

Language and age: A comparative study

Perera, M. A. Nipuni

Department of English Language Teaching

Abstract

Out of all the sociolinguistic factors such as class, gender, ethnicity etc. age has to be the least researched area available. According to Labov (2001), age is merely treated as a biological factor and is often overshadowed by gender as a sociolinguistic variable. However, age is an important marker in our lives as we are categorised in to infancy/childhood, adolescent, adult and old age according to our age and there is a massive research gap in the Sri Lankan context regarding the lexical and semantic change that takes place due to age. Accordingly, this research paper will focus on the lexical and semantic changes in the conversational register of the English language due to age and what changes can be seen prominently when people speak. The methodology used was the comparative analysis methodology. The data was gathered through semi-structured questionnaires, interviews and observations and the sample consisted of 30 members from age groups 15-30 and 30-60. The results showcased that there is a variation due to age and difference in register and vocabulary. Yet, the most surprising finding was a language merger between age groups during conversational situations that signified how age could cease to be a reason for language variation as well. Since the purposive sample that was chosen for the research study was limited, the researcher recommends an increased sample that can provide more definitive results.

Keywords - Sociolinguistic factors, Age, Variations in language, Semantics, Comparative analysis.