a mirror image of the social taxonomy but rather a tool that participants use to reconnoiter and renegotiate the social taxonomy. ethnographic research thereby offer a holistic view of the practices of using language giving important details regarding language and self-/identity construction.

Arising from a laboratory setting, the pattern of language use and social identity brings up experimental evidence is especially useful as they offer quantitative data for ethnographic work. These studies tend to include change of specific linguistic variables to see their impact on identity and sociability categorization. For example, in an experiment by Giles and Johnson, (1981) it was established that participants' attitudes towards the speaker depended on the standard or the non- standard dialect used, therefore emphasizing the role of language in the formation of identity. Similarly, language priming research has also found that specific cue can bring into operation certain social categorizations, a result in which behavior and attitudes are altered (Chen & Bond, 2010). These experimental approaches offer strong support for hypothesis that language use is organizers of social identification processes and indicate that even minor differences in language use may lead to the highly important consequences for people's perceptions and self-perceptions. Such findings make it possible for researchers to discover the processes by which language constitutes social identity by decomposing them into their cognitive and social components.

Cross cultural as well as cross linguistic comparisons are valuable as we are able to notice the process through which language and identity are constructed in different cultures. These researches pay attention to both general approach to language as the social category and the specificity of language representation of identity in various cultures. For example, Kashima and Kashima (1998) conducted a comparative analysis of the Japanese and the Australian English language and concluded that while the Japanese language is very formal, the social norms in such culture reflect formality of language and conformity to authority figures, in the AUssie English the language is less formal the social norms are more liberal and encourage individualism. In a similar vein, Blommaert (2010) himself also discussed how the processes of globalization and transnationalism with increase superdiversity, meaning multiple languages and thus identities and hence identity constructions which can and indeed do differ greatly across different contexts. The above comparative research thus highlights the need to take culture and language differences into account while undertaking sociolinguistic research since even as language is a universal symbol of identity across communities; the manner in which this identity is invoked and negotiated is informed and shaped significantly by cultural beliefs and practices.

VI. Language, Power, and Identity

It is further revealed that language ideologies which are people's attitudes towards certain tongues significantly support existing power relations in given societies. These ideologies are

bound to come out in the process that regards some languages or dialects as superior to others, which keeps echoing the existing social order (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). For instance, the world standard language ideologies, where the use of the standard national language is considered as the norm means that speakers of the regional or other non-standard named dialects are excluded and the social hierarchy is based on language differences (Lippi-Green, 2012). This ideologies not only impact the language behavior of these people but also their social persona as language assumes cultural importance that defines the class and community affiliations of people. In educational and professional contexts these ideologies can result in the systematic marginalization of those who do not speak the standard variety of the dominant group, thus perpetuating structures of social power and of blocked social mobility (Bourdieu 1991). Language ideologies are thus crucial to know how power maintains language as a tool of reproducing socio-political relations.

Linguicism is defined as the unfair treatment of people based on their language or the way they speak and it has deep effects on the process of identity and belonging. There is always a correlation between linguistic discrimination and other social discriminations like racism and classism where some particular groups are always discriminated and held back (Piller 2016). For example, people who speak minority languages and other forms of dialect are discriminated against in many schools, courts, businesses, and workplaces and thus they lose their self-esteem and feelings of rejection by society (Tollefson, 1991). These discriminations may cause people to change their ways of using language with the aim of coming closer to dominating norms which in the process leads to the decline in the cultural identity as well as language diversity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). The experience of and resultant prejudice and oppression can therefore be both individual and collective, in so far as the proposition of identity is preeminently both personal and social-cum-cultural in the context of language discrimination. Ending language discrimination thus means understanding how language differences and inequalities are reproduced in institutions and society.

Words can be rightly stated to be more than a mean of expression; it is actually a weapon/instrument of emancipation / revolution. In general, language is creating and informing discourse and from the very start of history oppressed groups turned to language to question the dominance of power, to make a statement about their existence when other options were closed to them (Fairclough, 1995). Such process often entails the conscious of promotion or retrieve of the minority languages and dialects as the reactions to the processes of globalization as well as anti-linguistic imperialism (Heller, 2007). For instance, the indigenous languages of Latin America have been used as a form of resistance against colonial and neocolonial powers and signify a way of gaining back cultural and political self-governance (May, 2012). In the same way, the using of language of civil rights movements in the United States shows how the language can be used with regard to the demands of justice and equality, determine the formation of public discourse, and its impact on social change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Language is therefore key in analyzing how change occurs within societies, as a specific subject since it allows dominated groups to counteract domination and forge new social realities with words.

Language policy is essential in the maintenance and development of linguistic as well as cultural diversities especially in societies that acknowledge more than one language and culture. These policies are adopted by governments and institutions in an attempt to regulate the use of language and most of the time seek to find a middle ground for the protection of the national language as well as the minority languages (Ricento 2006). Current language policies state that it is possible to preserve different languages and cultural backgrounds maintaining people's identities. For instance, Māori language in New Zealand shows how policy that can bring the renaissance of endangered languages and improve the stability of the community's

identification (Spolsky, 2004). On the other hand, policies and practices that tend to impose monocultural linguistic models like the policy of a single national language perpetuates social injustice and linguistic prejudice that results to loss of cultural identity as well as marginalization of those who practice the minoritized language (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Hence, it is very important for the work of developing and implementing the policies of inclusive language for minority for claims of their linguistic rights and to ensure that their languages and cultural identities are adequately provided and defended against the forces of globalization and social change.

Schools have a very important social responsibility of supporting and protecting multilingualism and modelling exemplary practices regarding their recognition in every learner. One of the ways to address the issue of linguistic diversity is the use of multilingual education, where the students' first languages are used alongside the main language used in the classroom, (Garcia, 2009). It also goes a long way in the prevention of depreciation of the minority languages while at the same time improves the students' cognitive and academic performance by letting them learn in their own language (Cummins, 2000). Nonetheless, educational policies that promote monolingualism seem to negate these advantages, making students to lose their ethnic and linguistic identity through forced language shift (Baker, 2011). When incorporating multilingual education, such learning institutions can become contexts of language, where students are promoted to create, sustain and enhance their language resources hence the general goal of promoting linguistic diversity within society (Hornberger, 2002). It therefore become incumbent upon any educational systems to implement policies that appreciate multilingualism's and see that all the learner are able to have education that embraces their language and cultural diversity.

This paper argues that what the media presents to the audience as common in linguistic and cultural settings determines how different linguistic and cultural groups are considered by others as well as how they consider themselves. This means that it is through the media particularly through social media that different Language Ideologies are produced for the express purpose of reproducing or transforming social relations (Fairclough, 1995). For example, some specific dialect or accent in the movie or TV show can mean that some linguistic minorities are locked out of society (Lippi-Green 2012). On the other hand, through media that has broken the white wash linguistic barrier, people of diverse linguistic backgrounds feel proud of their languages and it becomes acceptable to use them in the public domain (Meylakhs 2010). Another factor that has favored the use of languages itself, has significantly been media influence especially with the availability of new media technologies; this has promoted multilingualism in the media and embodies the heritage of diverse languages (Androutsopoulos 2015). Therefore, media representation is an on-going process in the construction of language and identity, which subliminally has serious ramifications for the role of language diversity in society.

Conclusion

Focusing on this topic, this review has revealed the close connection between language and social identity and has emphasized that language is more than a means of communication: rather, it is one of the key components of the identity process. From theoretical analysis and research findings we can conclude that language works like a symbolic system that signals group belonging that is ethnicity, gender and class and age (Gumperz, 1982; Eckert, 2000). The review also brought out how language ideologies work in perpetuating social ranking; how discriminations in language affect personal development and how discriminations in language contribute to prejudice (Bourdieu, 1991; Lippi-Green, 2012). Moreover the study of codeswitching and multilingualism showed the interplay of social personas and the use of language

to manage one's identity in accordance to certain social domains (Myers-Scotton 1993; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). The review has therefore offered a rich appreciation of how the three aspects of language, identity and power relation with regard to the paramount role of language in both personal identity and social transformation.

Further research should try to disentangle the relations between language ad identity with a focus on the processes ongoing in the globalized/digital environments that are characterized by the shifting linguistic landscape. One of the directions for further research can be investigated through the effects of digital communication on the uses of language and identity as new channels of media communication provide unique contexts for negotiating identities (Androutsopoulos, 2015). Also, there exist a need for future research that involves more cross cultural and cross linguistic comparisons to examine both the cross-cultural similarities and differences and the variables that mediate these similarities and differences in matters concerning language and identity (Kashima and Kashima, 1998). Research should also concentrate in the multiple and mutual relations between language, meaning that how race, gender, and class intersect in matters of language and discriminatory experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). More importantly, it is time to consider research initiatives that adopt what Geertz termed as 'genealogical' approach to conduct research on the trajectory of language policy and education efforts in relation to the Shuar people and their identity and linguistic rights. To this end, if the areas highlighted herein are addressed, then future research can provide better insights to the interactive correlation between language and identity as the two constituents continue to evolve to fit the contemporary global village.

Consequently, the theoretical and practical implications of the findings of this review are of great importance to sociolinguistic theory. Deeper theoretical developments of gender and sex must be pursued as it pertains to different contemporary societies because the nature of identity is constantly changing and the role of language as a mediator of an individual's social relations and relations of power in society is becoming more prominent (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Ideally, these findings should guide language politics and educational practices as variety equality and as support mineral identity requirements (Spolsky 2004). Sociolinguists and educators therefore need to promote policies and practices that helps to embrace and celebrate multilingualism (Garcia 2009). Further, there is a lack of ethnographically grounded research, which involved with minority language communities and mobilizes them to warrantor the documentation and revitalization of such languages (Heller, 2007). Through merging of these theoretical and practical frameworks sociolinguists are most helpful in creating societies in which language is not a source of exclusion but a means of connection.

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