

Social Identity and Language Use: Gender, Age, Region, Social Factors

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Abstract: Communication is a necessity for human beings, it is something that almost everyone does every day. But sometimes misunderstandings will happen between different people with different backgrounds. To get a deeper understanding about communication what kind of misunderstandings will occur, and how the misunderstandings occur. The paper reviews the reasons that cause misunderstandings in four aspects---- gender, age, region, and social identity. For gender, the researchers gave a lot of examples to describe the types of misunderstandings between men and women. For age, the words the old and the young use will be shown, and the researchers will analyze the differences between them. For region, the researchers will use China and America as examples to prove the correlation between the distance of the destination to the capital and specific language, and then analyze the data to prove the relationship between the invader and the number of official languages. For social identity, the researchers will analyze a few examples of the way people talk when they are in different social identities. The researchers found that people of different genders, of different ages, and from different regions, have different social identities have different ways of using language.

Keywords: communication, misunderstanding, language region, sociolinguistics, language usage

1. Introduction

Language is a bridge between people, it is a tool for people to communicate better, but sometimes different people with different backgrounds will make some misunderstandings in the conversation. So for better communication and understanding among people, it is necessary for people to realize that people with different backgrounds will be different in using language. The review paper is to investigate the phenomenon that different factors will cause different misunderstandings over communication. This paper covers four aspects, including gender, age, region, and social identity. Analyzing the examples and data proves the effect of different backgrounds on language usage. The realization of the difference in language usage among people with different backgrounds is important, as it helps people communicate better and reduce misunderstandings.

2. Four Factors That Affect Language Use

2.1. Gender

Gender is considered one of the most important factors that affect the usage of language. Because of the differences in characteristics, thinking patterns, and social status between men and women, they use different ways to express themselves.

2.1.1. Tone and Words

Women and men speak in different tones, women prefer to speak in rising tones, which are full of emotion and fluctuate, while men prefer to use falling tones, which are stable and monotonous. Most of the women tend to be gentler, so some soft words like “dear” “my goodness” etc., are often used in their conversations, and women often use modal particles and qualifiers, like “Oh! My Goodness! You are so beautiful!” “Oh! You are so handsome!”, while the men prefer to use aggressive or cool words like “buddy” “hell” “shit” “damn” etc [1]. Because most women are sensitive and careful, they are better than men at describing an object, view, voice, color, etc. Women can describe them more specifically, and their usage of the words are more diverse, while most men only describe them in some tasteless words. For example, women think that blue includes a lot of colors like “turquoise” “sapphire” and “ultramarine”, while most men only describe “blue” as “blue”. Women describe a cup as “a pink cup with a white cup handle in a heart shape, and with some diamonds embedded around the cup.”, while men mostly describe the cup as “a pink cup”.

2.1.2. Expression

Women and men have different thinking modes, which leads to different ways of their conversations. The intention of their conversation is different. Men prefer to talk about something in simple and brief language, while women prefer to talk more, and sometimes the digressions appeared in their conversation. For example, when a man wants to go out with another man, their conversation tends to be brief and simple:

Man: Do you want to go out for dinner?

Another man: I have nothing to do this evening, so yes.

Man: what about meeting at 8 p.m., in the Kong Kong Restaurant?

Another man: Sure.

When a woman wants to go out with another woman, their conversation tends to be more complex and with relative topics:

Woman: My professor changed his meeting time, I will be free tonight, do you wanna have an exciting girl’s party? Just two of us.

Another woman: Oh my god! It’s so exciting! It will be very crazy!

Woman: Oh! Speaking of party, guess which is the worst party I ever seen?

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The concentrations of women and men are different when the conversation happens. Women prefer to pay attention to interpersonal relationships, they care about what kind of feelings their words bring to others, and they try to use some euphemistic words when they refuse others. While men pay more attention to the information they need to convey. So they tend to be more direct when they refuse others, like saying a simple “No” [1].

Because of the different ways of thinking, some misunderstandings appear in their conversation:

Man: What do you want on your birthday?

Woman: Whatever, I just want to be with you.

Man: What about a gift?

Woman: But you don't have enough money.

Man: What about just go out for dinner?

Woman: As I just said, I just want to be with you.

In the conversation, the woman actually really wants a gift from the man, but the woman won't express her need directly, so the man doesn't know what the woman actually wants, and then decides to take the woman for dinner.

2.1.3. Social Status

Women and men have different social status. Generally, men's social status is higher than women's. Even though women's social status is becoming higher and higher, sexual discrimination still exists. Some men use a commanding tone when they ask their wives to do something. The husband is called "owner" by the wife in Japan. According to a survey in 1987, male pronouns appear four times more often in British textbooks than female ones [2]. So obviously, sexual discrimination is one of the most important reasons that cause the different language usage in gender. Besides, because men's social status is higher than women's, so most of the women became housewives while the men went out for work. In this social background, women mostly talked about family, children, and shopping, while men mostly talked about work and the economy [1].

2.2. Age

People of different age have different thinking patterns, the older the people gets, the more experience they have, so what they say is very different from what the young say, besides, with the development of society, the internet has become more and more common, the old still stick to the old words, while the young prefer to use more fashion words.

2.2.1. Second Language Acquisition

People of different ages have different abilities to acquire a second language. Some researchers have found that people who learned a second language at a tender age can use the second language more fluently than people who learned a second language at an older age. Besides, the people who learned second languages at a young age have more authentic pronunciation, which sounds like the pronunciation of a native speaker. That is because the more familiar people are with their mother tongue, the more influence they will be by their mother tongue in second language acquisition, since the grammar, the words, and even the culture behind the second language are different from their mother tongue in varying degrees. Moreover, the structure of the brain of an adult is different from that of a child. The left cerebral hemisphere and right cerebral hemisphere both participates in learning a second language for a child, but for an adult, only the left cerebral hemisphere participate in acquiring a language. Some researchers found that children are braver than adults in speaking a second language, which means that adults care more about the opinions of others. And because of these reasons, children are better at speaking than adults. The researchers also analyzed the characteristics of people at different ages in learning a second language, and also gave some advice:

- Childhood(3 ~ 10 years old)

People at this age have better ability to imitate, and their brains have better plasticity. So they must pay more attention to pronunciation learning.

- Boyhood(11 ~ 17 years old)

The cognitive ability of the people at this stage has reached a very high level, and boyhood is the best stage for learning a second language, so people at this age must pay more attention to the understanding of language, and improve the ability to input and output the language.

- Adulthood(over 18 years old)

People in this stage have a mature way of thinking and understanding, and the best ability to deal with the information in reading and writing, so they must pay more attention to grammar, translation, and communication [3].

2.2.2. Tone, Words, Grammar

People of different ages have different ways to talk, it apparently happens among the young and the old. The old often speak slowly while the young often speak faster, when people get older, the brain's ability to respond is reduced, so the old need more time to think about what they are going to say. And also, when the old pay more attention to think about the right words to say because the old are more rigorous than the young. Because of the rigorous attitude, the old people pay more attention to the grammar. For example, the old say "Do you know what I mean?" while the young prefer to say "You know what I mean?". The old and the young speak in different tones, the old prefer to speak in a more subdued tone, while some the young people prefer to speak in a dramatic and fluctuating tone. Moreover, with the development of networks, more and more people are affected by the internet and prefer to study and work online, most children and teenagers even gain knowledge and information from the internet, so it leads to the usage of the language of the young is different from which of the old. For example, the young say "numb", which is learned from a computer game, while the old saying "green hand" to describe a freshman.

2.3. Region

The language of a region is closely related to its culture. Cultures are various in terms of different regions, and so do languages. For better communication, it is necessary to realize the differences in language use between people living in different regions. For instance, the same body language in different countries has different meanings. In the United States and some parts of Europe, the thumbs-up is usually used to indicate a ride. While in Niger, it is considered an insulting gesture. Besides, in Germany, it represents the number 1. In this subsection, our purpose is to identify several factors that help us to explain why people can be expected to speak different languages whether they live in the same region or different regions.

2.3.1. Physical Geography

Physical geography is one of the essential factors that help us to explain how region affects languages. Sociolinguists have discovered a social phenomenon that people who reside in a particular type of region can speak a language that is entirely distinct from that of the country as a whole.

Evolutionary models show that geographical isolation plays a decisive role in language variation, coexistence, and diversity can be confirmed by one of Darwin's discoveries. This well-known finding states that after finches from a single ancestor settled in the Galápagos Islands, they became separated from one another and evolved into different species [4].

Another reason for this phenomenon can be identified in Tobler's first law of geography. A simple and powerful idea, which is put forward by Tobler's first law of geography asserts that everything is related to everything else; but that close-proximity relationships are stronger than far-proximity ones [5]. We draw the implication for language difference is that the possibility that a region's inhabitants will speak a separate language increases with distance from the national capital.

That's why there are various dialects, accents, and regional vocabulary in the world. For instance, the official language of China is Mandarin, which is standardized in the Beijing dialect. However, in Xinjiang, the region farthest from Beijing, people there tend to communicate in the local dialect, Uyghur, which is completely different from Mandarin. According to the survey, in the years between

2000 and 2022, the Mandarin penetration rate in Xinjiang is approximately 38% and 59% respectively. Another example is the United States. The primary language in the USA is English. Despite the fact that everyone in the country speaks the same language, people in the South communicate differently and employ distinct lingo than individuals in the Northwest. They are different dialects of English, depending on what region of the country you are in.

2.3.2. Colonization and Migration

Additionally, regional differences in the age of globalization, such as the impact of immigration, colonization, and the global Internet on regional languages.

An area becomes seemly to retain parts of its previous institution as well as traditions, including a unique mother tongue, if it has a long history of being an autonomous state. While there are more likely to be people who still speak one or more minority languages in a region that has been colonized by foreign invaders. Regions in India and Spain serve as examples of the effect. In India, both English and Hindi are official languages. The results from the research about the likelihood of a language region provide strong confirmation for this argument. Clear data can be seen in the figure 1. The likelihood of an area being the central portion of a former state is 5.23 times greater than it is for a region without such a background [5]. For instance, in India, fifteen of the seventeen states are now linguistic regions in addition to their earlier status as state-core. Three of the five communities in Spain share the same characteristics [6].

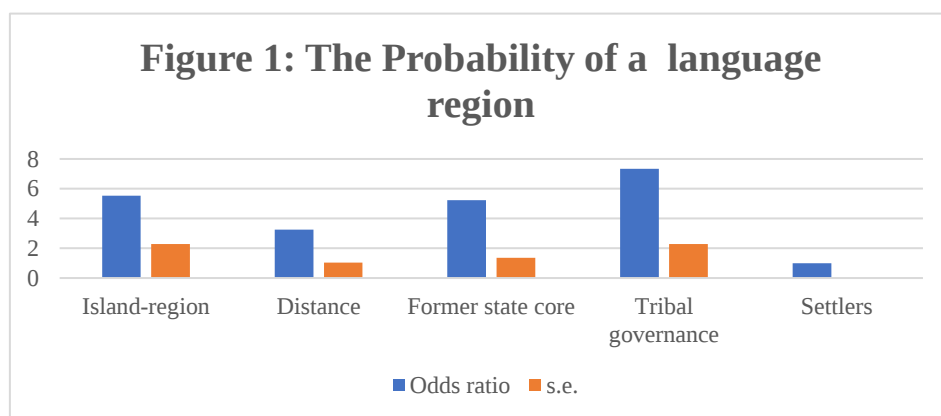


Figure 1: The Probability of a Language region.

Resource: the data comes from the paper named language difference and regional authority.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2020.1831476>

2.4. Social Factors

One of the most crucial cultural tools for defining one's identity is language. Therefore, language can differ depending on factors including social class, social situation, ethnicity, medium, and register in addition to time and region, which are inextricably linked to sociolinguistic diversity. Contact between speakers frequently results in change, and depending on whether this contact involves first-language (L1) or second-language (L2) learning, different patterns emerge [7].

2.4.1. Social Identity

The fundamental tenet of sociolinguistics is that language is flexible and constantly evolving [8]. People modify their speech according to their social context. For instance, a person will speak differently to their college professor than they will to a youngster. Besides, through language,

politicians create their identities, connect with supporters, and express their opinions on various topics and fellow candidates. Therefore, politicians use specialized political discourse to promote their values and build relationships with their constituents.

To establish their political and geographical identities, politicians use certain phonetic variations. Using the former president of Murcia, María Antonia Martínez as the subject of our study, we can find that Martínez utilizes a hyper-vernacular speaking pattern that engaged with certain native listeners but denied access for national ones, employing regional Murcian variations at a rate that was higher than that of rural constituents [9]. Díaz, like Martínez, had a traditionally male-dominated position of political influence. She was in the habit of omitting intervocalic /d/ and coda /s/ in her speeches, and to a certain extent, this kind of regional variant use also proves the above argument.[9]. It is clear from navigating the social meaning ingrained in factors that she employs sociophonetic variations to establish characteristics. It can be found that Díaz resembles non-politicians and conservatives more in terms of coda /s/ elision.

2.4.2. Racial Identity

The creation and preservation of ethnic identity both significantly rely on language. Compared to other social variables like gender, age, or socioeconomic status, ethnicity has a more pronounced link with language. And sociolinguistics is a field that examines how language shapes race and how race shapes language [10]. For instance, African Americans often pronounce certain words differently than whites. The scholar Noels holds the view that variations in linguistic patterns are thought to be impacted by speakers' ethnicities, and, in a reciprocal relationship, it has been proposed that language use can both produce and support ethnicity [8].

Additionally, we can discover a distinctive link between language and race in the in-depth research which was conducted by Stanford experts. Samy Alim, one of the famous scholars of Stanford Graduate School of Education, had studied Barack Obama's speaking habits and he discovered that Barack Obama's speech was altered by relying on his listeners. Obama appealed to the African-American community by adopting a "black preacher style" and equating himself with well-known black leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. He conversed with more general audiences while using "standard" English [10]. But his "black preacher style" was crucial for the black electorate in addition to allaying certain concerns among white Americans that he was "not American" and "not Christian" [10]. He had to negotiate between racial, linguistic, national, and religiously discriminating discourses if he didn't want to be perceived as "the African, Muslim boogeyman" that the far right painted him as. Here, race and language interact in profoundly significant ways.

3. Conclusion

In this review, researchers analyze the specific manifestations of the influence of social identity on individuals' language use in terms of four dimensions: gender, age, region, and social factors. For gender, there are certain discrepancies between men and women in some aspects, such as interjections and expressions. Due to differences in age and experience, children and adults have different modes of thinking leading to diverse ways of expressing themselves. Contrary to young children's speech, adult language is more socialized. For the region, researchers discovered that the occurrence of language areas relies on both physical geography and political systems, which is consistent with the theory that linguistic variation reflects the proportion of internal to external contacts. Finally, researchers explore language differences from two aspects of social identity and racial identity. The study purposely takes some politicians as its subjects and specifically analyzes how the particular social status of politicians affects the use of language by individuals. The result of the research is that politicians certainly will switch between diverse linguistic varieties according to their audience.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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