MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIOLINGUISTICS: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

ELT is regarding materials as a backbone of instructions, a guide for classroom practice and language exposure. However, materials are not just copies of linguistic rules and forms; they help to express social values, ideologies, and representations of social world (Gray, 2010). Sociolinguistics, the field that studies the relationship between society and language, highlights the importance of language teaching materials to form identities, understanding of linguistic norms, and attitudes towards language varieties. Since English is a lingua franca, sociolinguistics is crucial to develop authentic materials. Now questions towards materials developers are changing from what grammar to teach to what cultural context to include, how to prepare students to be well-rounded and aware of diverse communicational situations (McKay, 2012; Canagarajah, 2013).

The article explores about how sociolinguistics is being a part of materials development and assessment. It focuses on four main parts: (1) language varieties and learners' identities; (2) pragmatics and discourse features; (3) translanguaging and multilingual practices; (4) sociolinguistic awareness and critical pedagogy.

Language varieties and learners' identities

The main issue for sociolinguistics is language variations – differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar across regions, social and communoicative settings. But, most textbooks shows main models of English, especially praising standardized form of British (Queen's English) and American English (Gray, 2010). It is creating an image that "real English" comes from only Inner Circle (Kachru, 1992), decreasing the importance of marginalized groups who are trying to use English as a lingua franca in multilingual situations. It has been proved that learning various forms of Englishes enhance students' listening skill and promote positive attitudes towards language varieties (Jenkins, 2015). Materials that have different accent forms, idiomatic expressions, and references for various cultures aid students to develop "communicative capability" (Widdowson, 1998), more than just copy-catting "real-native English" norms.

Besides, materials are not only simple collection of rules and words, but also a crucial tool to shape learners' identities. Norton (2013) states that learning a language is not an ordinary cognitive process but investment in forming identities, telling who they are and who they want to be. When materials include tasks representing students' cultural values positively, giving them a chance to express themselves, they help to empower students' images of themselves as a part of Global Englishes. Canagarajah (1999) depicts the controversial scenario where textbooks ignore or even decrease values and identities of their students, it leads to feelings of disempowerment among the learners.

Pragmatics and discourse in materials

Pragmatics, the usage of a language in social context, has always been an indispensable part of sociolinguistics. Learners need to learn sociolinguistic as well as linguistic competences: being able to adjust register, level of politeness, acts of speeches according to the context (Hymes, 1972). Gilmore (2007) mentioned that most textbooks have dialogues to teach rather grammar than authentic exchanges which prepare students for real-world communication. For instance, requests, suggestions, and refusals are given in fixed forms without paying attention to cultural varieties or power relations. Material developers can improve situation by adding authentic discourse samples, awareness-raising tasks, and motivating students to differentiate scripted dialogues and spontaneous speeches. Differences in social distancing, gender, language choice, and institutional hierarchy can be taught through role-plays. These types of tasks enhance not only linguistic awareness, but also sociolinguistic competence.

Multilingual approaches and translanguaging

Most ELT materials promote monolingual environment with only-English norms to successfully learn the language. However, researches in sociolinguistics found that multilingual students rely on their full linguistic competence in speech. The process is known as translanguaging (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Turnbull and Dailey-O'Cain (2009) mentioned that

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materials that apply students' first language (s) can scaffold understanding, lower anxiety, and promote linguistic identities of learners. For example, tasks comparing idioms from various languages or showing how older family members use L1 and English can reflect real-life multilingual practices. Especially, in Uzbekistan where students use Uzbek, Russian, and English, materials can integrate code-switching exercises to enhance metalinguistic awareness. Canagarajah's call for "translingual practice" (2013) aligns with this approach embarrassing linguistic fluidity more than forcing rigid boundaries between languages.

Critical pedagogy and sociolinguistic awareness

Freire (1970) stated that materials development can get benefit from critical pedagogies' principles which motivate students to ask about social inequalities and hierarchies. Textbooks are never fully neutral; they show some ignoring others. Gray (2010) keeps documents of ELT textbooks that have normative gender roles, promote Western and consumerist values and so on. Tasks should invite students to think out of box: analyze news, challenge stereotypes, discuss issues related to language discrimination, inequality and many others. By doing it, teachers can turn materials into tools to empower. An example can be a listening task with various English accents followed by a discussion on why certain accents are "prestigious" and others are "invalid". This critical analysis prepares learners both for linguistic success as well as being global citizens.

CONCLUSION

Materials development and sociolinguistics are deeply connected. Tasks in textbooks are not only for teaching language structures, but also for shaping perceptions about English speakers, their values, and identities of learners as well. Sociolinguistic insights – variations in language, identity, pragmatics, translanguaging, critical pedagogy – material developers and teachers can apply to reach not only linguistic effectiveness but also social empowerment. As English continues to serve as a global means of communication, there is a need for materials to reflect its diversity and equip students with sociolinguistic competences to navigate complex intercultural encounters. Future research should explore brand new ways to integrate sociolinguistic awareness into digital materials and online learning platforms, ensuring that the next generation of learners is prepared for participation in a multilingual, multicultural world.

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