

STANDARD AND NON-STANDARD DIALECTS AND THEIR USAGE IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the usage of standard and non-standard dialects in education. The study of the different hypothesis argued that mostly all languages and dialects are regular and have rule-governed system. The linguists of this view claimed that there are no linguistic grounds for arguing that one variety is superior to another.

Keywords: Dialects, variety, language, education, students.

Introduction

The language varieties spoken in certain community can be classified as standard and non-standard dialects. The standard dialect is a prestigious, codified variety that has the highest social status and used in formal occasions. The non-standard dialect is any variety of language which is not standardized and lacks prestige [5, 45]. Sometimes the standards variety is considered as a language, whereas the non-standard variety is considered as a dialect. The varieties of a language can be classified as regional dialect and social dialect based on speaker's geographical origin and social background. The educational implication of the regional and social dialects can be considered within the standard and non-standard category. This is because a variety spoken by a certain social group or region can be emerged as a standard variety; while the other varieties remain in the status of non-standard variety.

It is argued that the varieties of a language play an important role in educational context. In this connection, learning is claimed to be better and more successful when conducted in the variety spoken by students [4,14-20]. However, selecting and compromising standard and non-standard varieties in different spheres of life such as in education, politics, social, etc., seems complex and controversial. For example, Cook described the situation of practically using the two varieties in academic setting as follows:

At the heart of the aspiration to relate theory to practice is a constant tension between language as viewed by 'the expert' and language as everyone's lived experience. The two are by no means easily reconciled and...are likely to be aggravated by an attempt to impose insensitively an 'expert' view which runs contrary to deeply held belief. Nowhere is this more apparent than in our attitudes to the language education of children, and the belief which they reflect about the 'best' language use. These provide a good illustration of the kind of problematic issue with which applied linguistics enquiry engages [5, 12].

Theoretically, the experts should value the different dialects of a language while preparing textbooks and national exams. However, the variety used by experts is considered as a 'good' variety and positively valued. In multidialectal society, selecting the variety to be used as a LOI (Language of Instruction) in multidialectal society is difficult as well as controversial. However, in most countries, the standard variety has been only used and taught in schools. The non-standard dialects have been officially unacceptable in schools. On the other hand, students go to schools

from both standard and non-standard varieties[4, 14-33]. Thus, there has been a mismatch between the varieties used at schools and those used at home. The use of dialects in education is affected by social evaluation of the varieties of a language.

The varieties of language used by members of a society vary from group-to-group and place to place. Though all varieties are linguistically equivalent, speakers of a language often assign social value to the linguistic forms used by certain groups. By attaching social value, the speakers categorize the language variants as socially prestigious or socially stigmatized. Wolfram described the two as “socially prestigious variants are those forms that are positively valued through their association with high status groups as linguistic markers of status; whereas, socially stigmatized variants carry a stigma through their association with low-status groups” [9,84]. This indicates that social value is given to the language variants considering the social status of a speaker. Most of the time the standard variety is taken as the prestigious variety; whereas, the non-standard variety is lacking prestigious and hence, taken as a stigmatized variety [6,530].

In addition, considering the power (both economic and political) of the speakers, the varieties are given different values by language users. Accordingly, the standard variety is often considered as “strong”, “correct”, “superior” and “better” form of a language; whereas, the non-standard varieties are considered as “weak”, “wrong”, “incorrect”, “dirty”, and “illogical” forms of a language [5,18;2, 50]. However, linguists argue that all variants of a language are equal in terms of their linguistic system as well as the functions they serve. Various scholars [1,7] indicated that the non-standard dialects are systematic and rule governed as the standard dialect, having their own sound features, lexical items and grammatical patterns. It is also argued that no dialect is better or worse than the other dialect. Thus, the variants are preferred or stigmatized on non-linguistic grounds. The social evaluation of language varieties highly influenced their use in education. Different arguments have been forwarded for the use of the language varieties in education. Those in favor of the standards variety argued that its use helps to keep the unity of a nation, enables students to have adequate educational resources and provides different social and professional benefits to the learners.

On the other hand, Papavlou and Pavlos claimed that the use of the non-standard dialects in education facilitates the elevation of the status of the dialects in a society and prevents their possible extinction. The use of the non- standard variety is also argued to provide educational advantages to learners as the variety is intimated to the student. In addition, students from a community go to school speaking the varieties spoken in their locality. In such cases, dialects, like languages, are considered as heritage of peoples and instruments for expression of cultures as well as markers of self-image and group identity. For this reason, it is argued that students need to be educated through their own variety. However, the social evaluation of and belief about language varieties has been affecting the selection of the language varieties for instructional purposes [7, 95].

Despite the arguments for the use of the non-standard dialects in education, many schools continued to teach or use the standard variety, ignoring the non-standard dialect. In schools, the standard dialect has been used for various purposes. For example, teaching materials have been prepared and teacher training has been given using the standard variety. During training, teachers are given no or little training about the varieties of a language and ways of treating linguistic diversity that they will encounter in the classroom while they become a teacher. After training, the

teachers lack basic knowledge and understanding of the non-standard dialects. Then, they tend to assume that dialects as deviations or errors in regular language usage. However, students go to school from both standard and non-standard varieties. There is no as such a homogenous classroom; every student brings unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds into classrooms. As a result, there has been a mismatch between the variety used at school and students' home dialects. This has led to the arousal of controversial debates in a society and in a school regarding which variety should be used in education. The debate has been further continued with the development of two hypotheses about the varieties of a language.

Two contradictory views regarding the nature and characteristics of language varieties were emerged. Deficit hypothesis is one view that considers the non-standard varieties as inadequate for communication. Wolfram [9,47] explained that, "In terms of language, proponents of the deficit position believed that speakers of dialects with non-standard forms have a handicap-socially and cognitively-because the dialects are illogical, or sloppy, or just bad grammar. This view advocates the eradication of the use of dialects in schools favoring the standard dialect. This is because they are considered as inappropriate for instruction. Thus, in a classroom dialects are prohibited and students are expected to use the standard variety. For this reason, students from the non- standard background are forced to attend their education through the standard dialect.

The different hypothesis, on the other hand, argued that all languages and dialects are regular and have rule-governed system. The linguists of this view claimed that there are no linguistic grounds for arguing that one variety is superior to another. Wolfram expressed the posit on of difference hypothesis saying, "because no one linguistic system can be shown to be inherently better, there is no reason to assume that using a particular dialect can be associated with having any kind of inherent deficit or advantage" [9,25]. In addition, we can say that different groups have different ways of using their own language. Thus, the non-standard dialects are not deficient; rather they are different way of expressing ideas. This hypothesis advocates that the non-standard varieties can be used for educational purposes.

These views have been reflected, implicitly or explicitly, in educational polices and particularly in teachers' classroom practice. For example, teachers negatively respond to the dialects used by African American students and correct dialects forms when used by students [8, 218]. In America, it was also found out that teachers encourage the style and dialects used by white students and discourage the varieties of the black students. However, in some counties, like in Switzerland and Italy, dialects are used for classroom instruction. This shows that the two points of view have been influencing the practice of educational programs and affecting the learning, positively or negatively, of the dialect speakers.

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