

## SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF THE FOREIGN STUDENTS' MOTIVATION TO LEARN LANGUAGES (SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF MODERN ENGLISH)

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**Abstract:** Modern linguistic science addresses several topical and applied scientific problems related to the study of the underlying nature of language sociolinguistic parameters. This paper examines the influence of social and verbal aspects on foreign students' motivation to learn languages. This article aims at establishing the components of foreign students' motivation to learn languages, the transformation of these changes according to the language proficiency level, and, also, to determine the main variables of sociolinguistic correlates. The methodology is based on a comprehensive approach. The methodology implementation tool consists of several methods: experimental method, sociolinguistic method, statistical and empirical methods, comparative-historical analysis method. The hypothesis lies in the fact that the involvement of sociolinguistic components in the language learning process by foreign students allows to determine and increase the overall motivation of students, forming a positive attitude to the acquisition of foreign languages. The result is to identify the level, components, and causes of students' motivation in terms of the sociolinguistic component involved in the learning process. In future research, it is necessary to further develop the theory and practice of sociolinguistic methods (adapted for educational and diagnostic purposes) and to determine the level of foreign students' motivation for learning.

**Keywords:** sociolinguistics, motivation, foreign language, higher education, foreign students.

### 1 Introduction

All countries and social groups are not perceived as closed, abstracted, and self-sufficient under information globalization but are united into global systems, which, in turn, have complex and contradictory interconnections and interdependencies. In this regard, let us note that almost every era in human history is characterized by the presence of its lingua franca. For example, for English, the following division is presented:

- 1) English as a native/the first language spoken by its speakers (Native/first language speakers) in Great Britain, North America, Australia, and New Zealand (i.e., in its original homeland and colonial settlements, a population of European origin created a demographic majority);
- 2) English as the official language (English as the second language) or Creole English, spoken by all those for whom English is not a native language but a second language speaker, and used as an official means of domestic and interpersonal communication. These are the official languages of India, East and West Africa (Ghana, Jamaica, Liberia), and Asia (Singapore, Philippines);
- 3) English as a foreign language is used as a means of communication for all those who learn English as a foreign language (McArthur, 1998).

The model of sociolinguistic perception of different language variations presented above has recently been criticized (Shim, Lee, 2018) because it is difficult to apply in the multilingual context. However, it can be used to illustrate quite clearly how many people in the world communicate in one foreign language.

It shows the general motivation level to learn many more foreign languages. This problem is relevant to researchers in different directions.

Recently, in the study of linguistic diversity, several sub-traditions have developed, two of which are of particular importance, first, pragmalinguistic (Howard-Jones, 2014), and second, sociolinguistic (Zhunussova, 2021).

Language can shed a light on the study of the society where it is used. It contains clear information about the cultural and political priorities of the society. Also, it is a part of the country's population traditions in which it is used (Giachanou, Crestani, 2016). This research context raises the multilingualism problem, which requires the development at the higher education level of certain teaching methods, technologies, and new innovative approaches to the language industry.

In today's world, multilingualism is promoted by communication, digital technology, and the existing linguistic diversity of many societies (Howard-Jones, 2014). Multilingualism poses both trivial and serious problems, from the need for road signs in several languages to the risk of competition between different languages or dialects, which in turn can lead to both speech tensions and political tensions.

The problems of "adaptation" to a foreign language and local conditions are acute (Mykytiuk et al., 2020). For example, English spoken in Arab countries acquires elements of the Arabic language system in a certain way (Rababah, 2020). Other factors influencing multilingualism are the linguistic and social environment, which forces people in a certain situation to make linguistic choices based on both of these factors.

Significant influences of immigrant languages, instability in the linguistic situation, linguistic competition, and linguistic fields are considered problem positions of language policy (Dryden et al., 2021). Although, the multilingual situation can be considered stable because different linguistic systems are geographically, socially, and functionally uncompetitive.

Open problems are the language policies of developing countries. The speed with which these countries have become multicultural and multilingual (over a period of 20–30 years) indicates a rapid change and development, which cannot but affect the educational situation, educational tourism, and the level of interest in learning foreign languages.

For example, English does not have the status of an official language in Arab countries. However, many speakers regularly use it in trade, diplomacy, science, and education spheres. Most Arab institutions, particularly the foreign affairs and health sectors and oil companies, prefer English-speaking experts and workers, whether citizens, immigrants, or expatriates, who use English fluently in communication and other activities concerning these sectors. This situation may be relatively consistent with business structures that prefer those professionals who know English, that is, those who graduated from school using English as their primary language (Candlin et al., 2021).

The relevance of using the potential of sociolinguistics to investigate the state of language and its variations in the sociocultural and geographical space of the world stems from the need to make an effective and flexible diagnosis of the quality of modern university education.

### 2 Literature Review

Sociolinguistics considers language attitudes as three components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The cognitive component is a set of beliefs about the object, which is evaluated with the help of tests, paper, and pencil. The affective

component includes an object feeling, which is assessed using psychological indicators. Finally, the behavioral component involves the speaker's attitudes and actions toward the object. Its evaluation is done through direct observation of language behavior (Salta, Tzougraki, 2004). Gök (2010) points out that most researchers define attitude towards learning a modern foreign language as a mental concept depicting favorable or unfavorable feelings towards an object (Ajzen Fishbein, 2000).

The problems of foreign language learning from a sociolinguistic perspective are the focus of a significant number of studies: the attitudes of different segments of the population towards foreign language learning (Marley 2004; Malallah, 2000); language typology from a sociolinguistic perspective (Assaf, 2001). In the field of pedagogy, the problems of students' motivation to learn a language, which is an integral part of learning and, therefore, should be an important component of pedagogy of learning a second foreign language (Bilal, 2019), are considered.

Students' attitudes toward learning a foreign language and the impact of motivation on educational aspirants' behavior, choosing and reading certain literature, and communicating in a foreign language, are examined (Koballa, 1988). The relationship between attitudes toward language learning and achievement is identified by Schibeci&Riley (1986) and Thompson&Lee (2018). Students' attitudes toward the target language, its speakers, and the context of learning may play a role in explaining their success in language learning (Candlin Mercer, 2021).

Individual differences are also a subject of research in sociolinguistics because personality traits play a significant role in language learning (Merisou-Strom, 2006). In the context of second language learning, factors such as age, gender, linguistic background, school type, and peer influence are some of the variables that affect language acquisition. Merisou-Strom (2006) found that female students have better attitudes toward second language acquisition (compared to male students). Ladies devote more time and money for acquiring and accessing reading materials in English and are likely to have better attitudes toward the study of literature (compared to male students).

Many studies that have looked at motivation in foreign language learning (Giachanou, Crestani, 2016; Mykytiuk et al., 2020) have shown that the effectiveness of the directed learning process is increased academic achievement, greater motivation, and students approving of learning.

Sociolinguistic aspects in foreign language teaching study should be carried out continuously. There is a wide range of questions about the influence of the educational and social status of the language in Latin America, Central Africa, China, and Ukraine. This study is relevant because learning and fluency in foreign languages have many problems related to both the education system, the language policy of the states, and the socio-cultural characteristics of the countries.

This study *aims* to establish the components of foreign students' motivation to learn languages, the transformation of these changes according to the language proficiency level, as well as to determine the main variables of sociolinguistics correlates.

- to establish variables in the structure of sociolinguistics as a research area;
- to determine the demographic and qualification characteristics of the respondents and the participants of the experiment;
- to establish the components of students' motivation to learn a foreign language.

### 3 Materials and Methods

The research methodology is based on a comprehensive approach. The method of experiment, sociolinguistic method, descriptive, statistical, and empirical methods, comparative-historical analysis method is used in the study.

Descriptive and comparative-historical methods were used to consider theoretical and methodological problems of sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistic, statistical, and empirical methods were used for the research work within the experiment.

The experiment took place during the 2020/2021 academic year within the "Foreign language" (English, French, German) academic discipline by choice. Foreign students of humanitarian specialties of the first (bachelor) education level of the Kharkiv National Pedagogical University named after Hryhoriy Skovoroda (Ukraine) took part in the study. The total number of interviewees was 74 students. All students were grouped into 3 groups: G1 – 23 people; G2 – 24 people; G3 – 25 people. Students came to study from China, Jordan, Morocco, Turkmenistan, and Nigeria. The groups were created by the criterion of the knowledge level of the chosen foreign language.

The survey focused on students' attitudes toward the need to learn foreign languages, motivation to learn, and the changes that can occur in motivation during the learning process. The structuring problem of the sociolinguistic components, which can affect the students' motivation level, was also considered.

The experiment consisted of 3 stages.

Stage I involved the preparation of training materials, diagnostic questionnaires to determine the level of the target language mastery and grouping respondents into groups. The demographic and qualification parameters of the respondents were determined. Organizational work with methodological and training materials was carried out. The consultations of teachers and students were organized.

At the II stage, active learning of foreign languages continued, development projects of intercultural orientation were introduced; innovations and technological opportunities in learning were involved as part of the foreign language course teaching.

At the III (final) stage, a questionnaire was conducted. The effectiveness of work to improve motivation for studying and foreign language learning was determined.

The questionnaire, which was conducted at the final stage, contained several questions with a choice of the proposed options. Statistical methods were used to collect and analyze survey data, which will help to solve the research problem.

Among the difficulties we encountered in the study are:

- the short period of the experiment continuation (during the school year);
- the lack of opportunity to conduct an in-depth qualitative survey because the project continues for one academic year.

Therefore, it is impossible to explain the respondents' motives for their choice. All participants of the experiment gave written consent to participate in it. The survey was conducted, maintaining the privacy and anonymity of the respondents.

### 4 Results

One of the main sociolinguistics' tasks relevant to this study is to analyze the problem of foreign students' attitudes toward language learning. In other words, a language from the different cultures, languages, and traditions perspective is not a closed system. Therefore, it is susceptible to all kinds of social influences. Hence, when learning a foreign language, there are its alternative forms and their implementation. Each speaker, as a representative of another tradition, realizes and assimilates a foreign language in different ways and aspects.

In sociolinguistics, it is possible to define a system of axes, which allows us to diagnose motives and ways of mastering a foreign language, the language of the country where learning takes place (Figure 1).

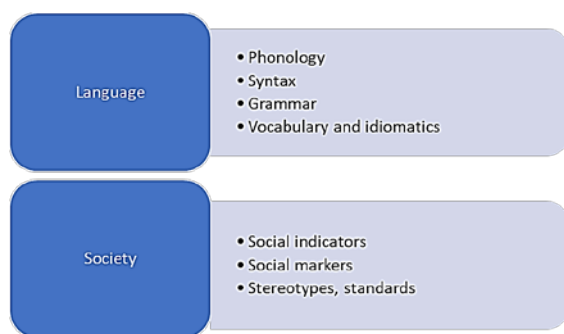


Figure 1. Seven variable correlates in sociolinguistics as a research direction

Source: author's elaboration.

The seven main linguistic correlate variables identified in this way include phonological, syntactic, and vocabulary layers of the language system, as well as speech processes, social indicators, social markers, standards, and stereotypes.

The social variable also depends on behavioral factors that can be identified to correlate with possible linguistic variations. These factors, including region, gender, age, social class, and ethnicity, are considered to explain language variation for individuals or communities.

During the 1st (organizational) stage of the study, preparations are made to examine and analyze the students' motivation to learn a foreign language. First of all, a questionnaire survey of the experiment participants by age, gender, education, and professional identification was carried out, which means that gender and professional indicators were assessed (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic and qualification features of the respondents (author's elaboration)

Age	19–22 23–26	G1	G2	G3
		16 7	19 5	20 5
Gender	Female	10	15	10
	Male	13	9	15
Country of origin	China	10	8	2
	Nigeria	2	2	10
	Jordan	8	2	8
	Morocco	1	2	
	Turkmenistan	2	10	5
First higher education	Bachelor's degree	21	17	20
	Master's degree	2	5	4
	Second higher education			
	Bachelor's degree	0	2	1
	Master's degree	0	0	0
Total		23	24	25

According to the demographics, the majority belongs to men, which is not significant. There are 35 women and 37 men in the groups. Groups are formed in such a way that young people are represented as an age category, where the majority are persons who are 19 to 22 years old (55 people), and the minority is 23–26 years old (17 people). The range of countries from which respondents came to study is quite wide. There are 5 countries located on 2 different continents. The vast majority of students in the group had no educational experience in higher education. 3 participants of the 72 were in the first (bachelor's) higher education level, and the other 3 were in the second (master's) level.

The learning materials were also shaped by age as a social variable, which affects variations in language use. Young people

are characterized by an appeal to non-standard forms, an interest in trying out the differences in language teaching methods, an orientation to interactivity, playfulness, and a high technological content of the process. That is why many creative tasks are involved in the learning process. There are organized cultural events.

The first stage of the research is also considering and analyzing the levels of foreign language knowledge based on which is the allocation of the group and the evaluation of the students' success. Students are offered diagnostic tests of different levels, which helped allocate students to groups (Table 2).

Table 2. Levels of a foreign language knowledge (author's elaboration)

Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
The student is proficient in spoken language but is unable to give a formal assessment of the language components.	Knowledge of grammar at the level of the requirements for elementary school education. Can read and speak simple conversational formulas.	Sufficient speech skills. Knowledge of the speech system at the level of secondary special education. Marked by sufficient proficiency in translation skills, fluency, expanded vocabulary, and conscious avoidance of using Level I.	All language proficiency levels are close to native speakers. However, the signs of levels II and III are retained. This is the university education level.

As a result, 3 groups were formed, according to the proficiency level. No students with language proficiency at level IV were found.

At this stage, there was analyzed the level of students' mastery of targeted speech. The results were determined by knowledge testing (Table 3).

Table 3. Level of a foreign (English) language knowledge among respondents

Motivation	Level 1	Level II	Level III	Level IV
China	32%	33%	0%	8%
Nigeria	34%	38%	18%	0%
Jordan	15%	39%	30%	0%
Morocco	20%	3%	0%	1%
Turkmenistan	45%	26%	24%	7%

As we can see, students from Arab countries who speak the chosen foreign language (English) have a similar proficiency level to students from China. They can be referred to three levels: Level I, II, III. Yet they do not reach level IV. Students from Morocco demonstrated knowledge of the chosen foreign (French) language at level IV and were recommended by the teachers to choose one more language for studying.

In the 2nd stage, students were interviewed on the students' motivation level to study foreign languages. The respondents were offered a questionnaire, which presented 4 motives for learning a language; the relevant ones had to be chosen (Table 4).

Table 4. Components of students' motivation to learn a foreign language (author's elaboration)

Motivation	Low	Satisfactory	Medium	High
Professional need	34%	28%	29%	9%
General educational need	36%	35%	14%	15%
Status, being politically correct	16%	41%	22%	23%
Practice-oriented	45%	23%	21%	10%

As the presented results indicate, the motivation basis is status and professional necessity. The less motivation gives general educational needs. It shows the need to include a strong didactic basis in the education content.

The term "international language" was also suggested during the research because English is studied in many countries around the world, not only in certain English-speaking territories but as a means of international communication across national borders among other language speakers.

The final stage also included a survey of students' motivation to learn foreign languages. The results were presented as a percentage (Table 5).

Table 5. Components of students' motivation to learn a foreign language (author's elaboration)

Motivation	Low	Satisfactory	Medium	High
Professional need	30%	30%	28%	12%
General educational need	30%	36%	17%	17%
Status, being politically correct	14%	38%	26%	24%
Practice-oriented	35%	23%	30%	11%

As the motivation monitoring results show, it has increased by 8% on average. Motivations of status, being politically correct (50%), and being practice-oriented (41%) have prevailed.

Such results indicate that, despite the researchers' disagreement about the European language's position in the world, it should be noted that a foreign language has reached the status of an important domestic national and international language in Africa and Asia. The students' orientation towards the learning of foreign languages also has a component of being politically correct, addressing the racial discrimination issue, and professional necessity.

At the III (final) stage, we analyzed the students' attitude towards the study of a foreign language (English, French, and Ukrainian). The assessment is carried out in percentage.

Table 6. The study results of the motivation level to learn and improve a foreign language knowledge (author's elaboration)

Level	Country				
	Morocco	China	Jordan	Nigeria	Turkmenistan
Low	10	5	2	12	2
Medium	20	60	12	18	2
High	70	35	86	70	96

Table 6 shows the assessment of foreign students' motivation and attitude towards the need to know foreign languages. As we can see, 94% of respondents came to the awareness of the need to know foreign languages, and only 6% of students do not see the need to learn foreign languages. The most motivated were the students from China (95%) and Turkmenistan (96%).

Further work on increasing the foreign students' motivation to study and learn foreign languages, involving the possibilities of sociolinguistics as research methodological and an educational component, will contribute to improving the university education quality.

## 5 Discussion

In the field of sociological research that focused on foreign language learning, it was found that undergraduate students have high levels of motivation, especially proficiency in communication. The first and second-year (undergraduate) students are less motivated (Ihmeideh et al., 2010). The first-year

undergraduate students also found reading literary texts difficult, citing it as the main problem. A total of 48.6% of the participants agreed (Kaur, Thiyagarajah, 1999) that they were not sufficiently prepared to read fiction texts. During this research, we found that undergraduate foreign language students were 94% motivated to learn a foreign language. These are very high rates of motivation.

Several recent studies (Kuzmina, 2020; Gorard, 2012) have shown that the use of the whole range of means, which are tools of interactive technologies, is an effective method to increase students' motivation. Undoubtedly, the possibilities of social networks and digital technologies are an open area for further research. Active use of learning technologies with a motivational component in our study contributed to the awareness of the need to know foreign languages: 94% of respondents approve of the need to learn a foreign language, only 6% of students do not see such a need. The most motivated were Chinese students (95%) and Turkmen students (96%).

Undoubtedly, as evidenced by some studies (Bilal et al., 2019; Tashakori & Haghight, 2019), large amounts of information, the difficulty of mastering, lack of certain technical capabilities make it difficult to learn foreign languages. But as the results of the study show, the positive dynamics in the organization of the educational process is present. The modern educational process of learning foreign languages should combine the traditional form of learning (direct communication) and learn with the help of interactive technologies (Howard-Jones, 2014; Sim, Pop, 2014). Our study also confirms this hypothesis, more than 90% of the students approved of the active use of interactive technology, making their foreign language classes more intense. Pedagogical science should use the potential that gives new knowledge and research tools of sociolinguistics. All this is a part of the modern educational space, aimed at forming a positive orientation of students to learning.

## 6 Conclusion

As our research shows, the demand for modern scientific discoveries and new research possibilities, presented in sociolinguistics, is steadily growing. All of them can be effectively applied in the educational environment, determining the motivation changes in learning foreign languages.

Among the main linguistic correlates variables are the following: phonological, syntactic, lexical layers of the language system, as well as speech processes, social indicators, social markers, benchmarks, and stereotypes. The social variable depends on behavioral factors: region, gender, age, social, and ethnicity.

As the diagnostics of foreign students' motivation to study languages showed, the respondents' majority (94% in total) preferred to learn foreign languages. The less number (6%) of not interested respondents indicates a clear and manageable motivation of the students' majority.

Mastering the sociolinguistic means of implementation and monitoring the quality of learning allows us to diagnose changes in student motivation. Addressing multiculturalism, interactive forms of learning and high technology have a permanent impact on students' motivation. It makes it easy to adjust the course of the learning process. Associated with this is an increase in positive attitudes towards learning foreign languages. The interest in language learning increased on average by 8%. Among the motives prevail the motives of status, political correctness (50%), and orientation to use in practice (41%).

Sociocultural aspects, which actualize the processes of foreign language learning, can be more effective in the interactive technologies space and constant monitoring of social and cultural changes in society. Sociolinguistics can be useful in creating effective methods for teaching foreign languages and quality monitoring processes in higher education. It determines the directions for further research in this field.

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