

The Importance of Teaching Sociolinguistic Knowledge in EFL

Abdurasulova Kamola Komiljonovna

English teacher of Department of Social Studies, Samarkand branch of "International School of Financial Technology and Science" Institute, Samarkand, 140100, Uzbekistan

kamolaabdurasulova97@gmail.com

Abstract: This study examines the importance of teaching sociolinguistic knowledge in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, focusing on second-language learners' comprehension of English greetings. Sociolinguistics explores how language use varies with social context, including factors such as the speaker's identity and relationship with the listener. The research shows that second-language learners often struggle to use greetings appropriately due to a lack of sociolinguistic awareness, relying on a limited set of greetings. The study emphasizes the need to integrate sociolinguistics into EFL teaching to help learners navigate social contexts and communicate effectively.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, EFL (English as a Foreign Language), second-language learners, greetings, language variation, social context, language acquisition, sociolinguistic awareness, language teaching.



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INTRODUCTION

Sociolinguistics is a subfield of linguistics that explores the connection between language and society. It seeks to understand why individuals adjust their speech based on different social settings and examines the social roles of language, along with how it is used to express social meaning. Analyzing language use across various contexts offers valuable insights into both the structure of language and the dynamics of social relationships within a community (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Additionally, sociolinguistics investigates how people shape and express their social identities through language. It also examines linguistic variations among groups distinguished by factors such as religion, social status, gender, education level, and age.

The social dimensions of language were first examined in a modern sense by Indian and Japanese linguists in the 1930s, as well as by Louis Gauchat in Switzerland in the early 1900s. However, these studies gained little recognition in the West until much later. The earliest recorded use of the term "**sociolinguistics**" was by Thomas Callan Hodson in the title of his 1939 article, *Sociolinguistics in India*. The field of sociolinguistics in the West emerged in the 1960s, spearheaded by linguists such as William Labov in the United States and Basil Bernstein in the United Kingdom. Additionally, William Stewart and Heinz Kloss introduced foundational

concepts for sociolinguistic theory, particularly in explaining how standard language varieties differ across nations (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociolinguistics>).

While learning a new language, one may be faced to a synonymic line of words which have the same meaning. The field which seeks where to use appropriately these combinations of words is sociolinguistics (Schuman, 1979). For example, sociolinguistics involves deciding how to choose among greetings that listed in below.

Sample greetings in American English

Hello
Hi
Hey
Hiya
How it's goin?
S'up?

For most speakers, several choices are possible from given example. And the right choice depends on our audience and the context in which we are speaking. One might choose “hello” for her elderly neighbor when she passes his house and “hey” for her husband when she comes in from work. As you read the list of greetings you must likely had reactions yourself as to which ones you would use, which ones you would use only in certain contexts, and which greetings you never say. The more we know sociolinguistics, the better we understand the choice we make and produce an utterance (Kimberly, 2014).

Now, imagine what would happen if the same list of greetings from the example were used and interpreted by a second-language learner of English. Do you think second-language learners have a strong intuition about when to use each greeting and when a particular greeting might be inappropriate?

Sociolinguistics examines the use of these forms and how factors such as the speaker's characteristics, the listener, and the speech context influence communication. As second-language learners, we recognize the importance of identifying these differences and understanding the meaning behind the choice speakers make.

Through theoretical parts it was clear that the elements of language vary at all level of grammar and from one speaker to another, one context to another, and one geographic region to another. Based them the objectives of the research is to show an importance of sociolinguistics in language acquisition. And there are two sub-objectives:

- ✓ To show the impact of social factors in language learning;
- ✓ To show reflection of characteristics in language variation through method.

The main aim of further chapters is to equip readers with key concepts and paradigms related to the research through analyzing sociolinguistic phenomena in method and data collection.

METHOD

Wolfram refers to the sociolinguistic survey as “the methodological heart of the sociolinguistic movement” (Wolfram, 2010). Inspired by this approach, **this study adopts** the survey method, which is considered one of the key research methodologies.

Topic: Comprehension of English greetings by second-language learners

Research Subjects: A group of individuals

Age Range: 23 to 25 years old

Number of Participants: 10

Gender Distribution: 5 women, 5 men

Native Language: Uzbek

Additional Information: Participants have an educational background

Hypothesis: Second-language learners of English struggle to use greetings appropriately without sociolinguistic knowledge.

№	Women	Age	Occupation	№	Men	Age	Occupation
1	Mukhayyo	22	student	6	Sardor	24	student
2	Maftuna	24	student	7	Farhod	22	student-teacher
3	Nigora	22	student-teacher	8	Eldor	23	student
4	Dilorom	25	student	9	Aziz	24	student
5	Sarvinoz	22	student	10	Zuxrob	25	student-teacher

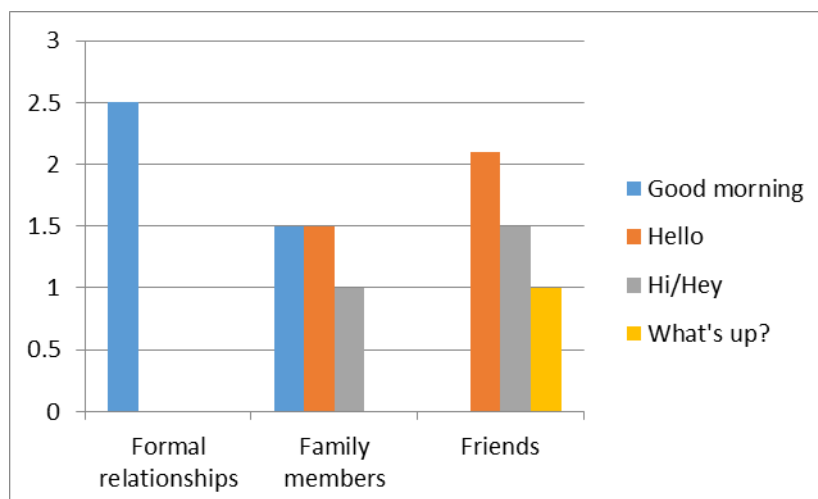
Participants were self-selected based on their willingness to take part in the survey, with no criteria imposed other than gender. To ensure balanced representation, an equal number of male and female participants were included. Additionally, they were not informed about the study's hypothesis to prevent bias in their responses.

The used survey:

<i>Survey</i>				
<p><i>Task: Which of these greeting words do you use to your formal relationships, family members and friends? Put tick in box which is suitable to you. You can put one more tick in each line.</i></p>				
Name: _____				
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 100px; position: relative;"> <div style="position: absolute; top: 0; right: 0; width: 50%; height: 50%; transform: rotate(45deg); border-left: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black;"></div> </div>	Good morning	Hello	Hi/Hey	What's up?
Receivers				
Formal relationships				
Family members				
Friends				
Thank you for participation!				

Results and Discussion

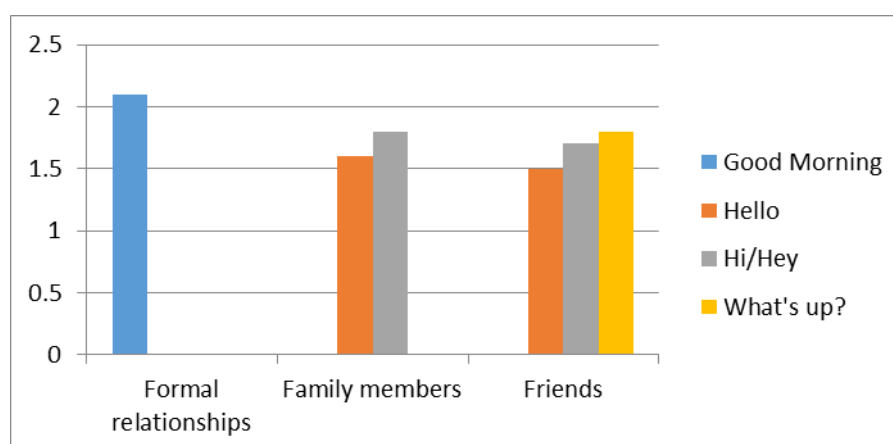
Thus, there is given a diagram that shows participants' results on survey:

Figure 1:

As shown in the figure, the highest percentage is associated with **"Good morning,"** while the commonly used greeting **"Hello"** ranks slightly lower. The greetings **"Hello"** and **"Hi/Hey"** display nearly identical usage among family members and friends. Additionally, **"What's up?"** has the lowest percentage in the overall chart.

Factually, the diagram differ from real one taking into consideration native speakers' use of greetings. There is broad approach to function of each greeting words by Annemarie "The right greeting for every situation in English" (Ash, 2009).

1. Good Morning/Afternoon/Night is the most common form of greeting in a formal situations and is appropriate to use anytime with colleagues, formal relationships.
2. Hello is the semi formal form of greetings, which is used to people that a speaker know.
3. Hi/Hey are all common way of saying 'Hello' in casual situations.
4. 'What's up?' is very informal greeting and should only be used among friends.

Figure 2

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of sociolinguistic knowledge in the acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). While second-language learners may master grammar and vocabulary, a lack of understanding of the social functions of language can lead to inappropriate language use, especially in greetings. The findings indicate that learners often rely on a limited range of greetings and fail to intuitively understand when and how to use different

forms appropriately based on social context. Native speakers, by contrast, naturally select from a wider variety of greetings depending on factors such as formality, relationship, and setting.

This underscores the importance of integrating sociolinguistics into EFL curricula, as it allows learners to better navigate the social dimensions of language and communicate more effectively in real-life situations (Trudgill, 2000). Understanding the social roles of language, such as when to use "Hello" versus "What's up?" or "Good morning," is essential for fluent and natural communication. Therefore, teachers should prioritize sociolinguistic instruction to help learners become not only linguistically proficient but also culturally and socially aware, ultimately enhancing their overall language competency.

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Internet resources

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