

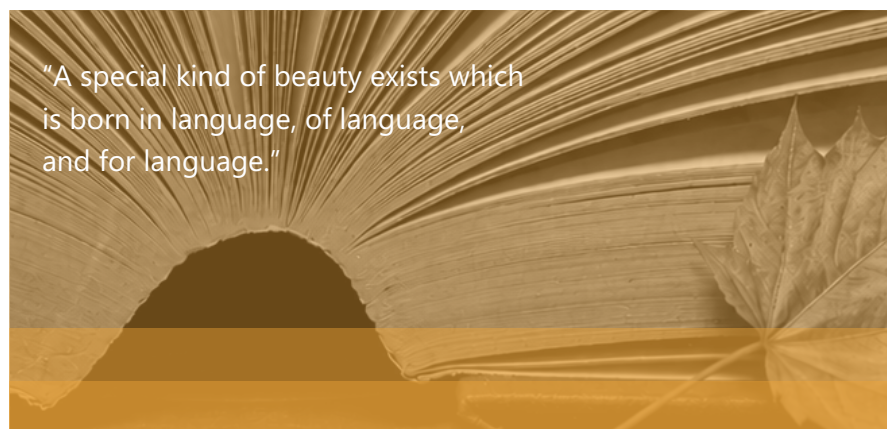


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"A special kind of beauty exists which
is born in language, of language,
and for language."



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Sociolinguistic Factors Influencing English Language Acquisition Among Secondary School Learners: A Case Study of an IT-Specialized School in Urgench, Uzbekistan

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Annotation

Language diversity is growing in the secondary schools of Uzbekistan, but English lessons are often planned in the same way for every student. This ignores the social and language differences that learners bring to class and may lead to unequal participation and unfair assessment. This qualitative case study is based on classroom observation and reflection on the author's own teaching during one school term at an IT-specialized school in Urgench. The analysis showed that four connected factors shape participation, even when students have the same English level: regional background, family income, gender, and ethnic and language identity. Bilingual students also switched between languages (code-switching) regularly. The study suggests that classroom silence and code-switching should be seen as normal social behavior, not as weaknesses. It offers practical strategies for similar mixed EFL classes: differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and assessment that accepts translanguaging. The author's contribution is a first-hand record of these patterns and teaching solutions based on the observations.

Keywords

Sociolinguistics, EFL, code-switching, differentiated instruction, gender, translanguaging

Ijtimoiy-lingvistik omillarning o'rta maktab o'quvchilari tomonidan ingliz tilini o'zlashtirishiga ta'siri: Urganch shahridagi IT ixtisoslashtirilgan maktabi misolida

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ixtisoslashtirilgan maktab Urganch filiali

Annotatsiya

O'zbekiston o'rta maktablarida til xilma-xilligi ortib bormoqda, biroq ingliz tili darslari ko'pincha barcha o'quvchilar uchun bir xil rejalashtiriladi. Bu o'quvchilar sinfga olib keladigan ijtimoiy va til jihatidagi farqlarni e'tiborsiz qoldiradi hamda sinfdagi ishtirokda tengsizlikka va baholashda adolatsizlikka olib kelishi mumkin. Ushbu sifat tadqiqoti (case-study) Urganch shahridagi IT ixtisoslashtirilgan maktabda bir o'quv choragi davomida o'tkazilgan sinf kuzatuvlari va muallifning o'z o'qitish amaliyotini tahlil qilishga asoslangan. Tahlil natijasida o'quvchilarning ingliz tili darajasi bir xil bo'lsa ham, sinfdagi ishtirokka to'rtta o'zaro bog'liq omil ta'sir qilishi aniqlandi: hududiy kelib chiqish, oilaning daromadi, jins (gender) hamda etnik va til jihatidagi o'ziga xoslik. Ikki tilli o'quvchilar tillar orasida muntazam almashinib turishi (kod almashtirish) ham kuzatildi. Tadqiqot sinfdagi jimlik va kod almashtirishni kamchilik sifatida emas, balki oddiy ijtimoiy xatti-harakat sifatida qarash kerakligini ko'rsatadi. U o'xshash aralash EFL sinflari uchun amaliy

strategiyalarni taklif etadi: differensial ta'lim, skaffolding va translanguagingni qabul qiladigan baholash. Muallifning hissasi qonuniyatlarning bevosita kuzatuvga asoslangan bayoni hamda kuzatuvlardan kelib chiqqan pedagogik yechimlardan iborat.

Kalit so'zlar *Sotsiolingvistika, chet tili sifatida ingliz tili, kod almashtirish, differensial ta'lim, gender, translanguaging*

Влияние социолингвистических факторов на изучение английского языка учащимися средней школы: на примере IT-специализированной школы в Ургенче, Узбекистан

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Аннотация *Языковое разнообразие в средних школах Узбекистана постоянно растёт, однако уроки английского языка часто планируются одинаково для всех учащихся. Такой подход не учитывает социальные и языковые различия, которые ученики приносят в класс, и может приводить к неравному участию и несправедливому оцениванию. Данное качественное исследование (кейс-стади) основано на наблюдении за уроками и осмыслении собственной преподавательской практики автора в течение одной учебной четверти в IT-специализированной школе города Ургенч. Анализ показал, что участие в уроке определяют четыре взаимосвязанных фактора, даже если уровень английского у учащихся одинаков: региональное происхождение, доход семьи, гендер, этническая и языковая идентичность. Двуязычные учащиеся также регулярно переключались между языками (переключение кодов). Исследование предлагает рассматривать молчание на уроке и переключение кодов как обычное социальное поведение, а не как недостатки. Оно предлагает практические стратегии для схожих разнородных классов EFL: дифференцированное обучение, скаффолдинг и оценивание, допускающее транслингвизм. Вклад автора состоит в описании этих закономерностей на основе непосредственных наблюдений в классе и в педагогических решениях, вытекающих из этих наблюдений.*

Ключевые слова *Социолингвистика, английский как иностранный, переключение кодов, дифференцированное обучение, гендер, транслингвизм*

Introduction

Language teachers need to understand the social and language background of their students. Uzbekistan is a multilingual and

multicultural country, and people here speak not only Uzbek but also Karakalpak and Russian. English is taught and learnt as a foreign language, and the languages students

know are shaped by their ethnic background, dialect, and family income. This means that learning English is closely connected with identity, language background, and access to learning materials and resources. The problem is getting more attention now, because specialized schools are growing in number and becoming more popular. They bring students from different regions and social backgrounds into one classroom. As a result, social and language diversity has become an inseparable part of everyday teaching, more than in previous years.

This paper deals with a simple problem. Standard English teaching methods pay little attention to the differences in students' social and language backgrounds. In practice, this may lead to unequal participation in class and to unfair assessment results. The object of the research is the process of teaching and learning English in a mixed-language secondary school classroom. The subject of the research is the way region, family income, gender, and ethnic language background affect how students take part and use language in class.

The aim of this study is to find out which social and language factors have the clearest effect on how students work with English in one Uzbek school, and to suggest teaching strategies that fit this diversity. There are three tasks: (1) to describe participation patterns by region, family income, gender, and ethnic background; (2) to look at code-switching among bilingual students; and (3) to give practical recommendations based on the evidence. The novelty of the paper is that it shows, through real classroom experience, how these factors work together in one Uzbek specialized school. Silence and code-switching in class are treated here as normal social language behavior. Teachers should plan lessons with them in mind instead of trying to correct them.

Literature review

Researchers have known for a long time that social differences play an important role in how students learn a second language. These

differences, especially social class and regional varieties, affect participation in class and how much English learners hear and use (Mesthrie et al., 2009). A clear example is the gap between city and village students in their access to English resources. Social class also shapes who gets access to language learning (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Students from different economic backgrounds often receive very different levels of individual attention before they join the same class.

Code-switching is not treated as a weakness. It can be seen as a sign of skill in several languages and of a connection to a culture (Deumert, 2011). So a habit that is common in the classroom can become a teaching resource and does not have to be seen as an error. Studies also show that translanguaging, which means using all the languages a learner knows, helps bilingual students understand more and feel more confident in an intercultural class (Wang & Shen, 2024).

Gender is another factor in second language classes. Differences in how men and women communicate are connected with the wider expectations of society (Eckert, 2003; Schilling, 2011). Teenagers learn ways of speaking that match the gender roles supported in their communities. A separate "women's language", linked with lower social power, has also been described (Cameron, 2005). This may explain why some girls, especially those from villages, do not want to speak in class even though their grammar is equal to or better than the boys'. Ethnic and language background also interact with these patterns, so language level alone cannot explain them (Fought, 2011).

In terms of teaching, fear of making mistakes is one of the main reasons why students stay silent in speaking classes, particularly when their grammar is weak (Le et al., 2024). This supports the use of scaffolding and differentiated teaching. Fair teaching should also accept language variety and should not push one "standard" accent or

variety on all students (Bayley & Villarreal, 2018; Selvi, 2019).

Comparing these studies, one strength is common: all of them see social variation in language as systematic and not random. This is a solid theoretical base for classroom research. There is also a common weakness. Most of the work is about general multilingual or immigrant education, and only a little is about a multilingual specialized school in a post-Soviet Central Asian country. This study aims to fill that gap. It gives a classroom-level, evidence-based description of how these well-known global patterns appear among secondary school EFL learners in Uzbekistan.

Research methodology

This study uses a qualitative case-study design, which is based on long-term classroom observation and reflection on the researcher's own teaching. This method is common in practitioner research in applied linguistics. The researcher taught English four times a week, with extra lessons during the week. The participants were 8th-grade students of the Muhammad al-Khwarizmi IT-specialized school in Urgench, and the study lasted one school term.

The students entered the school through a competitive entrance exam in three subjects: mathematics, IT, and English. They came from different districts of Khorezm region. During the study the class was at the CEFR B1 level. Their knowledge of grammar was at a similar level, but their speaking and pronunciation skills were not equal.

Data were collected from three sources: (a) direct observation of lessons and extra sessions during the whole term; (b) informal conversations with students about their background, language use, and learning preferences; and (c) results of the school's assessment system. In this system, every term includes two formative assessments (25% each) and one summative assessment (50% of the final grade). The analysis had three stages. First, the observation notes were arranged by date. Second, repeated patterns were coded

by theme under four factors: regional background, family income, gender, and ethnicity. Two more themes were used as well: the school environment and students' expectations about using English in the future. Third, the coded patterns were compared with the theory in the literature review to see where they matched and where the local context was different.

Analysis and Results

Regional background

The 8th-grade students belonged to different speech communities across Khorezm region, so their language showed this variety, mostly in the words they chose and in their accents. Students from villages were less enthusiastic about speaking activities in front of the class, and they often felt less confident in group speaking tasks. Students from Urgench, on the other hand, were more active and enjoyed speaking English regardless of their proficiency level.

Socioeconomic background

Students from richer families had often studied at private schools with smaller classes, where teachers could give individual attention. These students tended to be more independent than their peers from state schools. Students from state schools often needed extra help to improve their speaking skills and pronunciation, because state schools have often paid more attention to grammar than to these skills.

Gender

Girls usually performed better than boys in writing and grammar accuracy. Boys, however, were more ready to speak and to ask questions in front of others. Girls often stayed silent even when they had a question, and this was more visible among girls from villages.

Ethnicity and home language background

Although all the students were citizens of Uzbekistan, their home language backgrounds were quite different. Some of them had studied at Russian-medium schools, while others had studied only at Uzbek-medium schools. This

difference led to frequent code-switching, especially among bilingual students.

Institutional learning context and anticipated use of English

The school provides four English lessons a week, each 45 minutes long, and two extra classes where students get more exposure in order to improve their general English. Communicative Language Teaching and the Lexical Approach are mostly followed. Students' reasons for learning English are closely connected with future goals such as studying abroad, working internationally, or taking exams like IELTS. However, village students are more likely to have limited opportunities to use English in the future, while city students usually have more access to international exchange programs.

Implications for teaching

Table 1 summarizes the four factors, the patterns observed in class, and the strategies suggested below. Taken together, the results show that one teaching approach for everybody is unlikely to be fair in a class with such different language and social

backgrounds. Differentiated instruction can help. For example, teachers can offer extra grammar support to those who need it and give harder tasks to stronger students. In this way the gaps left by earlier schooling are filled, and expectations stay the same for every group. Scaffolded speaking tasks, such as sentence starters, can lower the hesitation of village students and girls without pointing them out in front of others. Mixed groups of boys and girls balance louder students and give quieter students more space to talk. Assessment also needs to change. Rubrics should reward clear, logical, and effective communication in all four language skills, and should not punish regional pronunciation or code-switching. This is in line with translanguaging-based assessment (Wang & Shen, 2024). Finally, teachers can use culturally relevant materials, for example bilingual glossaries and texts that show different varieties of English. Such materials build vocabulary and respect students' language backgrounds instead of erasing them (Selvi, 2019).

Factor	Observed pattern	Suggested strategy
Regional background	Village students were less confident in speaking tasks; city students were more active.	Scaffolded speaking tasks (sentence starters).
Family income	Students from richer families had earlier individual attention; state-school students needed help with speaking and pronunciation.	Differentiated grammar and speaking support.
Gender	Girls did better in writing and grammar but stayed quiet more often; boys were more willing to speak.	Mixed groups of boys and girls.
Ethnic and home language background	Russian-medium and Uzbek-medium school backgrounds led to frequent code-switching.	Assessment that accepts translanguaging; bilingual materials.

Table 1. *Social factors, observed patterns, and suggested strategies*

Conclusion and Recommendations

This case study clearly shows that factors such as regional background, income, gender, and ethnic language identity affect English learning even when students share a similar

formal level. Because of these factors, teachers need new approaches that go beyond the standard, traditional methods of the past.

The following recommendations are suggested for practice: (1) use differentiated

grammar and speaking materials that give extra support without lowering expectations for any group; (2) form groups deliberately by gender and family background in speaking activities so that participation is shared more evenly; (3) change assessment rubrics so that they reward communication across languages instead of punishing code-switching; and (4) use materials from different cultures and languages that respect students' regional and home-language backgrounds and do not try to correct them.

These recommendations can be used directly in similar specialized schools in Uzbekistan, where classes with mixed regional and social backgrounds are becoming more common. Further research is needed. A study with several classes, more students, and numerical data on participation and achievement would show how stable these patterns are in other multilingual schools in Uzbekistan and would make the evidence for the recommendations stronger.

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