LINGUISTIC VARIABLE: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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Abstract: *This article explores linguistic variables—language units that vary due to phonetic, lexical, and grammatical factors. Originating from William Labov's sociolinguistic studies, they reflect social, regional, and contextual influences on language change. The study highlights their role in communication and interaction with factors like class, gender, age, and region.*

Аннотация: *Статья рассматривает языковые переменные – единицы языка, изменяющиеся под влиянием фонетических, лексических и грамматических факторов. Основанные на работах Уильяма Лабова, они отражают социальные, региональные и контекстуальные влияния на изменение языка. Исследование подчеркивает их роль в коммуникации и взаимодействии с такими факторами, как класс, пол, возраст и регион.*

Keywords : *Linguistic variable, phonetic variation, lexical variation, grammatical variation, sociolinguistics, language change, speech patterns, social factors, language policy.*

In linguistics, the concept of a linguistic variable refers to the variation of linguistic units depending on context. This term was first introduced by the American linguist William Labov in the field of sociolinguistics, where he analyzed how language is influenced by social factors and how it manifests in speech. Linguistic variables are language units that convey the same meaning but appear in different forms due to regional, social, or stylistic factors.

Linguistic variables can be observed in various aspects of language. Phonetic variables refer to differences in pronunciation. For example, in English, the word running is often pronounced as runnin' in informal speech, while in Uzbek, the word "qishloq" (village) may be pronounced as "qeshloq" in certain dialects. Lexical variables involve differences in word choice across regions or social groups. For instance, the word "apple" in Uzbek is commonly known as "olma," but in some regions, it is referred to as "seb." Grammatical variables involve structural variations in sentence formation. In Uzbek, for example, the expressions "men bordim" and "men ketdim" both imply movement, but their usage depends on context. Linguistic variables highlight the continuous evolution of language and how speech patterns differ based on factors such as age, profession, education, and social background. Younger generations tend to adopt newer and more informal expressions, while older generations are more likely to adhere to traditional pronunciation and grammatical norms. Additionally, linguistic variables differ in formal and informal settings. In formal speech, words are pronounced fully and accurately, whereas informal speech often includes contractions and relaxed pronunciations.

The Social Uniqueness of Linguistic Variables.

Linguistic variables are socially unique because they are influenced by a wide range of linguistic and social factors in different ways. No two linguistic variables are identical in how they interact with social structures. Several factors affect linguistic choices, including a speaker's:

-Domicile (place of residence)

-Gender

-Age

-Ethnicity

-Socioeconomic class

-Social group membership

-Speech style and register

For instance, frequent use of a particular linguistic form may indicate social class in one speech community but not in another. This is evident in the case of the

English (r) variable, which refers to the pronunciation of postvocalic /r/ in words like fourth and floor.

In most varieties of American English, /r/ is pronounced, but in New York City, it is more commonly pronounced by higher-status groups and less frequently by lower-status groups. However, this does not mean that socioeconomic status is irrelevant in /r/-pronouncing communities; rather, distinctions between social classes in such communities are marked by other linguistic variables, such as (ing) and multiple negation (I don't want nothing instead of I don't want anything). Similarly, regional distinctions play different roles in different speech communities. In England, regional variations in English are highly marked, whereas in Australia, they are less distinct. The combination of social factors affecting linguistic variation is highly complex and differs across societies. Importantly, linguistic change does not always follow a predictable path, as social factors interact in unique ways during language evolution.Linguistic variables play a crucial role in the ongoing process of language change. Over time, certain pronunciations, words, or grammatical structures become more widely accepted, while others fade away. This process is driven by factors such as:

-Language contact (e.g., loanwords from other languages).

-Technological influence (e.g., new terms related to digital communication).

-Social media and pop culture (e.g., viral phrases and slang).

For example, the use of "gonna" instead of "going to" has become more widespread due to its frequent use in spoken English and digital communication. Similarly, in Uzbek, some Russian loanwords are gradually being replaced by native equivalents as part of language policy efforts.

Conclusion

Linguistic variables are a vital aspect of language study, providing insights into how language evolves and adapts to different social contexts. By examining phonetic, lexical, and grammatical variations, linguists can better understand regional dialects, social identity, and language change over time. Recognizing linguistic variation also helps in shaping language policies, improving language education, and

fostering effective communication across diverse communities.Moreover, linguistic variables are socially unique, meaning that their interaction with social factors varies from one community to another. No two linguistic variables function in exactly the same way across different linguistic and social settings. This uniqueness plays a crucial role in distinguishing social groups and shaping language change. Understanding linguistic variables not only enriches our knowledge of language structure but also highlights the deep connection between language and society.

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