

Introduction to Linguistics 2: Assignment 2

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1. *Read the section on Diglossia in the 4th Chapter of 'An Introduction to Sociolinguistics' by R Wardaugh (5th ed) carefully. Comment on the following statement from the section "People living in a diglossic community do not usually regard diglossia as a 'problem.' It becomes a problem only when there is a growth of literacy, or when there is a desire to decrease regional and/or social barriers ..."*

A: In the chapter, Wardaugh talks about diglossia, its extent of spread and influence in various manners, and conditions leading to and from such a state in society through a number of examples: namely, Arabic, Swiss German, Haitian(French and Creole), and Greek. These are considered rather extreme examples of very divergent uses of the same language - a rather narrow construct to work with, and there exist examples in more clearly demarcated bilingual and multilingual communities, such as Biblical Hebrew and Yiddish for many Jews, Spanish and Guaraní in Paraguay, and even Standard English and Caribbean Creole. However, even said 'narrow' examples are rather good for examination, especially when considering the similarities and differences in them in their respective diglossic situations.

One common standout feature amongst those listed is the lack of formal education for the 'L' variety in the diglossia, and the requirement for such formal education for the 'H' variation. This is indicative of a number of facts -

First, in many cases there exists some resistance - active or passive - to the formal codification and orthography of and for the 'L' variation in society. This could be a result of deep-rooted bias against speakers of exclusively the 'L' code and a desire to maintain a status quo, preventing literacy for such persons unless they can formally learn the "higher form".

Second, the 'H' variety is not learned naturally, by say children - it's not part of standard language acquisition, and has to be formally taught. It's not necessarily intelligible from preexisting knowledge of the L variation itself.

The takeaway here is that there is a very distinct barrier to literacy - since the L variation that is known to most is not always formally codified, so there exists bias against it in any formal occasion; and any who wish to be "literate" by societal definition shall need to acquire a whole new, alien variation. In most cases this does not appear to be an active problem, but in cases like Haitian Creole, the distinction appears

to be reinforced for classist purposes. Either way, this lack contributes to the prestige factor, as we shall see next.

Another very common feature is the regard at which each variation is held (albeit the terms used, “High” and “Low” varieties, give this away anyway). A large part of the “Prestige” associated with a language comes with the literature in it, that ties it to history, culture, beauty, and the like. Due to the lack of literacy raised previously, there more often than not exists little to no literature in the L variety, robbing it of any prestige through connected forms as raised previously. This is a self-worsening situation, as because of the lack of literature in L fewer people consider actually writing in L, and the gap widens. Notable exceptions would be Chaucer with English diglossia, or Tagore with Bengali diglossia in the early 20th century, both of which signalled the demise of their respective diglossias.

From the examples it is evident that killing diglossia reduces social barriers - it removes an artificially enforced status quo that restricts intermingling of classes - and it promotes literacy, by not restricting usage of language to specific occasion and freeing up education of any biases towards any one variety.

Hence it is possible to infer that, for the greater part, diglossia exists to enforce a status quo and establish a superiority between the “masses” and the “higher elite” it’s a (highly effective) class-based separation system.

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2. *List out the number of languages/language varieties in your repertoire. Also map how and where you use each of them. Form a team of two members. Each member of the team has to observe the other member's language use in the following social contexts*

- a. Mess (or any other eating place such as canteen etc)*
- b. Playground*
- c. Classroom discussions with other students*
- d. Marketplace (conversing with the shopkeepers)*
- e. Telephonic conversations with their families/friends.*

Report your findings. The observations should be properly noted down. Your conclusions of their usage should be based on what you observe in the data thus gathered.

A: Examination of myself, Zubair:

Languages in repertoire: English, Bengali, Hindi.

General trend of conversation with peers and family: With friends, I primarily use English. I keep switching to bengali with people who know the language, so with my school friends the language used is a mix of primarily English, some Bengali, and a bit of Hindi. With Sayar it’s mostly Bengali, and around Prateek and my roommate, it’s mostly a mix of Hindi/Bengali.

Around family, it's more of a generational thing - with all but 2 or 3 cousins/similar generations and below, it's English, even if they're as old as my parents. With my parents, their generation, and older, it's Bengali.

a. Mess/Canteen

I follow the general trend for the most part, with those that I sit. When talking to any of the workers I use Hindi, and once Bengali with someone who knew it.

b. Playground

English, even if everybody is shouting in Hindi. They don't, usually.

c. Classroom discussions with other students

Once again, I follow the general trend (named so accordingly). The people sitting next to me in most classes share English as our only common comfortable language, so that's what is used.

d. Marketplace

Hindi is used most often, in most non-mall establishments. I switch to a more comfortable language (Bengali or English) at the first available opportunity.

e. Telephonic conversations with family/friends

Follows the general trend of conversation. I use more Bengali on the phone with friends who know it.

Examination of my teammate, Abhigyan:

Languages in repertoire: English, Bengali, Hindi.

General trend of conversation with peers: Interchanges between Hindi and English with his roommate, and some other people from his wing. Talks in a mix of English and Bengali to me, Souvik, and some others who know Bengali. Almost primarily in Bengali with Sayar.

a. Mess/Canteen

Talks in English with most of the people he sits with. Uses Hindi with the mess workers. Otherwise, follows the general trend.

b. Playground

English.

c. Classroom discussions with other students

Follows the general trend of conversation with peers, with a bit more English thrown into the mix.

d. Marketplace

Mostly Hindi.

e. Telephonic conversations with family/friends

Bengali with family. Hindi with friends from Jamshedpur. Bengali/English with friends from Calcutta.
