

Current Perspectives on Sociolinguistics and English Language Education

Yasemin Bayyurt¹

Abstract

In this paper, the position and significance of sociolinguistics in foreign language education is examined along three dimensions: attitudes towards learning a foreign language, inclusion of culture in foreign language lessons, and the contribution of language planning to foreign language education. Curriculum and instruction can be arranged to promote positive attitudes toward the foreign language to be learned and nationalities associated with the language. Inclusion of cultural elements in the foreign language curriculum helps learners to understand new language concepts and provides a context for their use. Language planning at the highest level, on the other hand, must be based on data derived from research and must be conducted by foreign language educators. Finally, the status of English as an international language is also examined and Kachru's (1985) three-circle model of English speaking countries is reviewed. In the world today, no country and no culture can claim sole ownership of the English language.

Key words: Strategic planning; Narrative storyline complexity; Complexity; Accuracy; Fluency; EFL context

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1. Introduction

Foreign language education has become a significant phenomenon in the present era. Responding to personal or professional needs, people learn a foreign language to qualify for education abroad, to communicate with colleagues in international corporations, or to prepare themselves for travel. In order to understand the phenomenon, broad knowledge of the process of language acquisition, second or foreign language education, sociolinguistics, linguistics, psycholinguistics, and specific knowledge of foreign language teaching techniques and methods of measurement and evaluation have become especially important. In this article, the position and significance of sociolinguistics in foreign language education will be examined.

Broadly speaking, foreign language teaching has two goals. The first, typically realized in the classroom, is that students learn the formal properties of a language and get some practice using it in communicative situations. The second goal, realized outside the classroom, is that students actually communicate with people in an L2 environment (Cook, 1999). Verbal communications among people fall within the realm of sociolinguistics.

Current approaches to foreign language education entail an understanding of sociocultural theory and sociolinguistics. New areas of research in English Language Teaching (ELT) include the

¹ Boğaziçi University, Faculty of Education, Foreign Language Education, Istanbul, bayyurty@boun.edu.tr

relationship between ELT and World Englishes (WEs), English as an International Language (EIL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). The schools of WEs, EIL and ELF emerge as a result of the interaction between people (e.g., nonnative speaker-nonnative speaker; native speaker-nonnative speaker) in choosing a common language – i.e., English – to communicate. These trends include the analysis of different genres of written and spoken language emerging in contexts where English is spoken as a native language and also in global contexts where other varieties of English are spoken. All this research requires an understanding of sociolinguistic phenomena such as language registers, varieties, context, pragmatic universals, modes of interaction between people, and so on. Hence, it is important to note that foreign language teaching in a broader sense involves the teaching of successful communication in L2 through the use of correct register or appropriate variety, where to use the correct register or variety, and so on. On a theoretical basis, Hymes's "communicative competence" (1972) emerges out of such a trend in ELT and a whole method or approach of CLT comes as a result of an understanding of this theoretical construct. , analyzing the context where this interaction is taking place. Intercultural communicative competence which emerges out of Hymes's communicative competence becomes the basis of EIL and/or ELF (Alptekin, 2002; Bektaş-Çetinkaya, 2012; Bektaş-Çetinkaya & Börkan, 2012; Hymes, 1972). Therefore, I believe, any researcher in the field of ELT should have an understanding of the relationship between FLT and sociolinguistics through the study of related areas of research adapted from sociolinguistics (see section 2 for a list of these sociolinguistic areas of research).

Briefly, sociolinguistics can be defined as the science that investigates the aims and functions of language in society. It attempts to explain how language differs from one context to another across geographical borders and how people in one context communicate with people in other contexts (e.g., nonnative-nonnative speakers; nonnative-native speakers; and so on). Scientists working in the field of sociolinguistics conduct research on how language is used in diverse social contexts and the appropriateness of language used in any given context, considering such factors as etiquette, interpersonal relations, and regional dialects. However, this definition of sociolinguistics is narrow and needs to be expanded. Therefore, in the next section, the current definition of sociolinguistics will be expanded and the relationship between sociolinguistics and foreign language education will be explored in depth focusing on the following topics :

1. What is sociolinguistics?
2. What are the main components of sociolinguistics?
3. In what important ways does sociolinguistics contribute to foreign language education?
4. What is the relationship between sociolinguistics and the teaching of English as a foreign language?

2. The Expanded Definition of Sociolinguistics

One of the uses of language in society is to build and sustain meaningful relationships among people (Spolsky, 1998). When we meet people for the first time in a social context, our first reaction often includes speculation, on the basis of their spoken language, about where they come from, and what social class they belong to. Such speculation leads one to form a fuller image and understanding of people, which may or may not be accurate. Sociolinguistics researchers collect reliable data about these topics. Hence, we can define sociolinguistics as the branch of science that analyzes the relationship between language and society on the basis of its use in diverse social contexts. It is one of the most far-reaching subdisciplines of linguistics, interacting with many other disciplines, including foreign language education and international relations.

Sociolinguistics employs numerous lines of research, ranging from analysis of local dialects and accents to differences between men's and women's use of language. Some of the basic issues addressed in the field of sociolinguistics can be listed as follows:

1. language variety and change
2. variation and style
3. language attitudes
4. language and culture
5. language and interaction
 - a. interaction analysis
 - b. discourse analysis
 - c. language and interaction in social settings
 - d. use of politeness as a variable in speech
6. bilingualism or multilingualism and multiculturalism
7. social class and language use
8. language contact
9. language and gender
10. language planning and policy
 - a. the selection of foreign language(s) to be taught
 - b. curriculum development
 - c. teacher education

The basic theoretical features of sociolinguistics and the context of its practice lend foreign language education its rich social content. To illustrate, when one considers language education in a school context, noting student-teacher interactions alongside educational components of teaching and learning, the significance of social interactions is readily perceived. Regarding communicational functions, the application of sociolinguistics in a classroom context can contribute enormously to the development of foreign language teaching techniques. Foreign-language-education-related research in areas listed above has been well developed and applied. The theme of this article is the interaction between sociolinguistics and foreign language education because in FLT research sociolinguistics has been an ignored or overlooked area of study. Generally, the FLT researchers do not make any connection between the two even though they make inferences about the significance of the context in developing the communicative competence of the learners of a foreign language. Therefore, it is essential to see the attributes of both sociolinguistics and foreign language education disciplines, such as language attitudes, language and culture, and policies governing the selection of foreign languages to be taught. In this article these will be examined.²

3. Language Attitude

In daily life in various situations and events, we make countless inferences about language use and language users. We infer the geographical regions people come from on the basis of their speech, and we condemn styles of speech and figures of speech that are inappropriate in a certain context. For example, tele-shopping and tele-operations related to credit cards, now a part of our lives, direct us to talk with people we have never met. During these conversations we begin to draw inferences about the people we hear on the phone, about their gender, social background, friendliness, ethnic origin, and whether or not they have good intentions. Such inferences determine the kind of approach that speakers and listeners adopt in relation to one another during communications.

Attitudes towards various uses of language in society can be either positive or negative. One example of a positive language attitude is the desire of English language learners in Turkey to speak

² The issues that I have discussed under the titles of "Language and culture" and "The teaching of English as a world language" in the present study have been extracted from the related sections of the 104K085 career project report supported by TÜBİTAK between 2005 and 2009.

English with a British accent. In this case, the attitudes towards British English are positive. An example of a negative attitude is the development and use of new words in order to avoid gender discrimination. Examples do not occur frequently in Turkish; however, the use of "biliminsanı" (science person) as opposed to "bilimadamı" (science man) is becoming more common in academic circles. English offers more examples, "police officer" instead of "policeman," "chair" instead of "chairman," "humankind" instead of "mankind." All of foregoing reinforces the connection between language and attitude. Language is a medium that contributes to the formation of speakers' attitudes about themselves and others.

4. Language attitudes and foreign language education.

Many research studies examining attitudes in foreign language education have been conducted at every age and proficiency level. The general aim of this line of research is to understand how students' and teachers' positive or negative attitudes towards a language influence the teaching and learning of the language. To carry out research on language attitudes, researchers have to develop a valid and reliable questionnaire incorporating psychological, sociological, and linguistic dimensions and then collect data by means of this tool. For instance, students' attitudes towards the foreign language taught will either facilitate or complicate their language learning. Study of the relationship between attitudes and learning will contribute to the development of foreign language teaching methods and materials appropriate for specific student groups exhibiting specific attitudes. At present, there are many studies of students' attitudes towards the foreign language they are learning, Turkish, English, and more.³

5. Language and Culture

We use language in order to tell others about our ideas, wishes, needs, and experiences, to share our feelings, to understand the people around us, and for many other purposes. Were we to list the factors influencing our choices related to language use in any social context, the first issues that come to mind would be features of the context (school, office, house, park, shopping mall, etc.), the role relationships among the communicators (acquaintance, stranger, etc.), the effects of the selected words among the listeners considering the culture and people of the country where the language is spoken. In this section, the place and significance of culture in foreign language learning is examined. The concept of culture has hundreds of different definitions, changing from discipline to discipline, a variety that makes it hard to arrive at one satisfactory definition. Generally speaking, the concept of culture comprises a society's daily lifestyle, artistic works, language, religion, and traditions. Thus the concept varies according to communication style, social values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Given the problem of definition, understanding the influence of culture in the learning of a second or foreign language seems even more complex.

From an anthropological perspective, culture is a system of shared beliefs, ideas, values, traditions, behaviors, and artistic values (Bates & Plog, 1991, p. 7). Within the framework of this view, culture is a static concept transmitted from generation to generation. Sociolinguists, however, have a more dynamic perspective: culture is continuously reconstructed in accord with knowledge and experiences acquired as a result of interactions in different contexts (Baker, 2009; Corbett, 2003).

³ See Büyüköztürk, Ş. (2002), Devrim and Bayyurt, 2010; Sarıçoban, A. (2004), Urgan (2006).

6. The place and significance of culture in foreign language education

A look at the concept of culture within the scope of foreign language learning reveals that experiences acquired by students in their native language are restructured as a result of new concepts and experiences acquired while learning a new language. Students activate their prior cultural knowledge before starting the foreign language class and try to make sense of new cultural concepts by comparing and contrasting them with previous ones. It will be of use to increase these students' awareness of the second/foreign language culture so that they can understand the target foreign language in a better way. To Fantini (1997), learning languages by comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences between two cultures is a period of transition in which students' awareness of the foreign language and the culture associated with that language increases. At the end of this transitional period, a universal culture will emerge.

To put it in a nutshell, in light of cross-cultural communication and transfer assumptions, it could be argued that while learning a second/foreign language, students will also explore the second language culture. In addition to this, students' linguistic and cultural experiences in their native/first language acquired prior to the language learning class will help them clarify the novel linguistic and cultural concepts they encounter in the second/foreign language. In the meantime, students will reconstruct the concepts they have learned in the past and make use of earlier experiences in the learning process. An overview of the culture concept in terms of the foreign language classroom indicates that the culture of the foreign language is a component of the topics covered in the foreign language class. Some researchers believe that incorporating the culture of the foreign language in the classroom is a waste of time since the students will never need such knowledge, while others claim that multilingualism and multiculturalism are qualities students need to understand and integrate newly met concepts. To this end, foreign language teachers' cultural awareness should be increased and foreign language learning materials should be restructured in line with multiculturalism and multilingualism (Bayyurt, 2006, 2012; Bayyurt & Erçetin, 2009; Canagarajah, 1999; Bektaş-Çetinkaya, 2012; Devrim & Bayyurt, 2010; Holliday, 2005).

Another approach to the inclusion of culture in foreign language classrooms is to prepare the cultural component of the curriculum in view of learner needs, local/source culture, language identities, and the learning contexts (Braine, 2005; Canagarajah, 1999; Holliday, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). It is important to analyze culture-related approaches in countries that have received English as the language of the dominant power, that is, the *outer circle* countries according to Kachru's (1985) classification. Today, English in these countries has become the official language, embedded in the social and daily lives of the people. English is also their literary language. Reading the literary works of these countries reveals how this recently emerging hybrid language influences the identities of people who have grown up speaking it and learned to identify themselves with it (Bhatt, 2005). Since the discussion of this issue extends far beyond the foreign language education domain, it will not be elaborated here.

7. Foreign Language Planning and Policies

In its general sense, language planning and policies entail the selection and educational framework for teaching the language(s) which will be used in official-unofficial institutions in a country (Ricento, 2000). In recent years, the most significant example of foreign language planning and policy is the European Language Portfolio.⁴

Cooper (1989) classifies language planning into three categories: status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning. Status planning generally refers to the official status of a

⁴ See http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/portfolio/default.asp?l=e&m=/main_pages/welcome.html

language, to general preferences and aims for using the language. Corpus planning, is related to the language itself and incorporates the selection of vocabulary regardless of gender discrimination, new words added to the language, alphabet selection, and identification of spelling and punctuation rules. Acquisition planning entails the teaching and learning and use of the language for certain purposes, business-related uses, for example, or educational use as a medium of instruction).

A consensus of research studies of foreign language planning in Turkey has concluded that there has been a continually changing language policy in parallel to global trends to foreign language education, and foreign language planning is here addressed in this context.

Işık (2007), for example, states that the most significant problem related to foreign language planning is that implemented policies lack some essential elements of the planning process. Although foreign language education is much emphasized and supported by funds, the decisions taken are not based on scientific data. The decisions mostly depend on the political powers' opinions and bureaucrats' personal views. The Board of Education and Discipline in charge of foreign language policy and planning is not in a condition to undertake this duty. The members of this council are recruited on the basis of assignment. The members are not selected from among academicians with academic reputation all over the country, with adequate knowledge and experience and according to academic criteria. In this respect, whether the member has the necessary qualities to direct policies and planning cannot be guaranteed. In addition, since the duties are based on assignment and dismissal, it is difficult to maintain continuity in terms of foreign language policies. Due to such deficiencies, a foreign language education policy which depends on the country's aims and realities has not been formed as of yet (Işık, 2007, p. 21).

In the early years of the Turkish Republic, the most commonly taught foreign language was French, which was rapidly replaced by English in the 1950s (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998). As a result of the educational reform of 1997, English has become a compulsory school subject in primary schools from 4th grade onwards (Bayyurt, 2006; Kırkgöz, 2007; Uysal et al., 2007). As Kırkgöz (2007: 187) states:

Since the educational reform in 1997, TEYLs⁵ in Turkey has gone through several phases of change. With Turkey's attempts to enter the European Union, the country is becoming more open to the external world, which makes the learning of English inevitable for the young generation, thus putting a greater demand on learning English. To meet increasing demand for TEYLs, it seems clear that more investments need to be made for facilities to enhance the quality of ELT professionals in Turkish primary education.

Today, the foreign language most commonly taught in Turkey is English (Bayyurt, 2006; 2012), and many schools and universities make English the medium of instruction. Families do their best to provide the financial and psychological support needed to send their children to schools where they can learn English (See also Kırkgöz, 2007 and Uysal et al., 2007). Nevertheless, within the scope of the European Language Portfolio, new foreign language policies and plans have been developed in Turkey, which is now undergoing a European Union integration process, and a second foreign language has become compulsory in many state schools. A discussion of these issues, which lie beyond the scope of this article, may be found elsewhere.⁶

⁵ TEYLs: the acronym for Teaching English to Young Learners.

⁶ For more information, see Bayyurt (2012), Doğançay-Aktuna (1998, 2004), Doğançay-Aktuna and Kızıltepe (2005), Kırkgöz (2007, 2009), Uysal et al., 2007.

8. Teaching English as an International Language

Considering the worldwide status of English today, the necessity for teaching English as an international language (EIL), training teachers, and developing appropriate materials is obvious. The viewpoint adopted here is that English is a world language and related research and educational policies yet to be developed must take into account the international status of English. Furthermore, experimental and observational studies must be conducted and analyzed in this context. First of all, it should be noted that an international language does not belong to a certain country or culture. Naturally, since English is not an artificial international language like Esperanto (Kachru, 1985), its use as a local language must not be ignored. However, the number of people who use English as an international language may far exceed the number of local speakers. Consequently, who determines the norms and standards that ensure the teachability of the international language becomes a prominent issue. As Smith (1976) proposes, English as an international language does not belong to any nation, a position that challenges theorists and researchers (See also Jenkins, 2003, 2007; Rajagopalan, 2004; Widdowson, 1994, 2003). In this regard, McKay (2003) cites three significant issues: First, the cultural content of English should not be restricted to societies whose native language is English. In other words, students' local culture and other countries' cultures must be featured in the learning process. Second, local expectations related to the teachers' and the students' roles in the teaching and learning of English must be considered. Third, bilingual teachers' dual qualities, that is, their mastery of the local and international culture must be acknowledged. The overarching qualities of bilingual teachers help them to be models for students, thus motivating students to learn and to use the language.

In recognizing the cultures of countries like India which have accepted English as their official language, teachers of English must be aware that the cultural dimensions of English are not the same as those of other languages. All cultures in the world play a role in the teaching of English. To put differently, English teachers can teach English effectively when they integrate the local culture into their curriculum while also incorporating the broad picture of international use.

In her theoretical approach, McKay (2003) emphasizes that English is a world language and that the local and international culture must be represented in the teaching of English. However, acceptance of approach within the scope of Kachru's three-circle model is a controversial issue. Kachru (1985) classified world countries according to the status of English in each country as inner circle, outer circle and expanding circle (see Table 1).

Table 1: *The inner circle, outer circle and expanding circle as defined by Kachru (1985)*

	Aim	Countries
Inner Circle	Countries where English is taught as a second language (ESL)	United States of America, Britain, Australia, etc.
Outer Circle	Contexts where English is taught as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL)	India, Jamaica, Singapore, Nigeria, etc.
Expanding Circle	Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL)	Turkey, Germany, Japan, Brazil, etc.

In his original definition of these categories, Kachru (1985) emphasized that there is no distinct boundary between categories. To Kachru, the most significant difference between outer and expanding circle countries is the acceptance of English as an official language in outer circle countries and its presence in the daily lives of people (in official procedures, schools and the workplace, etc.). In

actuality, the position of English in expanding circle countries is not so clear; English is usually learned for functional purposes and it is not the official language of these countries. This gives rise to the teaching of English as a second language in outer circle countries, as it is taught in inner circle countries, and as a foreign language in expanding circle countries. In addition, Kachru holds that distinct separation between expanding and outer circle countries is also lacking and that some important features of these categories are shared. To illustrate, English speakers in both groups are considered to be bilingual or multilingual.

In his study questioning the confusion of concepts related to the teaching of English, Nayar (1997) mentions the fuzzy boundaries of classification systems. In addition to this, as Canagarajah (2006) also states, many people who have lived in countries defined as outer and expanding circle countries have moved to inner circle countries. Thus, in inner circle countries, which are dominantly monolingual, residents hear English varieties spoken among their neighbors, colleagues, and service workers, and they have need to communicate with these groups. The question of whom the English language belongs to has lost its importance. That English is a world language is well-known among researchers from both inner and the expanding circle countries operating in national and international domains (Canagarajah, 2005; Widdowson, 2003). Recent development calls for a reconsideration of Kachru's theory. Exclusion of the outer circle group when defining native English speakers is unacceptable for scholars in the "World Englishes" school. However, as stated in the beginning, the outer circle is not to be considered separately in this paper, which focuses on English in inner and expanding circle countries, and educational issues are analyzed accordingly.

Berns (2005) has pointed out that researchers have mostly focused on the inner and outer circle countries and that less research is conducted in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. It is evident that research in these environments should be encouraged. For example, studies on native and non-native speaking teachers show that the results of research in this area can make a significant contribution to the teaching of English as a foreign language and English as an international language in expanding circle countries (Bayyurt, 2006, 2012; Bayyurt & Erçetin, 2009; Berns, 2005; Llorca, 2005; Moussu & Llorca, 2008).

9. Discussion and Conclusion

This article has explored subcomponents of sociolinguistics such as language attitudes, the relationship of language and culture in foreign language education, and language planning in foreign language education. In the globalized world, to sustain good relationships with other countries, a common language ensuring communication across borders is necessary. To develop widespread foreign language proficiency, it is important to promote positive attitudes towards the language to be taught. Teaching a foreign language is difficult, even impossible, if the learners have negative attitudes towards the target language, the nationality of the language teachers, or the teaching context. For this reason, investigating existing attitudes towards the target language and the development of methods and materials that promote positive are worthwhile endeavors. In this regard, the integration of culture into foreign language instruction helps learners to understand unfamiliar concepts by meeting them in context, and thus the learning of the language is enhanced.

With respect to all of the above aspects, effective execution and implementation of foreign language planning by related authorities (For example, in Turkey, the Ministry of Education) will greatly assist foreign language teaching and learning. For this reason, when foreign language planning and policies are determined, decisions must be grounded on reliable data generated by research (Işık, 2007: 22). According to Graves (2000) and Belcher (2006), the planning and implementation stages of data collection and contextual analysis, identification of aims, planning, piloting, implementation, reaction analysis, measurement and evaluation, and re-planning must be seriously and thoroughly complete.

In conclusion, this article has focused on students' and teachers' attitudes towards the foreign language selected for instruction and the contribution of target language culture to learning. In addition, it has addressed the importance of planning and effective implementation of a language policy. The contribution of other subcomponents of sociolinguistics to foreign language teaching and learning may be found in other sources.

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