

The Contributions of the Sociolinguistic Theory to Language and Language Learning

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore the enlightenment of sociolinguistics on language and English learning. It first explains the concept and the development of sociolinguistics, then gives two examples to help readers to better understand and illustrate the theory, clarifies the importance of combining sociolinguistics with English language learning and finally lists the enlightenment of sociolinguistics on our English learners from four aspects. It is hoped that in the future, we can consciously master the language from the perspective of sociolinguistics in the process of language acquisition.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics; English Learning; Social Context; Language Use

1. Brief Introduction of the Sociolinguistic Theory

The term "sociolinguistics" first appeared in a paper published by American scholar Haver C. Currie in 1952. However, as an independent discipline, sociolinguistics was born in 1964. In that year, the United States published language in culture and society: a reader of linguistics and anthropology, which was compiled by D. Hymes, in which the word "sociolinguistics" was used; In May of the same year, W. bright hosted the first sociological seminar. At the beginning of the 20th century, sociolinguistics had a chance to develop and was welcomed. At that time, sociolinguistics was a frontier subject and has been regarded as a branch of social science since 1960.

Sociolinguistics mainly refers to a discipline that uses the theories and methods of linguistics and sociology to study the social essence and differences of language from the perspective of different social sciences.

Sociolinguistics is a big term, which covers a large number of issues related to language and society, including the social functions of language and the social characteristics of language users.

Sociolinguistics attempts to reveal the social rules and norms that can explain and limit language acts in speech communities. At the same time, it also tries to determine the symbolic value of language diversity to speakers.

2. Two Examples

2.1 Classic department store survey

"Social stratification of New York City Department Store (R)" was to ask all kinds of respondents on each floor "where is the women's shoe department" (the default answer is "the fourth floor"), and then pretend not to hear clearly and ask again. Social variables include company, floor, gender, age, position, race, foreign accent and national accent etc. The conclusion is that more rich people retain the R sound than the poor, more whites than blacks, more women than men, and more high positions than low positions.

This is not just a simple language phenomenon, but shows the influence of social and time changes on language. There is a historical problem involved-before World War II, Britain dominated. The traditional British pronunciation believed that curly r was rustic, while after World War II, Britain lost its imperial status, and not the British accent but the American accent with curly r was regarded as upper class.

2.2 "Fat talk" sociolinguistic phenomenon

People (mostly women) often say "I look fat" and "do I look fat" in the conversation to complain about their body. These phrases are difficult to collect systematically, so it is a challenge for sociolinguistics. The researchers trained a group of local ordinary citizens and taught them how to record the fat self-mockery they accidentally heard in conversation or in daily life in the southwest of the United States.

The researchers found that the most common response to self-mockery of obesity was negative answer. Questions like "do I look fat" or "I'm so fat in these tights" will get more rejection answers. The most commonly used response of women is comfort, such as "hell no! You look good. You think too much". The common reaction of men is positive remission: "you are fat, so am I". We can see the influence of gender social differences on language.

3. The Importance of Integrating Sociolinguistics with English

As we have mentioned above, sociolinguistics is a discipline that studies the relationship between language and society. Its central problem is the relationship between social context and language use. As a social phenomenon, language will change with the differences of region, nationality, culture, gender and other factors. English, like all other languages, will change according to the specific circumstances in which it is used.

Therefore, if we can try to look at English from a sociolinguistic perspective and pay attention to various changes in English under different circumstances, it will be of great help for us to effectively understand, master and use English. On the contrary, if an English learner knows nothing about sociolinguistics, it is difficult for him to properly use English as a tool of language communication in his study, work and interpersonal communication.

4. The Contributions to Language and Language Learning (take English as an example)

4.1 Help us take the cultivation of English communicative competence as the ultimate goal

As English learners, we should always make it clear that the ultimate goal of language learning is communication. Language communicative competence refers to the use of language by speakers in various social environments by using language skills. That is to say, how to properly and appropriately use language variants in different environments is an acquired ability that people gradually learn in social communication or in education. The fundamental purpose of College English teaching is to cultivate students' ability to communicate in English. This point is indisputable in principle. The concept of "communicative competence" in sociolinguistics has a great impact on second language acquisition. Since this concept was put forward, the foreign language community has regarded the cultivation of students' communicative competence as the primary goal of language teaching. However, for a long time, College English teaching has only paid attention to the teaching of language knowledge, completely ignoring or even not considering how to cultivate students' English communicative competence in classroom teaching, which is closely related to the influence of traditional linguistic theories.

According to the Sociolinguistic Theory, language exists for communication. The traditional exam-oriented education makes us pay much attention to grammar and vocabulary, ignoring the practical significance and application value of language itself. This is also why Li Yang Crazy English has been admitted and affirmed by the society.

4.2 Help us pay attention to the impact of different situations on English communication

Time, region, social customs and culture, gender, identity, class and interpersonal relationship of communicators, communication occasions, topics discussed, speaking motivation and other factors may affect and change language. Therefore, when we communicate in English, we should consider all factors as much as possible, understand and use appropriate English variants, and clarify the situation and appropriate expressions. In the non-English environment, it is obviously too difficult to notice the variations of English in all situations, but we can set up an English environment for ourselves in our daily life, such as reading more English newspapers, watching more original English movies, listening to more original English songs, and learning English culture in the process of reading, watching and listening.

4.3 Help us pay attention to the standardization of English

English is a relatively broad language with a large degree of freedom. It has not developed a set of standard language, namely Putonghua, like Chinese. But in learning English, we still can not ignore the standardization of English. We should be able to distinguish what is beautiful and acceptable language from what is ugly and unacceptable language; Understand what is a grammatically correct language and what is a non-grammatically correct language. We usually take standard English as the object of study. Standard English refers to a language that is grammatically correct, uses words accurately, conforms to norms and idioms. The promotion of standard language does not mean that it belittles other non-standard languages, but because non-standard languages put aside grammar and emphasize idioms, which seems to make it difficult for people, especially those of us who learn English as a foreign language. Language is always restricted by society, and grammar is one of them. Therefore, when we learn English, we can neither ignore idioms nor abandon grammar; It can neither be bound by grammatical rules nor be completely free and uninhibited.

From the moment a person is born, he is constantly making one or another contact with his surrounding environment or society. In this process, he gradually learns his mother tongue and the dialect of his region. If we were not brought up in an English-speaking country, we might never reach the level of a mother tongue. It is true that dialects are the characteristics of a region, but now we all advocate speaking standard language. Standard language is not only standardized, but also practical, which is of great help to our English communication.

4.4 Help us realize the special language phenomena like euphemism and slang in English

As language learners, we should distinguish between formal and informal occasions in the process of communication, and use appropriate language in the corresponding occasions. If informal language is used in formal occasions, it will give people a bad impression; Similarly, speaking too formally when talking to friends can also cause embarrassment. Because language relationship is an important means for people to maintain social and interpersonal relationships, people usually avoid using language that causes unhappiness and damages the relationship between the two sides in daily communication, and use circuitous methods to express ideas and exchange information. This is how euphemism came into being. For almost all languages, euphemism plays a very important role in communication, especially in English. For example, when a person dies, we usually don't say "die" directly, but say "pass away" or "kick the bucket", which can improve the politeness of speaking and also reflect the clever use of language in the social environment, which is worthy of our attention and learning.

Slang is also a kind of informal English, especially common in American English. In ordinary English learning, we are very familiar with some common slang, such as a piece of cake, a book, the cover of a book, and so on. The meaning contained in it is also worth our understanding and reflection.

It is very difficult to master all euphemisms and slang at one time, because such languages are often related to culture, history and customs. If we do not fully experience and perceive the culture of a country and a nation, we cannot accurately grasp the meaning behind the dialogue, and the dialogue will become invalid.

Therefore, as second language learners, we need to learn more about common expressions in daily life in Britain and the United States and accumulate this knowledge, which will be very helpful for us to learn English language and understand the culture of English-speaking countries. There is an old Chinese saying that no step in a long way can lead to a thousand miles;

There is no river or sea without small streams. We should pay attention to the great power accumulated on weekdays, bit by bit, and eventually quantitative change will produce qualitative change.

Conclusion

Sociolinguistics is a subject that studies the relationship between language and society, whose core is the relationship between social context and language use. English, like all other languages, will change according to the specific situation at the time of use. Therefore, when we learn English, if we can try to look at English from the perspective of sociolinguistics and pay attention to various changes in English under different circumstances, it will provide great help for us to effectively understand, master and use English well.

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Main research directions: English Language Teaching, English Acquisition.