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LANGUAGE DIFFERENCE AND LINGUISTIC PREJUDICE

***Аннотация:** в данной статье рассматривается вопрос отличительных особенностей различных языков. Авторы приходят к выводу о необходимости изучения отношения языковых диалектных различий. Если не противостоять этим отношениям, они будут продолжать оказывать негативное воздействие на тех, кто говорит на других диалектах.*

***Ключевые слова:** language, language difference, linguistic prejudice.*

Language difference is used to describe instances in which an individual speaks a dialect or language other than Standard American English (SAE) and no language disorder or delay is present. Because this individual speaks a different dialect or language, his or her responses will present as errors in SAE though they may be grammatically correct in that person's dialect or language. The «errors» are then due to language difference rather than a language disorder.

Language difference is, of course, a complicated matter, and the level of complication that emerges from difference is often less linguistic and more attitudinal or sociopolitical. We expect, for example, to not understand someone who speaks Russian if we speak English. If, however, we encounter someone who claims to speak English or who we believe to be a native speaker of English, and we seem to have difficulty understanding that person, then somehow their (this should be highlighted) language difference becomes problematic. The problem, of course, is the us-and-them distinction

that is constructed from claiming exclusive ownership of English, or of a particular variety of English.

Ownership of English is anything but exclusive because of its historical colonial expansion and its current and rapid globalization. With over a billion users of English worldwide, many people claim English as their native language and countless others use it as a second language or lingua franca. As Widdowson (1994) notes, «The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it.... It is not a possession which they (so-called native speakers) lease out to others, while still retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it» (p. 385).

Small wonder that we are now encountering in North America a growing number of immigrants who claim English as their language but whose claim to nativeness is often questioned by Americans, the implication being that their English is «different» and therefore not «native.” Inherent in the judgment is different and deficient. Even within the United States, speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), who are considered native speakers of English, often encounter their English being seen as different and deficient. It should be noted, though, that the view of difference is not uniform.

Kachru and Nelson (2001) correctly point out that American and British speakers of English are rather tolerant of each other’s English (quite a diversity themselves), but are unlikely to be tolerant of the English of South Asians and Africans. The authors are clearly underscoring the racial prejudice that frequently accompanies linguistic prejudice. Race, of course, is not the only factor underlying linguistic prejudice. Negative judgments on social class, nationality, education, regional provenance, and accent, can all manifest themselves as linguistic prejudice. Furthermore, all of these factors are implicated in the term «native speaker» (a far cry from Chomsky’s notion of mere «native speaker intuition»).

I must point out here that the linguistic prejudice I speak of is not only found among speakers of English of European ancestry toward non-European speakers. There is, for example, as much negative judgment of language difference among speakers of Asian and African descent both outside of and within the United States. A case in point

is the recent furor over Ebonics (AAVE), which was as intense within the African American community as it was in the society at large. The furor itself pointed to a very real ambivalent attitude towards so-called nonstandard varieties of English, that is, they are at once celebrated and denigrated by their speakers, aptly characterized by Kachru and Nelson (2001) as «attitudinal schizophrenia» (p.14).

The ambivalence is understandable. On the one hand, English as a language of colonial expansion took on a life of its own as it spread to diverse communities worldwide, and its emergent varieties (AAVE, pidgins, creoles, etc.) reflect the lived experience of its speakers in the various contexts. Its speakers, therefore, have a right to celebrate, claim, and use their respective varieties of the language as legitimate and reflective of their identity. By the same token, the spread of English has been, and continues to be, in contexts of asymmetrical power relations (slavery, colonialism, globalization, etc.), which gives privilege to the English spoken by the group who holds power and concomitantly stigmatizes the language of the disempowered group. Unfortunately, this stigmatization is often internalized by disempowered groups as they clamor, with good reason, to embrace the standard form of English that give access to, and power in, the society at large.

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The study of language and dialect differences challenges a set of «common sense» assumptions, stereotypes and prejudices that too often fly under the radar, even in mul-

ticultural education. Unless we confront these attitudes, they will continue to negatively impact those who speak dialects other than Standard English-and that's now a majority of the American population.