

FROM INTERLANGUAGE TO ENGLISH VARIETIES –A LINGUISTIC APPROACH

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1. The Interlanguage – a Remarkably Elaborate Linguistic Abstraction

1. 1. General Survey upon Language Functions. Instead of a Prefatory View

A social communication system inhering in a structured arrangement of sounds (or their written representation) into larger units, i.e. morphemes, words, sentences and utterances, is called **language**. This system is frequently described as having three major functions:

1. The **descriptive function** of language is to convey factual information.
2. The **expressive function** of language is to supply information about the speaker, his or her feelings, preferences, prejudices and past experiences.
3. The **social function** of language serves to establish and maintain social relationships between people.

Considered by the British linguist M.A. Halliday, the language has three functions that differ from those previously enumerated:

1. the **ideational function** is to organise the speaker’s or writer’s experience of the real or imaginary world, i.e. language refers to real or imagined persons, things, actions, events, states, etc
2. the **interpersonal function** is to indicate, establish or maintain social relationships between people; it includes forms of address, speech function, modality, etc
3. the **textual function** is to create written or spoken texts which cohere within themselves and which fit the particular situation in which they are used.

These functions are always dependent on the social context of language.

This context can be analysed in terms of three factors:

1. the **field of discourse** refers to what is happening, including what is being talked about .
2. the **tenor of discourse** refers to the participants who are taking part in this exchange of meaning, who they are and what kind of relationship they have to one another.
3. the **mode of discourse** refers to what part the language is playing in this particular situation, for example, in what way the language is organized to convey the meaning, and what channel is used – written or spoken or a combination of the two.

Considering language functions within a social context is an approach ascribed to systemic linguistics. The theory behind this approach is functional rather than formal i.e. it considers language as a resource used in communication and not as a set of rules. In this way, the scope of systemic linguistics is wider than that of many other linguistic theories. Phonology and **lexicogrammar** (words and grammatical structures) are closely related to meaning and cannot be analysed without reference to it. An essential concept of the theory is that each time language is used, no matter in what situation, the user is making constant choices. These choices are essentially choices in meaning but are expressed, for instance by intonation, words and grammatical structures. Developed by Halliday, systemic linguistics is mainly concerned with grammar, one that has been called **systemic grammar**. It is an approach to grammatical analysis based on a series of systems. Each system is a set of options of which one must be chosen at each relevant point in the production of an utterance.²²⁷

²²⁷ For example, in English, the speaker or writer makes choices among the systems of **number**: singular or plural; **tense**: past, present or future; **mood**: declarative, interrogative or imperative (this being different from the instituted classification of moods: indicative, imperative, subjunctive; a specification in here would be that infinitive and gerund are dealt with as verb forms by modern grammar and not as moods).

1.2. From Language Functions to Linguistic Performance. The Interlanguage – a Remarkably Elaborate Linguistic Abstraction

1.2.1. Competence and Performance in Language Learning

The importance of considering language functions becomes evident in second language **acquisition** – a term different from **learning**, the latter being sometimes linked to Behaviourism. Language acquisition is studied by linguists to enable them to understand the processes made use of in learning a language, to help identify stages in the developmental process and to give a better understanding of the nature of language. Techniques in this respect include longitudinal studies of language learners as well as experimental approaches and focus on the study of the development of phonology, grammar, vocabulary and communicative competence. The latter is concerned with the ability not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences, but also to know when and where to use these sentences and to whom. Communicative competence includes:

1. knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of the language.
2. Knowledge of rules of speaking (e.g. knowing how to begin and end conversations, knowing what topics may be talked about in different types of speech events, knowing which address forms should be used with different persons one speaks to and in different situations.
3. Knowing how to use and respond to different types of speech acts, such as requests, apologies, thanks and invitations.
4. Knowing how to use language appropriately.
5. As far as appropriateness is concerned, a speaker needs to know that his or her utterance is grammatical i.e. suitable (appropriate) for the particular situation.
6. Language acquisition is supposed to carefully combine competence and performance.

1.2.2. From Language Learning to Interlanguage

So fashionable a linguistic concept, the **interlanguage** does factually delineate that specific type of commonly – shared parlance produced by second- and foreign-language speakers in full process of learning a new language. In such a process, errors²²⁸ or inaccuracies are originated in certain utterly distinct mechanisms that comprise:

1. assuming patterns from the first language
2. extending patterns from the target language (e.g. by resemblance or analogy)
3. expressing meanings using the words and grammar that are already known

Inasmuch as the language that the learner produces with using these processes is different from both **the first** and the **target language**, it is occasionally labelled as an **interlanguage** i.e. said to derive from the learner's interlanguage (or approximate) system.

The 1st point i.e. **assuming patterns from the first language** is directly connected to the **language transfer**, a concept that stands for the effect of one language on the learning of another. Two types of language transfer may occur. The **negative transfer**, also known as **interference**, is the use of a native-language pattern or rule that leads to **an error** or inappropriate form in the **target language**, while. The **positive transfer** is that which makes learning easier, and may occur when both the native language and the target language have matching words. In error analysis²²⁹ terms, the

²²⁸ A second or foreign language learner's speech or writing is often characterised by using linguistic items (e.g. words, grammatical elements or utterances) in a way in which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning. Such a use is known to be referred to as an **error**. A distinction is sometimes made between an error, which results from incomplete knowledge and a **mistake** made by a learner when writing or speaking and which is caused by lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness or some other aspect of performance. Errors may be classified according to vocabulary (lexical error), pronunciation (phonological error), grammar (language cohesion error), misunderstanding of a speaker's intention or meaning (interpretative error) or to producing a wrong communicative effect, e.g. through the faulty use of a speech act or one of the rules of speaking (pragmatic error).

²²⁹ The study and analysis of errors made by second or foreign language learners is called **error analysis**. Such an analysis may be carried out in order to identify the strategies which learners use in language acquiring, to point out the causes of learner errors, and obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid to teaching or to preparing teaching materials.

concept of **negative transfer** is practically based on that of **interlingual error**²³⁰, the latter obviously resulting from the transfer at issue and from the learner's native language orientation. Different from the interlingual error, the **intralingual**²³¹ one is that resulting from faulty or partial learning of the target language, rather than from language transfer. The 2nd point i.e. *extending the patterns from the target language* does specifically refer to the linguistic **overgeneralization**, which is also called **over-extension, over-regularisation** or **analogy**. This concept refers to a process common in both first- and second-language learning, in which a learner extends the use of a grammatical rule of a linguistic item beyond its accepted uses, generally by making words or structures follow a more regular pattern. The 3rd point i.e. *expressing meanings using the words and grammar that are already known* is directly connected to another linguistic concept called **communication strategy**. This concept points out a way to express a meaning in a second or foreign language by a learner who has a limited command of the language. In trying to communicate, a learner may have to make up for a lack of knowledge of grammar or vocabulary. The use of paraphrase and other communication strategies characterise the interlanguage of some language learners. However, there are cases in this respect when a person changes his or her way of speaking to make it sound more like or less like the speech of the addressed person i.e. the recipient. This is called **accommodation**. For example, a teacher may use simpler words and sentence structures when he or she is talking to a class of young children. This type of accommodation is called **convergence**. A person may exaggerate his or her rural accent because of being annoyed by the attitude of some one from a large city. This is called **divergence**. When proceeding to an interlanguage operation, the person making the language transfer is supposed to produce an **interlingual identification**. This concept is used in second or foreign language learning and points out the judgement made by learners about the identity or similarity of structures in two languages. Learners often categorise sounds in terms of the phonemic systems of their first language, making the acquisition of new target language sounds become a very difficult process.

When addressing foreigners who are not proficient²³² in the language, native speakers often use that type of speech called the **foreigner talk**. This speech has several features:

- it is slower and louder than normal speech, often with exaggerated pronunciation
- it uses simpler vocabulary and grammar. For example, articles, function words and inflections may be omitted and complex verb forms are replaced by simpler ones
- Topics are sometimes repeated or moved to the front of sentences (native speakers often feel that this type of speech is easier for foreigners to understand).

So generous a concept, the **foreign or non-native language** is much more complex than it might seem. It is common knowledge that a foreign language is usually studied either for communication with foreigners who speak the language or for reading printed materials in the language at issue. What is less known is that in American applied linguistic usage, **foreign language** and **second language** are often used to mean the same in this sense, while in British usage, a distinction is always made between foreign language and second language. A foreign language is a language that is taught as a school subject but which is not used as a medium of instruction in schools nor as a language of communication within a country (e.g. in government, business or industry).²³³

²³⁰ Entirely connected to the type of language produced by second or foreign language learners, the **interlingual** error is rooted in the language transfer, i.e. it originates in the learner's native language and it depends on the effect of the first language upon the learning of the second or foreign language.

²³¹ **Intralingual** errors were classified as **overgeneralizations** (errors caused by extension of target language rules to inappropriate contexts), **simplifications** (errors resulting from learners' producing simpler linguistic rules than those found in the target language), **developmental errors** (those reflecting natural stages of development), **communication – based errors** (errors resulting from strategies of communication), **induced errors** (those resulting from a transfer of training), **errors of avoidance** (resulting from failure to use certain target language structures because they are thought to be too difficult) or **errors of overproduction** (structures being used too frequently). Attempts to apply such categories have been problematic however, due to the difficulty of determining the cause of errors.

²³² As for the spoken language proficiency of adult foreign language learners, it is best tested using the **Foreign Service Institute Oral Interview**, a technique developed by the United States Foreign Service Institute. It consists of a set of rating scales, which are used to judge pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and fluency during a 30 minute interview between the learner and, usually, two interviewers. The rating scale measures language proficiency of learners, making use of scales that go from worst to best performance in a number of steps.

²³³ English is described as a foreign language in France, Japan, China etc. A second language is a language which is not a native language in a country but which is widely used as a medium of communication (e.g. in education and government) and which is usually used alongside another language or languages. English is described as a second language in countries such as Fiji, Singapore and Nigeria. In both Britain and North America, the term **second language** would describe a native

However, such regards aim de facto at a larger linguistic chapter, which linguists have been used to calling **English Varieties**. The latter may be considered either diachronically (in chronological i.e. time – oriented or evolutionary terms) or synchronically (in the current or contemporary use of language). The ensuing section is entirely dedicated to this specific English variance – concerned linguistic chapter.

2. Varieties of English in Contemporary Use

2.1. From RP to Speech Varieties. Prefatory View

RP or **RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION** stands for that type of British **STANDARD ENGLISH** pronunciation which has been regarded as the prestige variety and which shows no regional variation. It has often been popularly referred to as **BBC English** because it has been the standard pronunciation used by most British Broadcasting Corporation Newsreaders. RP is definitely related to the **STANDARD VARIETY**, also called **STANDARD LANGUAGE** or **STANDARD DIALECT**, which points out the language variety having the highest status in a community or nation, one usually based on the speech and writing of educated native speakers of the language.

A standard variety is generally:

- used in the news media and in literature
- described in dictionaries and grammars
- taught in schools and taught to non – native speakers when they learn the language as a foreign language

Sometimes it is the educated variety spoken in the political or cultural centre of a country, e.g. the standard variety of French is based on educated Parisian French.

The standard variety of American English is known as **STANDARD AMERICAN ENGLISH** and the standard variety of British English is **STANDARD BRITISH ENGLISH**. A standard variety may show some variation in pronunciation according to the region where it is spoken, e.g. Standard British English in Scotland, Wales, Southern England. **STANDARD ENGLISH** is sometimes used as a cover term for all national standard varieties of English. These national standard varieties have differences in spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and particularly pronunciation, but there is a common core of the language that makes it possible for educated native speakers of the various national standard varieties of English to communicate with one another.

Unlike standard language, the **REGIONAL DIALECT** (i.e. the variety of a language spoken in one part of a country) is originated in a **REGIONAL VARIATION**, i.e. a language variation depending on the geographical area the speaker comes from.

The same as dialects or standard language, **SOCIOLECTS** are dealt with in terms of **SPEECH VARIETIES**.

A **SOCIOLECT** is a variety of language used by people belonging to a particular social class. The speakers of a sociolect usually share a similar socioeconomic and educational background. Sociolects may be considered in point of being high or low in status. For example:

He and I were going there. (higher sociolect)

'Im'n me was goin' there. (lower sociolect)

The sociolect with the highest status in a country is often the standard variety. The difference between one sociolect and another can be investigated by analysing the recorded speech of large samples of speakers from various social backgrounds; these differences are referred to as **SOCIOLECTAL** or **SOCIAL DIALECTAL VARIATIONS**.

Although it is common to think of a language as being divided into separate regional dialects or social dialects, there is often no clear division between them but rather a continuum from one another, which linguists are used to calling **SPEECH CONTINUUM**. This name is used particularly when referring to varieties spoken by those with varying levels of proficiency in a second language, e.g. English in Singapore. The sub – variety used by those with high levels of English medium education is frequently called the **ACROLECT**. The **BASILECT** is the sub – variety used by those with rather low levels of education and the **MESOLECTS** are the sub – varieties in between. Naturally, there are no clear – cut boundaries between these "lects". Educated speakers of a more

language in a country as learnt by people living there who have another first language. English in the UK would be called the second language of immigrants and people whose first language is Welsh.

established **ESL** (English as a Second Language) variety may use the acrolect or an upper mesolect in more formal situations and something close to the basilect in a more informal context.

2.2. A Deeper Insight into the Matter. Contemporary English Varieties

2.2.1. Regional Variation

Varieties according to region have a well – established label both in popular and technical use: **DIALECTS**. Geographical dispersion is in fact the classic basis for linguistic variation, and in the course of time, with poor communications and relative remoteness, such dispersion results in dialects becoming so distinct that we regard them as different languages. This latter stage was long ago reached with the Germanic dialects that are now Dutch, English, German, Swedish, etc, but it has not been reached (and may not necessarily ever be reached, given the modern ease and range of communication) with the dialects of English that have resulted from the regional separation of communities within the British Isles and (since the voyages of exploration and settlement in Shakespeare's time) elsewhere in the world.

2.2.2. Social Variation

Within each of the dialects there is considerable variation in speech according to education, socioeconomic group, and ethnic group. Some differences correlate with age and sex. Much (if not most) of the variation does not involve categorical distinctions; rather it is a matter of the frequency with which certain linguistic features are found in the groups. There is an important polarity between uneducated and educated speech in which the former can be identified with the nonstandard regional dialect most completely and the latter moves away from regional usage to a form of English that cuts across regional boundaries. An outsider (who was not a skilled dialectologist) might not readily find a New Englander who said *see* for *saw*, a Pennsylvanian who said *seen*, and a Virginian who said *seed*. These are forms that tend to be replaced by *saw* with schooling, and in speaking to a stranger a dialect speaker would tend to use 'school' forms. On the other hand, there is no simple equation of regional and uneducated English. Just as educated English *I saw* cuts across regional boundaries, so do many features of uneducated use: a prominent example is the double negative as in *I don't want no cake*, which has been outlawed from all educated English by the prescriptive grammar tradition for over two hundred years but which continues to thrive as an emphatic form in uneducated speech wherever English is spoken.

Educated English is codified in dictionaries, grammars, and guides to usage; it comes to be referred to as **STANDARD ENGLISH**, and provided we remember that this does not mean an English that has been formally standardised by official action, as weights and measures are standardised, the term is useful and appropriate. In contrast with standard English, forms that are especially associated with uneducated (rather than dialectal) use are generally called **NONSTANDARD**.

2.2.3. Standard English

The degree of acceptance of a single standard English throughout the world, across a multiplicity of political and social systems, is a truly remarkable phenomenon: the more so since the extent of the uniformity involved has, if anything, increased in the twentieth century. Uniformity is greatest in orthography, which is from the most viewpoints the least important type of linguistic organisation. Although printing houses in all English – speaking houses retain a tiny element of individual decision (e.g.: *realize* / *realise*; *judgment* / *judgement*), there is basically a single spelling and punctuation system throughout: with two minor subsystems. The one is the subsystem with British orientation (used in most English – speaking countries other than the United States), with distinctive forms in only a small class of words, *colour*, *centre*, *levelled*, etc. The other is the American subsystem, with *color*, *center*, *leveled*, etc. In grammar and vocabulary, standard English presents somewhat less of a monolithic character, but even so the world – wide agreement is extraordinary and it seems actually to be increasing under the impact of closer world communication and the spread of identical material and nonmaterial culture. The uniformity is especially close in neutral or formal styles of written English on subject matter not of obviously localised interest: in such circumstances

one can frequently go on for page after page without encountering a feature which would identify the English as belonging to one of the national standards.

2.2.4. British and American English

What we are calling *national standards* should be seen as distinct from standard English which we have been discussing above and which we should think of as being supranational, embracing what is common to all. Again, as with orthography, there are two national standards that are overwhelmingly predominant both in the number of distinctive uses and in the degree to which these distinctions are institutionalised: American English (AmE) and British English (BrE). Grammatical differences are few and the most conspicuous are known to many users of both national standards: the fact that AmE has two past participles for *get* and BrE only one, for example, and that in BrE either a singular or a plural verb may be used with a singular collective noun:

The government is / are in favour of economic sanctions.

whereas in AmE a singular verb is required here.

Lexical differences are far more numerous, but many of these are familiar to users of both standards. Recent innovations tend to spread rapidly from one standard to the other. Thus, while radio sets have had *valves* in BrE but *tubes* in AmE, television sets have *tubes* in both, and *transistors* and computer *software* are likewise used in both standards. Mass communication neutralizes differences; the pop music culture uses a 'mid – Atlantic' dialect that levels differences even in pronunciation. The United States and Britain have been separate political entities for over two centuries; for generations thousands of books have been appearing annually; there is a long tradition of publishing descriptions of both AmE and BrE. These are important factors in establishing and institutionalising the two national standards, and in the relative absence of such conditions other than national standards are both less distinct (being more open to the influence of either AmE or BrE) and less institutionalised.

One attitudinal phenomenon in the United States is of sociolinguistic interest. In affirming the students' right to their own varieties of language, many American educationalists have published numerous works in which they have declared that Standard American English is a myth, some asserting the independent status (for example) of Black English. At the same time they have acknowledged the existence of a written standard dialect, sometimes termed 'Edited American English'.

2.2.5. Pronunciation and Standard English

All the variants of standard English are remarkable primarily in the tiny extent to which even the most firmly established, BrE and AmE, differ from each other in vocabulary, grammar, and orthography. Pronunciation, however, is a special case in that it distinguishes one national standard from another most immediately and completely and it links in a most obvious way the national standards to the regional varieties. In BrE, one type of pronunciation comes close to enjoying the status of 'standard': it is the accent associated with the older schools and universities of England, 'Received Pronunciation' or RP. It is nonregional and enjoys prestige from the social importance of its speakers. Although RP no longer has the unique authority it had in the first half of the twentieth century, it remains the standard for teaching the British variety of English as a foreign language, as can be easily seen from dictionaries and textbooks intended for countries in which BrE is taught.

3. Final Judgement

It is utterly difficult to encompass, within the definite confines of this scientific text, the whole affluence in significance pertaining to such a debatable and sonorous linguistic marathon. Neither epitomised nor exhaustive, the paper is actually a mere admixture between a synoptic survey upon a whole range of current linguistic issues and an analytical approach of certain very specific and transparent language realities. The scope or limits of this investigation, likewise its own magnitudes, are carefully conceived so as to best capture the overflow of multiform linguistic information considered.

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