

The Use of English in Multilingual Communities and Its Effect as an Official Language on Nations' BuildingDr. Halima Benzoukh¹

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Abstract

English is considered as the most used language in today's world. The present paper comes to shed light on language in the English society. In every society, there are factors that determine language use. The determinants of language use are the factors that determine acceptable linguistic forms in a given society. The paper first makes a comparison between Chomsky's competence and performance, and Saussure's terms langue and parole. It then shows how English is employed in many fields. English is the most popular on the internet. It is also regarded as the top business and science language. Since it is widely taught in many countries all over the world, English turns out to be the best means for making communication easier when travelling internationally. The idea of making English as an official language becomes the main issue of national debates in many countries. English in some nations where there are several spoken languages is seen as a politically neutral language. Therefore, the current paper comes to show the importance of using English as an official language in multilingual communities and its impact on nation building.

Key-words: English; society; official language; neutral language; multilingual communities.

المخلص

تعتبر الإنجليزية اللغة الأكثر استخدامًا في عالم اليوم. و يأتي هذا المقال لإلقاء الضوء على اللغة في المجتمع الإنجليزي. هناك عوامل تحدد استخدام اللغة في كل مجتمع، و محددات استخدام اللغة هي العوامل التي تحدد الأشكال اللغوية المقبولة في مجتمع معين. يقارن المقال أولاً بين ثنائية تشومسكي، القدرة والإنجاز ، و ثنائية دي سوسير ، اللسان و الكلام. ثم

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يوضح المقال استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في العديد من المجالات. تعتبر اللغة الإنجليزية الأكثر شعبية على الإنترنت و تعتبر أيضاً لغة الأعمال والعلوم. و نظراً لأنه يتم تدريسها على نطاق واسع في العديد من البلدان في جميع أنحاء العالم، فقد تبين أن اللغة الإنجليزية هي أفضل وسيلة لتسهيل التواصل عند السفر دولياً. أصبحت فكرة جعل الإنجليزية كلغة رسمية هي القضية الرئيسية في العديد من البلدان. في بعض الدول حيث توجد عدة لغات منطوقة يُنظر إلى اللغة الإنجليزية على أنها لغة محايدة سياسياً. و لذلك يظهر هذا المقال أهمية استخدام الإنجليزية كلغة رسمية في المجتمعات متعددة اللغات وتأثيرها على بناء الأمم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية؛ المجتمع؛ اللغة الرسمية؛ اللغة المحايدة؛ المجتمعات متعددة اللغات.

1. Introduction

An official language is a language which is given a particular legal position in a specific nation. A country's official language is also used to refer to the language used in its government sectors. Because of the fact that ways of expression of people cannot be altered by any rule, an official language is not necessarily related to the language used by its people, but by its government offices (Holmes, 2013).

English is nowadays regarded as the global language and it is widely used than in any other languages. It is the recognized international language of technology, politics, business and culture. English is spoken as a first language on every continent except South America (Gardiner, 2008). It is used in many countries as an official language or semi-official language. The supremacy of English as a world language can be due to the rise of the British Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The use of English grew when the United Kingdom (UK) established a number of colonies around the world. However, the political and the economic authority of the UK declined, but the emergence of the United States as a world power meant the continued spread of English.

2. Society and Language Determinants

The speaker/writer makes complex sets of choices which lead to the realizations of the meaning in an actual structure. The systems are grouped into three broad functions which correspond to the tasks that any communicational system is asked to perform (Halliday, 1985). These functions are saying something about the state of events in the world, which Halliday (1985) calls 'the ideational function', saying something about the state of the social relations between those who are interacting by means of the communicational system, which he calls 'the interpersonal function' and saying something about the organization of the structure as a message, which he calls 'the textual function'. Speakers choose simultaneously from options in each of these functions (ibid.). For example, one might choose, within the ideational function, to have a clause-type which highlights agency "rioters bum nine buses"; within the interpersonal component of the grammar, one might choose a statement so that the

speaker has the role of someone who gives information (rather than asking a question or giving a command) which would make it acquire different social relations between the people interacting within the textual component; one might choose to highlight the agents of the action- “it was the rioters who burned nine buses”. The role of the speaker here is very different from that in the correlational view (ibid.). Here, s/he is active in selecting from the range of options available to him/her in response to the social contingencies in which s/he finds himself/herself (ibid.).

The language in use in some situations is not appropriate in some others. Since language does not occur in a vacuum, it is made possible through the basic requirements in a given society. Apart from the general societal requirements, there is also language use required in certain situations of professional touch. For certain situations requiring vocational appeal, there are some linguistic requirements. For example, in a school environment, it is expected that the teacher should be careful in his language use since s/he has learners all around him/her, because they may learn all that s/he says or does; therefore, any linguistic deviation by the teacher may be copied as appropriate by the learners.

Social life, including language use, is governed by norms- socially shared concepts of appropriate and expected behaviour (Wardhaugh, 2010). The most basic of these concepts are acquired in early childhood through socialisation (ibid.). In the case of language norms, this means that the first language norms adopted are the ones of everyday spoken language (ibid.). Compared to the prescriptive norms of the standardized language, these uncodified norms are perhaps less conscious, yet more natural, in every sense of the word: they are more numerous, acquired earlier in life and mastered by all native speakers (Meyerhoff, 2006). They also historically precede the norms of the standard language, and in communities without a written language they are the only norms available (ibid.). Labov (1972) has stressed the importance of these naturally occurring norms for linguistic description (Trudgill, 2000). He both encourages to take the norms of the vernacular as the basis of grammatical description as well as to discuss more thoroughly the nature of language norms (ibid.). Norms are inherently social (ibid.). Therefore, it is especially interesting to ask whether these principles are realized in sociolinguistic description.

3. General Rules and Individual Use

Language acquisition and use are related to a society's growth and development (Bell, 1976). In traditional grammar, language was also seen as prescriptive and not descriptive, whereby the users accept the structure and usage as it was (Coulthard, 1977). In 1916, the publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (posthumously by his students) marked a turning point in the study of the human language. De Saussure recognized the concept of 'Langue' and 'Parole' in

human language (ibid.). Simply translated, ‘langue’ and ‘parole’ are ‘language’ and ‘speech’; however, such a translation is misleading because those terms are almost synonyms (Gardiner, 2008).

According to De Saussure, the only way to avoid this is to isolate a coherent object which will provide both a goal for analysis and a principle of relevance. Saussure distinguished with a bold stroke between language as a system (la langue) and the actual manifestations of language in speech or writing (la parole). This distinction between langue and parole has been important, not only for linguistics, but for other disciplines as well, where it can be rendered as a distinction between institution and event, or between the underlying system which makes possible various types of behaviour and actual instances of such behaviour.

However, among scholars, these concepts have generated a lot of controversies. Noam Chomsky gave his own version, but he has a slight shift from those of Saussure. The American linguist, Noam Chomsky, initiated what many view as a scientific revolution in linguistics. Chomsky (1965) sought a theory that would account for both linguistic structure and for the creativity of language— the fact that we can create entirely original sentences and understand sentences never before uttered. He suggested that all people have an innate ability to acquire language. The task of the linguist, he claimed, is to describe this universal human ability, known as ‘language competence’, with a grammar from which the grammars of all languages could be derived. The linguist would develop this grammar by looking at the rules children use in hearing and speaking their first language (Hudson, 1996). Chomsky (1965) termed the resulting model, or grammar, a transformational-generative grammar, referring to the transformations that generate sentences in the language. He asserted that certain rules are shared by all languages and form part of a universal grammar, while others are language specific and associated with particular speech communities. Since the 1960s, much of the development in the field of linguistics has been a reaction to or against Chomsky’s theories (Hudson, 1996).

At the end of the 20th century, linguists used the term ‘grammar’ primarily to refer to a subconscious linguistic system that enables people to produce and comprehend an unlimited number of utterances (Bell, 1976). Grammar thus accounts for our linguistic competence (Chomsky, 1965). Observations about the actual language we use, or language performance, are used to theorize about this invisible mechanism known as grammar (ibid.).

The orientation toward the scientific study of language led by Chomsky has had an impact on non-generative linguists as well (Hudson, 1996). Comparative and historically oriented linguists have thus started looking for the various ways linguistic universals show up in individual languages (ibid.). Psycholinguists, interested in

language acquisition, investigate the notion that an ideal speaker-hearer is the origin of the acquisition process (Bell, 1976).

3. 1 Langue and Parole

Saussure (1916) in his course focuses on what he calls language, that is a system of signs that express ideas, and suggests that it may be divided into two components: *langue*, referring to the abstract system of language that is internalized by a given speech community, and *parole*, the individual acts of speech. Saussure argued against the nineteenth-century popular organicist view of language as a natural organism, which, without being determinable by the will of man, grows and evolves in accordance with fixed laws (Bell, 1976). Instead, he defined language as a social product, the social side of speech being beyond the control of the speaker. According to Saussure, language is not a function of the speaker, but is passively assimilated. Speaking, as defined by Saussure, is a premeditated act.

While speech (*parole*) is heterogeneous, that is to say composed of unrelated elements, language (*langue*) is homogeneous, composed of the union of meanings and sound images in which both parts are psychological (Bell, 1976). Therefore, as *langue* is systematic, it is this that Saussure focuses on since it allows an investigative methodology that is rooted, supposedly, in pure science (*ibid.*). Beginning with the Greek word ‘*semion*’ meaning ‘sign’, Saussure names this science ‘*semiology*’: ‘a science that studies the life of signs within society’ (*ibid.*).

Langue and *parole* are more than just ‘language and speech’ (although this is a useful way of remembering them) (Eggins, 1994). *La langue* is the whole system of language that precedes and makes speech possible (*ibid.*). A sign is a basic unit of *langue* (*ibid.*). In fact, in learning a language, we have to master the system of grammar, spelling, syntax and punctuation. These are all elements of *langue* (Bell, 1976). *Langue* is a system in that it has a large number of elements whereby meaning is assumed in the arrangements of its elements and the consequent relationships between these arranged elements (*ibid.*). *Parole* is the concrete use of the language, the actual utterances (Eggins, 1994). It is an external manifestation of *langue* (*ibid.*). It is the usage of the system, but not the system (*ibid.*). By defining ‘*langue*’ and ‘*parole*’, Saussure differentiates between the language and how it is used, and therefore enabling these two very different things to be studied as separate entities. As a structuralist, Saussure was interested more in *la langue* than *parole* (Bell, 1976). It was the system by which meaning could be assumed that was of interest rather than individual instances of its use (*ibid.*).

Words are subjected to negotiation, contest and struggle (*ibid.*). Language is strongly affected by social contexts (Trudgill, 2000). Modification of *langue* at the

point of parole is used to create assumed meanings, either where the speaker has limited grasp of language or where deliberate twist is used (Eggins, 1994).

3. 2 Competence and Performance

The limitations of current language processing systems are not surprising; these systems are built on a competence-grammar in the Chomskyan sense (Hudson, 1996). Chomsky made an emphatic distinction between the competence of a language user and his performance (Wardhaugh, 2010). The competence consists in the knowledge of language which the language user in principle has; the performance is the result of the psychological process that employs this knowledge in producing or in interpreting utterances (ibid.). The formal grammars, that theoretical linguistics is concerned with, aim at characterising the competence of the language user (ibid.). However, the preferences that language users display in dealing with syntactically ambiguous sentences constitute a prototypical example of a phenomenon that in the Chomskyan view belongs to the realm of performance (ibid.).

The linguistic perspective on performance involves the implicit assumption that language behaviour can be accounted for by a system that comprises a competence-grammar as an identifiable sub-component (Hudson, 1996). Because of its ambiguity, this assumption is however computationally unattractive: if one would find criteria to prefer certain syntactic analyses above others, the efficiency of the whole process might benefit if these criteria were applied in an early stage, integrated with the strictly syntactic rules (ibid.). This would amount to an integrated implementation of competence and performance notions (ibid.).

3. 3 Points of Convergence and Divergence

Chomsky (1965) defines competence as a factor that refers to a speaker's knowledge of his language that enables him to understand an infinite number of sentences often never heard or produced before. Similarly, in Saussure's point of view, the term 'langue' represents the general system of language. Performance refers to the actual use and realization of language, which is alike to parole, that relates to the appliance of language, the actual process of speaking (Eggins, 1994).

To exemplify how Chomsky and Saussure thought and why they used the terms they did, one can use the phrase 'structure rules' (ibid.). A sentence can be fragmented into single units that describe its structure (Corder, 1973). A native speaker applies all these rules even though he might not be completely aware of them (Romaine, 2000). The general concept of the internalization of the rules is similar to competence while the usage of them can be referred to as performance and parole (Eggins, 1994). Langue and competence are not too similar here, because langue does not contain any dynamic rules, but is only a system of signs (ibid.). Apart from this affinity, there is an important difference that has to be mentioned. Chomsky (1965) sees competence as an

attribute of the individual person, whereas Saussure states that language exists perfectly only within a collectivity. Another important difference is that langue only refers to the sign system (Yule, 2010).

4. Language Use in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is a multilingual country. However, the English language has helped in several ways in solving the complexity since the vast multilingual populace could communicate in English, no matter the level of competence of each user of the language. UK has four major islands, and each island has a complex linguistic structure.

There are big cities in each island. These cities harbour many people from different ethnic divides. Hence, English language becomes the only interactional language among the vast and mixed populace. Then, many sociolinguistic factors like education, status, location and gender determine the use of English in these cities. For instance, in Britain, the English of the ethnic minorities generally signal their ethnic background. Ethnicity is not signaled by the speaker's knowledge of a specific linguistic variety, but by the way speakers use the varieties in their linguistic repertoire as symbols of their ethnicity (Gardiner, 2008). Patois features are incorporated in the speech of Jamaican British speakers to signal their Black identity (Trudgill, 2000). Special features of intonation, like stress, and patterns that differ from those of Standard English are also used as well as the omission of /h/ sound in 'home' (ibid.). The substitution of /ð/ sound by /d/ in 'then' and /θ/ sound by /t/ in 'thin', the form 'mi' that is used for 'I', 'me' and 'my', e.g. 'Mi niem' (my name), and 'dem' that is used for 'they', 'them' and 'their', e.g. 'Dem niem' (their name) are some of its characteristics (Gardiner, 2008).

Further, there are regional varieties of British Black English. The function of these varieties is to act as symbols of ethnicity among British Black people (Wardhaugh, 2010). The term of anti-language is sometimes used for these varieties to mark their function as expressing opposition to the mainstream values of white British Society which exclude Black people and their culture (ibid.).

In many parts of England and Wales, Standard English has lost the pronunciation of /r/ in cases where it follows vowels in words like 'star' and 'start' (Trudgill, 2000). Post-vocalic /r/ does not occur in RP nor in the London Cockney dialect any more (ibid.). The loss of post-vocalic /r/ seems to have begun in the 17th century in the South East of England, and is still in progress (ibid.). In South West of England, post vocalic /r/ is still regularly pronounced (ibid.). Accents with post vocalic /r/ are called 'rhotic' (Gardiner, 2008). In large areas of England, rhotic English

accents are regarded as rural and uneducated (ibid.). The English in use in each of these cities is determined by the social setting and the cultural environment (ibid.).

5. Using English in Multilingual Countries

Nearly 178 countries in the world have got at least one official language, and 101 of them recognize more than one language (ibid.). Several countries' constitutions maintain one or more official languages. Though Arabic, French, and Spanish are widely used as official languages in many countries, English remains the most used official language, with a recognized status in over seventy countries (Gardiner, 2008).

5.1 English as a Medium of Instruction

As a healthy sign, most colonized countries all over the world after getting their independence tried to assess the state of their conditions. Education system was one of the most crucial issues that must be reconsidered since a high quality of education is the main factor that leads to any nation's economic growth. However, a key area of education is the language that is used as an instrument of instruction (Kaplan & Buldauf, 2011).

Using English as a second official language in schools and higher education institutions is a strategy which has been adopted by many countries all over the world nowadays. This strategy has come to meet the wants and the needs of the different stakeholders. English is maybe the first international language which is widely used by non-native speakers. It is the language of science since all scientific research works are published in English. It is also the language of letters since most literary books are translated into English. Therefore, students will find it easy to get access to different resources that can help them not only in their studies, but also in their future careers. In addition, many study opportunities abroad are often offered in English. In this case, students will find it easy to apply for these scholarships and fellowships.

Language is the key means to understand the other. If a country chooses its official language, it then establishes its language policy. This official language must be stated clearly in the constitution. However, in some countries real life situations show another reality of the constitutional language. For example, in some nations, the second language is commonly used in educational institutions and administrative services. This reality creates a number of contradictions in terms of language identity since there are no constitutional statements on the way how first and second languages can be used in the same country. If a student starts his school in his official language and finishes his university studies in English, s/he will always face many challenges in understanding that language change.

5.2 English as a Language of Science and Technology

Technological innovation is the key to creating a lasting development in all the fields. However, this can be achieved just through having recourse to previous experiences in some developed countries where there was a great change in all the domains. In this case, the best tool to transmit those experiences is English since it is the widely used language in the tech-world so that new innovative inventions will be introduced to help in building the nation.

English is regarded as the first language of technological revolutions and of the internet. What occurs inside any electronic devices is often dominated by the use of English. The USA till nowadays remains the most technological country and because of its language policy, English is the dominant language in that field. Therefore, any new technological innovation is first produced in English.

5.3 English as the Top Language on the Internet

English is the top language on the internet. Different social media networks offer their services for the first time in English and many of their users prefer using English in their communications. First versions of programs on the net are first produced in English as well.

There are millions of websites and online materials created in English on the internet. English today dominates various universal information resources and provides the largest amount of data in printed and electronic materials (McArthur, 1998). Therefore, to take advantage of most information resources in numerous domains, specifically science and technology, English is the only asset that is needed to implement as an official language.

5.4 English as the Top Business Language

English is also considered as the top business language since most business affairs around the world are made in English. The latter is regarded as a lingua franca for many countries and that will facilitate cooperation and exchanges between them (Crystal, 1997). All that could develop trades, and hence the country's economic status will be better. If a country wants to trade internationally, it needs to use English in its commercial affairs.

The worldwide economy at the present time is getting more consolidated. Large businesses have been launched in almost every country all over the world and all stock and currency markets also get closely tied up that even the tiniest changes in an important stock price will have an immediate effect on other prices worldwide. It is

only common sense that in a situation like this a common language would be chosen to make the information flow as simple and unproblematic as possible, and for many countries English is selected as the first language serving this function.

5.5 English as a Neutral Language

In multi-ethnic communities, different languages are used. Choosing one of them as an official language can meet the refusal of the other ethnic groups who may see that this decision comes against their cultural heritage and identity (Bekes, 2011). In this case, any potential conflicts may appear on the surface.

To settle such conflicts, many countries have chosen to add English as a second official language to their constitution. English is regarded as the best resolution in such communities to get over any problems which may lead to the nation division. It is also seen as the best way to get rid of such problems which can threaten the national stability and development.

6. Conclusion

Language differences within a particular country can sometimes lead to a bottleneck situation. Having one official language in this case will facilitate communication between the government and the different ethnic groups. This will create a more integrated nation. Therefore, many countries set their language policy as the first step in their nation building. Choosing English as an official language has been considered by most of them as the best way to settle any conflicts within their multi-lingual communities and as the asset that could help their economic growth.

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