



**“A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PROFILE OF
UNIVERSITY EFL LEARNERS IN TASHKENT,
UZBEKISTAN”**

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Abstract *This paper presents a sociolinguistic profile of first-year philology students at a University in Tashkent. It investigates how learners’ linguistic backgrounds, socioeconomic status, gender, and motivations influence their English learning experiences. Based on classroom observations and learner profiles, the study shows how multilingualism and diversity shape classroom dynamics and teaching practices. The findings indicate that students’ English learning is strongly connected to their personal aspirations—such as careers in business or education—and that inclusive, differentiated instruction supports their growth. The research also reveals that gender and societal expectations subtly affect learners’ confidence and participation. The study argues that teachers should advocate for linguistic equity by recognizing diverse English varieties and rejecting standardized norms. Integrating communicative and task-based methods with fair assessment, the paper underscores the importance of creating classrooms where every learner can develop linguistic competence, confidence, and agency in a globalized context.*

Key words: *Sociolinguistics, multilingualism, language-learning motivation, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Uzbekistan, linguistic diversity, gender and language learning, teacher advocacy, inclusive pedagogy, classroom dynamics.*

Introduction

In every classroom, students bring more than just notebooks and pens—they bring dreams, identities, and a deep desire to be heard and understood. In my context, teaching English to university students in Tashkent, I've come to see how language learning is never just about grammar rules or vocabulary lists. For my learners, English represents opportunity: a bridge to higher education, international experiences, successful careers, and a sense of belonging in a wider world. These students come from different regions of Uzbekistan and beyond, each carrying unique life experiences, languages, and motivations.

Some hope to open their own businesses, others dream of becoming educators, and many are simply working hard to improve their communication skills so they can confidently participate in today's global conversations. This diversity in goals, backgrounds, and language use makes the classroom a dynamic and multilingual space—one where English is not just learned, but lived in different ways. It also challenges me as a teacher to look beyond traditional instruction and instead respond to who my learners truly are.

In this paper, I aim to create a sociolinguistic profile of my students and their learning environment, while reflecting on how these factors shape my classroom instruction, material selection, and assessment practices. Grounded in both theory and lived experience, this profile also highlights the importance of teacher advocacy in creating inclusive, affirming spaces where all learners can thrive—regardless of how they speak or where they come from.

Methodology

Sociolinguistic Profile of a Group of Learners

I was in practicum at a University. In observation process, we given different classes and teachers to observe the class and I chose one of them. My target learners are first-year Philology and teaching languages faculty students who aged between 18-20 years old. 30 % of them are bilingual and know Russian and Turkish languages. When it comes to their level, 70 % of them are A2+ (flyer), rest of them are B1 according to the CEFR. Actually, they are mixed level students and most of the time; teacher has to implement differentiation and scaffolding techniques while planning the lesson. Their group consists of 15 students; two of them are boys and 13 are girls. Students come from different parts of Uzbekistan rural and urban areas: Samarkand, Tashkent region, Bukhara, Tashkent and so on. Their future goal and working places are different even study the same field. For example: two boys are going to set up their own business and in this case, English language plays a connection role with their future business partners. It means they need more focus on general English and speaking skills, however, this class lessons are exam and teaching focused. The classes are organized around both IELTS and multilevel English tests. Each language skill—like reading, writing, speaking, pronunciation, listening, and grammar is taught not only separately, but also in an integrated way. For instance, reading is often paired with writing, and speaking with pronunciation. What is interesting is that the students use different course books for each skill: for speaking, they work with IELTS speaking topics; for writing, they use Successful Writing; and for grammar, listening, and reading, they follow Navigation along with some additional materials.

During my observation, I noticed that many students were struggling with grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Some even had

trouble distinguishing between past and present simple tenses, and they often found it difficult to use vocabulary accurately in context. Given that these students are future philologists and English teachers, it's crucial for them to master all aspects of the English language in depth—starting from their very first year.

As the teacher juggled various subjects like speaking, reading, phonology, literacy, and teaching methodology, it became clear just how flexible and adaptable EFL teachers need to be. They naturally shift between different language skills and teaching approaches depending on the needs of each lesson. What really stood out was the impact of differentiated lesson planning—tailoring tasks to students with different levels of proficiency made a noticeable difference in how well they engaged and progressed.

Individual learners' description

1. **Malika** is a 20-year-old Uzbek woman who grew up in a monolingual household where Uzbek is the main language of communication. Her limited exposure to other languages—aside from occasional Russian in public spaces—means that English is her first foreign language experience. She studied English for a year at a private course, focusing almost entirely on grammar to prepare for an entrance exam. As a result, her speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills are still developing.

Malika's socioeconomic background has shaped her learning path; while she doesn't have many opportunities to use English outside the classroom, she makes the most of what she has. She's a highly independent learner, often working through tasks on her own without needing explanations. Her strong memory and curiosity

help her progress quickly. In class, she's attentive, eager to understand every detail, and confidently helps classmates when they struggle—showing early signs of leadership and a strong desire to connect through language.

2. **Murat** is a 19-year-old Uzbek student who began learning English in 11th grade, mainly to prepare for university entrance exams. Despite his relatively late start and lack of formal language training, his speaking skills are closer to B1, thanks to his strong interest in movies and foreign actors. Growing up in a predominantly Uzbek-speaking environment with little exposure to English outside school, Murat created his own immersion by watching English-language films, picking up expressions, intonation, and cultural references.

His passion for acting and film has shaped his sociolinguistic development — he often imitates scenes, adopts natural phrases, and expresses himself confidently in discussions. Though his grammar foundation is still developing, his curiosity and creativity stand out. In class, Murat contributes original ideas, especially in tasks involving problem-solving or discussions. His story highlights how personal motivation and access to global media can bridge sociolinguistic gaps, even in low-exposure environments.

3. **Madina** is an 18-year-old bilingual Uzbek student who speaks both Uzbek and Russian fluently. She hasn't attended any private English courses, but she built her grammar knowledge in public school by focusing on entrance exams. Despite her strong memory and accuracy with grammar rules, Maria struggles to use English confidently in real situations. Her perfectionism and fear of making

mistakes often hold her back, especially in speaking and writing tasks. She tends to shut down when attention is on her, which reflects a deeper affective filter shaped by social and classroom expectations.

Still, Maria's supportive and cooperative attitude has a positive influence in group work. She actively engages with peers and encourages a collaborative environment. With more opportunities for low-stakes speaking in pairs or small groups, and a classroom culture that normalizes mistakes, Maria could gradually develop her confidence and communicative ability.

4. **Nilufar** is 20, grew up in a bilingual Uzbek-Russian environment and is highly skilled in code switching—fluidly moving between languages depending on context and audience. Her multilingual identity is flexible, and she is motivated to use English not only academically but also as a social language to engage with wider communities, particularly through social media. Her learning style is very communicative and experiential; she thrives in interactional contexts like role-plays and group discussions that mirror real-life language use. Unlike more instrumentally motivated learners, Nilufar exhibits integrative motivation — a genuine desire to connect culturally and socially through English

Sociolinguistic Profile of the Learning Context

Classes are held in a typical university setting- a shared space where lessons involve a balance of reading, writing, speaking. It means even some students have another goal not being a teacher; they also have a chance to improve other skills. Their lessons are mostly IELTS and Multilevel exam based. The atmosphere is friendly and open, where

students often lean on each other for support. It is not common to see someone whispering a quick explanation to a peer, or staying behind after class to go over homework or ask questions.

Because of their different backgrounds and experiences, not everyone is at the same level when it comes to language skills or confidence. But what's really special about this group is how supportive they are of one another. Despite their differences, they share a strong sense of purpose, and they're all here to grow—whether that's toward a classroom of their own, a university abroad, or the dream of running a successful business someday. There are many opportunities at university such as library, classroom based tools, computers and so on.

When it comes to relevance of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, in our classroom, topics like race and ethnicity really matter—they come up in both subtle and more obvious ways. These aspects shape how students are seen, how they see themselves, and even how their language use is judged, whether fairly or not. Fought (2011) talks about this in a powerful way, showing how people can face bias based just on the way they speak, even when it's unintentional. It's something I've seen firsthand in the way some students hesitate to speak up or feel like they need to “prove” their English is good enough. While we're not allowed to openly talk about gender in most classrooms in Uzbekistan, I've come to see just how much it quietly shapes the learning experience. These patterns often show up in small but powerful ways—how students carry themselves, who feels comfortable speaking, or even who takes risks when learning a new language.

I've noticed that many of the girls in my classes tend to hold back. They often double-check their answers silently, waiting until they're

absolutely sure before raising their hands. Some even whisper their ideas to a friend instead of sharing them out loud. It's not that they don't know the answer—often, they do. But I can tell that there's a deeper layer of pressure they're carrying, shaped by the world around them. They want to avoid mistakes, to not “sound wrong,” especially in front of others. The boys, on the other hand, are usually more comfortable jumping in. Even when they're unsure, they speak up without much hesitation.

These habits aren't random—they reflect how our society teaches boys and girls to behave, even from a young age. And over time, this impacts how students learn English. Language learning is all about using your voice, taking risks, and trying again after a mistake. If some students feel like they have to be perfect before they speak, they miss out on the very moments that help them grow.

As a teacher, I carry the quiet responsibility of making sure those patterns don't go unnoticed. I try to balance participation by encouraging the quieter students to share their thoughts and giving them space to speak without pressure. I pay close attention to group dynamics, making sure that no one voice dominates. It's in these everyday decisions—how we form groups, how we respond to mistakes, how we celebrate effort—that we can offer all students equal chances to grow.

So while gender might not be a topic we can openly explore, it still lives in the room with us. And part of my role is to recognize that, gently work around it, and build a classroom where all my students—regardless of what the world expects of them—feel like they belong.

Results

The students in my classes come with a variety of goals. Some are learning English to grow in the business world, others want to continue

their academic journeys, and a few are simply focused on improving their language skills for personal or professional reasons. Because they come from different regions and backgrounds, there's a rich mix of experiences and knowledge that they can learn from each other (Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert, & Leap, 2009; Fought, 2006).

We all know English has become a global standard. Whether it's for traveling to Europe or other parts of the world, studying abroad, or working with international partners, English acts as a common language that's in high demand (Kachru, 1990; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). My students aren't just learning English to check a box—they're learning it because it opens doors to their dreams and helps them navigate an increasingly connected world. For many of them, mastering English means gaining access to better education, career opportunities, and the ability to communicate across cultures (Schilling, 2011; Selvi, 2019).

Many of them also value chances to take part in internships or exchange programs in English-speaking countries. These experiences help turn what they learn in the classroom into real-world skills. This matches what I see among young professionals in Uzbekistan today—they're increasingly seeing English as a tool to advance their careers and connect globally (Kachru, 1990). Plus, with so much linguistic and ethnic diversity in the classroom, there's a lively environment where mixing languages and switching between them is totally normal and even beneficial (Mesthrie et al., 2009; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

For these learners, English is more than just a subject—it's the foundation of their futures. Some hope to start their own businesses, while others want to become teachers. Each one plans to use English in a way that fits their own path. Even though our classes often focus on

exam prep and teacher training, the students feel they really need to build stronger general skills, especially speaking (Bayley & Villarreal, 2018; Selvi, 2019). That's why it's so important to use different teaching strategies, integrate skills, and offer support tailored to their needs.

Discussion

Understanding the diverse backgrounds of my students—whether it's their first languages, socioeconomic status, or exposure to English—deeply influences the way I approach teaching. As an instructor, I need to create lessons that are flexible and responsive to different strengths and challenges, especially when it comes to grammar and vocabulary, which many students find tricky. Since many of them are stronger in speaking but vary in academic or formal language use, I try to incorporate contextualized vocabulary work, collaborative tasks, and real-world speaking activities that allow them to build confidence without feeling judged. Drawing from Baugh's (2005) work on linguistic profiling, I've become more aware of how students' accents or speech patterns may lead to biases—even in assessments—so I'm intentional about creating a more inclusive classroom where diverse Englishes are not just tolerated but valued.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, I also recognize how structural inequalities, like those Lippi-Green (1997) discusses regarding "standard" language ideologies, can impact language learning and evaluation. Some students might use English forms shaped by Russian or Turkish, and while this is a natural part of multilingual development, these differences could be unfairly penalized in standard assessments. That's why I try to use a variety of assessment types—such as peer feedback, portfolios, and oral presentations—in addition to exams. In

preparing students for high-stakes tests like IELTS, I also work to help them decode what kinds of English are expected and how to navigate these norms strategically. Ultimately, as Rosa and Flores (2017) remind us, it's essential to reject the idea that there's only one "correct" way to speak English. My role is not just to teach language but to support my students in understanding—and pushing back against—systems that don't always recognize their full linguistic identities. This means staying flexible, aware, and committed to a pedagogy that is not only effective, but just. Many of my students want to succeed in academics or business, I focus on teaching both formal English for things like presentations and writing, and also everyday spoken English they'll use in real life. When I pick materials, I don't just grab textbooks with "perfect" British or American English. Instead, I bring in videos, articles, and examples that show different accents and varieties of English from all over the world. This helps students see that English isn't owned by one group—it's a tool they can use their own way (Selvi, 2019; Bayley & Villarreal, 2018)

Classroom Methodologies and Practices

Methodologically, I rely a lot on communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (TBL) because these approaches emphasize real-world use of English and meaningful interaction. These methods help students practice speaking and listening in authentic contexts, which is exactly what many of them need to build confidence and fluency (Mesthrie et al., 2009; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). I also use scaffolding techniques, breaking down complex tasks into smaller steps and gradually removing support as students gain independence. This is important because of the wide range of proficiency levels and backgrounds in the classroom. Differentiated instruction lets me tailor

activities to meet each student's needs, making sure no one feels left behind or unchallenged. Creating a supportive classroom atmosphere is essential, especially since some students worry about their accents or making mistakes. I use pair and group work often, encouraging collaboration so students can learn from each other's diverse linguistic and cultural experiences. Code-switching is allowed and sometimes encouraged, helping students express themselves fully while they build their English skills (Baugh, 2005; Rosa & Flores, 2017).

In the end, understanding my students through a sociolinguistic lens has made my teaching more flexible, respectful, and effective. It's not just about teaching English—it's about helping students find their own voices and succeed in a world where English connects people from many cultures and backgrounds (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Mesthrie et al., 2009).

Assessment Implications

Given the diverse backgrounds, goals, and language experiences of my students, assessment needs to be thoughtful, fair, and supportive of their individual progress. Because many learners come from different regions and speak multiple languages, traditional assessments that focus only on standardized, "native-speaker" English could unfairly disadvantage some students or fail to capture their true abilities.

In my classroom, I prefer ongoing, formative assessments—like oral presentations, group projects, and written reflections—that allow students to demonstrate their skills in varied and meaningful ways. These types of assessments give a better picture of how well students can use English in real-life situations and help me adjust my teaching to meet their evolving needs (Mesthrie et al., 2009). For example, when students participate in discussions or role-plays, I look for their ability to

communicate clearly and appropriately rather than just grammatical accuracy. Many students prepare for high-stakes external exams like IELTS or Multi-level exams; I also incorporate practice tasks that mimic these formats. However, I remain aware that these exams often prioritize specific accents, vocabulary, or grammar structures, which can create pressure and anxiety, especially for students who have unique linguistic backgrounds (Lippi-Green, 1997). I strive to balance exam preparation with fostering a positive, confidence-building learning environment where students feel valued for their own voices and expressions. Moreover, I also use CEFR, IELTS frameworks to assess the learning progress.

Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Assessment

While assessing students it is important to take an account sociolinguistic factors so ethically, it's important to recognize and respect the linguistic diversity students bring into the classroom. I avoid assessments that unfairly penalize accents or language varieties that differ from "standard" English norms. Instead, I emphasize communicative competence, fluency, and the ability to adapt language use to different contexts, which are more meaningful indicators of real-world English proficiency.

Finally, I include students in the assessment process by encouraging self-assessment and peer feedback. This not only helps them reflect on their own progress but also builds their metalinguistic awareness and confidence in using English across different settings (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). By making assessment a collaborative and ongoing process, I hope to create a fairer and more motivating environment that respects each learner's unique journey with English.

Conclusion

In today's diverse and dynamic classrooms, the role of a language instructor extends far beyond teaching grammar or vocabulary. As an educator, I see myself not just as a facilitator of language learning, but as an advocate for my students—amplifying their voices, honoring their linguistic and cultural identities, and addressing the subtle power dynamics that shape their learning experiences.

Many of my learners navigate complex sociolinguistic realities. Some come from multilingual households, balancing Uzbek, Russian, and English with remarkable flexibility, while others face invisible pressures related to gender, accent, or societal expectations. For example, I've observed that girls often hesitate to speak up in class, even when they know the answer, while boys tend to participate more freely. These patterns are not isolated; they reflect deeper historical and social structures that define who is encouraged to speak, who is listened to, and whose errors are forgiven.

Understanding these dynamics allows me to create more equitable and empowering learning spaces. It informs the way I design activities, give feedback, and structure classroom interaction. I strive to ensure that every student—not just the most confident—feels seen, supported, and capable of growing in their language abilities. This approach is deeply influenced by critical pedagogy, which reminds us that education is never neutral; it either reinforces inequalities or challenges them (Freire, 1970).

By centering learners' lived experiences and identities, I hope to foster not only language proficiency but also self-confidence and agency. My goal is for students to leave the classroom not just with better

English, but with a stronger sense of their own power to communicate, connect, and advocate for themselves in a broader world. I also hope my reflections will encourage fellow educators to look more closely at the social dimensions of their classrooms—particularly the ways in which race, gender, class, and language intersect—and to consider how we can all become more intentional advocates for our learners.

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