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**The Place of Socio And Cultural Context In The Determination Of Meaning In The Non Native Environment Of English**

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the extent to which social and cultural context determine meaning in the non-native environment of English. It focuses on the notions such as; speech communities, verbal repertoire, language transfer, code-mixing/switching and domains, the latter are concerned with issues such as; identity and target model norms. The contributions of the above fields are critical particularly now, for no longer are ESL users primarily from the post-colonial communities, nor is English primarily a language to communicate exclusively with the native speaker. This paper introduces some of the relevant sociolinguistic concepts and offers concrete proposals for including critical research discernments from bilingualism/multilingualism and world Englishes.

**Keywords:** Social context, cultural context, multilingual, domain, speech community, verbal repertoire.

**Introduction**

Human culture revolves around language. The purpose of this study is to chronicle and investigate how language reflects social structure and cultural thought processes. Language, Society, and Culture offers a practical approach to researching the relationship between language and society.

However, the purpose of this work is to see how far research findings in two well-defined domains of sociolinguistics, namely bilingualism/multilingualism and world Englishes, may be applied. Speech communities, verbal repertory, language transfer, code-mixing/switching, and domains, the latter of which is concerned with topics such as identification and target model norms, are all included. The contributions of the following fields are especially important now, because ESL users are no longer largely from post-colonial communities, and English is no longer primarily used to connect with native speakers. This paper provides an overview of some of the key sociolinguistic topics.

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**Bilingualism/Multilingualism**

The phrases 'bilingualism' and 'multilingualism' have been used interchangeably in the literature to refer to an individual's or a community's knowledge or usage of multiple languages. This practice will continue here, but we must consider the possibility that multilingualism is more than just a more advanced form of bilingualism. Multilingualism can be researched as an individual as well as a societal phenomenon, and it has been done. Issues like how one learns two or more languages in childhood or later, how these languages are represented in the mind, and how they are accessed in on-line production and understanding become crucial as individual phenomena.

Bilingualism, as a societal phenomenon, is concerned with issues such as the status and roles of languages in a given society, attitudes toward languages, determinants of language choice, symbolic and practical uses of languages, and the correlations between language use and social factors such as ethnicity, religion, and class, among others.

**The Composite Nature of Multilingual Competence**

An important feature of multilingualism, pointed out by Pandit (1972), is that multilingualism has always existed. Multilingual use, which includes the full, balanced and original commands of all the

languages in the repertoire, is very unusual. Multilingual people usually speak at different levels of the language in their repertoire. Differences in language proficiency range from some lexical elements, standard expressions such as greetings and basic speaking skills, to good grammar and vocabulary, special registers and styles. The second key feature of multilingualism is the optional feature. Multilingual people develop all the required code and skills in the context in which each language is used. For example, a multilingual person may have excellent reading, writing, speaking, and understanding skills in one or both languages, but using one language for academic or professional purposes and using the other for intimate or emotional expression may be more comfortable. This is due in part to different registration administrations (functional variability), but also to general associations between languages, domains and contexts. Thus, the linguistic competence of a multilingual language is a combination of many complementary competencies that complement each other to create a rich and complex resource suitable for all basic functions (Grosjean 1982). Therefore, when assessing the adequacy of language proficiency in multilingual people, the complex nature of this repertoire must be taken into account. In a multilingual environment, it is not necessary and

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common to find native speakers or speakers in all languages.

**Speech Communities**

For applied languages, linguistic approaches, supplemented by the study of the internal structure of the language and, where possible, described as a communicative (interactive) environment, are much more practical than psycholinguistically motivated approaches such as Chomsky's. A variety of functional language approaches, especially Halliday (1973), Fishman (1972a), Ferguson (1959), Humpertz (1971), and Hymes (1974), have placed great emphasis on the use of social language. This approach allows us to understand the interaction between language and society, the contribution of the social context to linguistic meaning, the "social" function of language and its use as the main social institution.

It hardly needs to be emphasized that communication is a skillful task. In general, people have experience working with social norms and interaction patterns. The totality of people who share the same norms of communication is called the linguistic community (Labov, 1972). A linguistic community is defined as a community that shares knowledge about the rules of behavior and the interpretation of language. This sharing includes knowing at least one form of the language and knowing the patterns for its use. Labov (1972: 120)

stresses the importance of common views and common norms. ... .. Bollingers (1975: 333) The definition of a language community is more complex. "There are no restrictions on how people gather for identification, security, profit, entertainment, worship, or other general purposes. Hence, there is no limit to the number and variety of linguistic communities that can be found in a society. "The Bollinger definition allows for the possibility of more than one linguistic community in any geographic area and the possibility of more than one geographic base for a linguistic community. The groups you define are not always constant. Perspective shift, overlap, overlap, and complementary identities are well suited to characterize multilingual linguistic communities. For monolingual people, general rules may include rules about when you speak or stop a speaker, how to add or thank someone, how to ask politely, etc. For multilingual people, the rules apply to everyone.

**Verbal Repertoire**

The concept of linguistic repertoire is central to the discussion of multilingual use by both individuals and society. A language repertoire is the collection of language resources available to individuals or communities. For native speakers of the same language, this includes experiencing regional, social, functional and stylistic variations, both productive (speaking or

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writing) and receptive (reading or understanding, speaking). Obviously, in a multilingual person or in a multilingual society, the language is more complex in the sense that it includes not only variants of the same language, but also completely different languages. It is important to remember that each language in the repertoire has its own grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics and sociolinguistic rules and conventions (norms). Spice vendors in India are a classic test. A Gujarati spice merchant in Bombay uses Kathiawadi (his dialect of Gujarati) with his family, Marathi (the local language) in the vegetable market, Kacchi and Konkani in trading circles, Hindi or Hindustani with the milkman and at the train station, and even English on formal occasions. Such a person may not be highly educated or well versed in linguistic rules, but knows enough to be able to use the language(s) for his purposes.

**Language Choice**

For multilingual, language choice, that is, what language to use with whom and for what purposes is a key communicational issue. One of the basic assumptions in sociolinguistics involving multilingual speech communities is that,

In heterogeneous linguistic communities with varying degrees of linguistic diversity and social complexity, speakers interact with a variety of linguistic variants derived

from deterministic repertoires that are largely non-random. On the other hand, the distribution of elections is determined by several factors in the system of social communications of society. (Elias-Olivares 1979: 121).

Multilingual select their code from their linguistic repertoire based on the person one is talking to, the place (social context of the talk), and the nature of the topic of discussion.

**Domain**

Given the presence of other languages in the repertoire of multilingual societies or individuals, how and when are they used? When answering this question, the concept of domains is very important. Exploring the field, Fishman (1972b: 437) argues that "... who speaks which language in a linguistic community characterized by widespread and relatively stable multilingual use ...". Barber (1952) defined areas at the socio-psychological level. In his analysis, these domains are classified as intimate (family), formal (religious and ceremonial), informal (environmental), and intergroup (business and entertainment activities, interaction with government and legal bodies). Subject matter research Fishman and colleagues discuss language choice in areas such as family, playgrounds and roads, schools, churches, literature, media, military, courts, and public administration (Fishman 1972b). Other researchers have either added or reduced the numbers of domains in

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investigating multilingual societies. Greenfield (1972), for instance, has added person, place, and topic as determining factors in language choice

Examining how languages are used in multilingual communities reveals highly complex and effective models. Not all languages are used across all domains. The speaker chooses a level based on his or her relationship with others in the group (Alip 1993). Some languages are considered very appropriate for a particular region. There are various studies examining the use of language in different fields. The use of language in intimate areas (eg, family, friends, and the environment) and the use of language in practical areas (work, government, banking) have been studied by many researchers. For example, in Paraguay, Spanish is spoken by government officials, commerce and foreigners, while friends, family, and servants prefer Guaraní (Rubin 1968).

In Nigeria, it is very important to use the title when greeting to show respect. Greetings from other cultures can also help you choose the language that suits your environment. Indonesian and Javanese (Alip 1993) have two language levels. Namely, the formal style known as kromo (used by the elderly and seniors) and the familiar style known as ngoko (used by people of their peers and people of a lower language level). Sridhar (1982, 1987) shows that speakers in central Karnataka

state in southern India use a three-tier distribution, with English, Kannada (the official national language) and Hindi (official national language) playing a different role. Roles depend on intimacy, status, and power. Thus, in the linguistic repertoire of many languages, many other languages, each plays a certain role and in its own way manifests a unique identity, and they all complement each other, defining the complex communicative needs of a pluralistic society.

### Code Switching and Code Mixing

Since there is more than one language in a community, speakers often switch from one language to another in the same communication situation. This phenomenon, known as code switching, has received a lot of research attention over the past two decades. Scientists have studied structural patterns, functional determinants, social correlations, and psycholinguistic code change processes in various communities, including India.

Blom and Gumperz (1972) distinguish between two types of code transitions. When the situation code changes, the switch reacts to changes in the situation (for example, when a new participant enters the stage or there is a change in the object or situation). For example, at the end of a formal transaction, to inquire about a family matter, the standard language switches to the local dialect. For code that changes

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metaphorically, the switch has the following stylistic or textual features: B. To indicate a quote, underline or underline a joke, change the tone from serious to funny, etc. Code transitions are not random, they are modeled and often functionally motivated.

Carol Myers Scott, in a series of light studies on multilingualism in East Africa (Scotton, 1993a), describes the transformation of codes in terms of a theory of rights and obligations based on what she calls a semantic model. We believe that members of the multilingual community know the appropriate range of codes for certain types of traditional exchanges and understand the choices based on those expectations. Departure from a neutral or unsigned choice conveys a symbolic social message about the speaker's personality and attitude. In this sense, code transitions are defined by the "result grammar" (Scotton, 1988). In some cases, using mixed code may be an untagged option.

Recent research shows that code mixing is common in multilingual communities around the world and is often used by users who are fluent in all mixed languages. Chord mixes perform important sociocultural and textual functions as expressions of complex personality types and communities. A versatile tool for meta-communication in multicultural communities. For example, in Nigeria, public school students often fluently

combine English with their mother tongue (English) when speaking with friends and teachers. Also, mix codes in official sections like onboard exams and switch to English and Pidgin or Creole or MT. Naturally, many creative writers use code mixing as a powerful source of expression to convey multicultural experiences ("God is not responsible," for example Ola Rotimi).

Code mixing is increasingly used in many multilingual societies around the world, as improved communication leads to increased linguistic and cultural contacts between countries (see Bhatia and Richie, 1989; Bokamba, 1988; Desai, 1982; Kamwangamalu, 1989). It has been shown that English-speaking bilingual users tend to switch code when interacting with people of the same code origin. Hence, the function, motivation and purpose of transcoding are very important for bilingual English behavior. The phenomenon of language mixing more than once in a sentence raises an interesting and important question about the effectiveness of a second language. For example,

- What kinds of morphemes, words, or phrases can be embedded from one language into another?
- Is this mixture governed by the grammar of the 'host' or 'matrix' language or the 'guest' or 'embedded' language?

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- Are there any universal constraints on the structure of such bilingual mixing?
- What are the implications of mixing for theories of mental processing of languages in bilinguals?
- What textual, stylistic, or literary functions are served by such mixing?

These and related questions have been studied extensively since the mid-nineteen seventies, making code-mixing one of the most recent topics in bilingualism, Scotton,(1993) and by extension in an ESOL bilinguals communicative strategies. It can be argued that the felicitous use of code-mixing, therefore, implies a more sophisticated linguistic competence than monolingual language use and provides a new perspective on the second language user's competence: it presupposes the ability to integrate grammatical as well as discourse units from two different language systems into a more complex linguistic structure. Code-mixing has often been regarded negatively by teachers, prescriptive usage legislators, and even by the speakers themselves. Gumperz and Hernandez, C.(1972); Haugen (1969); and Mkilifi(1978). It has been regarded as a sign of laziness or mental sloppiness and inadequate command of language. It has also been claimed to be detrimental to the health of the language. The traditional pedagogic resistance to code-mixing stems from a combination of puristic attitudes and

the use of a monolingual paradigm of language. These attitudes distort and devalue many aspects of multilingual behavior and therefore become especially relevant in establishing the target performance requirements and models for ESOL learners. Canagarajah (1999) has clearly demonstrated the significance and the positive role of the use of multiple codes in the ESOL learning contexts.

**Language Transfer**

It is important that we understand the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic significance of language transfer, which is the influence that an acquired language has on an acquiring one. The proper evaluation of language transfer as a cross-linguistic phenomenon has suffered neglect and distortion due to an erroneous identification with a behaviorist theory of (second) language acquisition, according to which transfer is a mechanical product of habits from the first language (Dulay and Burt 1974). However, recent research has shown that transfer is compatible with a cognitive view of language acquisition as well (Odlin 1989, Sridhar and Sridhar 1980, 1986). In this view, transfer is an efficient and economical psycholinguistic process in which the tried and tested rules of the first language are used as hypotheses in mastering a second language. It reduces cognitive dissonance and contributes to processing economy.

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Sociolinguistic ally also, transfer plays a positive role in multilingual communication. The traditional objection to mixing and transfer are based on the claim that such processes interfere with intelligibility. However, when the interlocutors share the same languages, transfer from one to the other enhances the expressive resources of each language without causing interference or reducing intelligibility. Communication in multilingual societies often presupposes this multilingual competence (for a detailed discussion, see Sridhar 1992). This and related research on language interaction in multilingual communities makes it clear that multilingualism cannot be regarded as simply an extension of language variation but poses special challenges and holds special promises for the construction of a theory of language use and meaning.

**Contributions from World Englishes**

Research on and from World Englishes (acceptably stable regional variants of English in different parts of the world) has complemented the research on multilingualism. The functions performed by the various languages in multilingual societies where a local variety of English is also simultaneously active have been investigated from several perspectives, e.g., domain analysis, language choice, code-

mixing/switching, attitudinal studies, intelligibility studies, cross-cultural discourse, etc. (Hyrkstedt 1998, Nelson 1992, Thumboo 2002). These studies, which have important implications for ESL teacher training programs, have provided serious insights into the nature of multilingualism. It is important to recognize that a large number of today's students of English are in countries where institutionalized varieties of English (Kachru 1986, 1992b) are used on a daily basis. Most of the ESL countries (e.g., India, Nigeria, Singapore, etc.) share a colonial past, where non-native varieties of English have developed over centuries, and this non-native variety of English is as native to them as Australian English is to a native speaker of Australian English. These students might speak Nigerian/Indian or their own variety of the so-called 'British English'. It might be literary, might use archaic forms, and certainly the accent and pronunciation will be affected by native languages in the students' verbal repertoire. Expecting these students to achieve (monolingual) native-like proficiency in English is an unrealistic expectation. Kachru (1992) discussed 6 fallacies with respect to the users and use of English:

(a) Most non-native speakers learn English to communicate with native speakers of English, e.g., an American, a British person, or an Australian. This is no longer valid, especially in the light of research in



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World Englishes. In countries that use English as a second language (Outer Circle countries), e.g., Nigeria, Singapore, or India, people need English to communicate with their own neighbors.

(b) English is necessarily learned as a tool to understand and teach American or British cultural values. Research in World Englishes shows that it is being used to impart local traditions, cultures, and values, not necessarily those of Americans or Australians.

(c) Another misconception that still persists is that the goal of learning and teaching English is to adopt the native models of English, e.g., Received Pronunciation or General American (Quirk 1988). In most Outer circle countries, local models have been institutionalized and are used by teachers, politicians, administrators, and by the legal experts, leading to the widespread use of Indian English, Nigerian English, Singaporean English, etc.

(d) A fallacy that persists about non-native Englishes is that these are nothing but ‘interlanguages’ striving to achieve ‘native-like’ character (Selinker 1974). This hypothesis has several limitations in the context of countries where English is used extensively as a second language. Thus, Indians and Nigerians who use English in their daily lives are not ‘learners’, but are proficient users of the language. The

English they use is a distinct variety, quite unlike the native varieties of English (Sridhar and Sridhar 1986).

(e) Another fallacy lies in the belief that native speakers of English as teachers, academic administrators, and material developers provide a serious input in the global teaching of English, in policy formation, and in determining the channels for the spread of English. In the Indian context, most materials for the teaching of English are developed by Indians in India, using Indian themes, values, and cultures.

**Conclusion**

Based on previous discussions, it has proven that the diversity and variation in English is an indicator of linguistic decay. The non-native varieties are causing the decline of English. This could easily be disputed by the popularity of non-native writers such as Naipaul, Rushdie, Achebe, and Soyinka, who have attracted worldwide attention for successfully exploiting the creative resources of the English language to express sensibilities that are not necessarily English.

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