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## Social Stratification and Second Language Acquisition: Scrutinizing the Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Linguistic Attainment

\*<sup>1</sup>Sudarshan Chakraborty\*<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Chandrakona Vidyasagar Mahavidyalaya, Vidyasagar University, West Bengal, India.

### Abstract

In an increasingly interwoven global arena, the acquisition of a Second Language (SLA), a must-have proficiency to ensure cross-cultural communication, economic upliftment, and international collaboration, is found to be of paramount importance. Ascertaining mastery of SLA involves a complex process. Effective L2 Acquisition hinges on several intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Of the extraneous Macrosocial factors, the most significant one is the Socio-Economic Status (SES). This paper aims at excavating the intricate interplay of socioeconomic status (SES) and linguistic proficiency in second language acquisition (SLA). With an objective of scrutinizing the multifaceted impacts of socioeconomic status (SES) on linguistic attainment, this paper draws upon a comprehensive review of related literature, the systematic analysis of which exposes how disparities concerning socioeconomic status control linguistic performance. Critical analysis of the empirical studies and theoretical frameworks helps in identifying the additional contributing factors such as disparities in educational resource availability, teaching quality, parental involvement, and sociocultural influences, and thereby highlight the necessity for tailored interventions and policy reforms to address educational inequalities. By acknowledging and mitigating the influence of SES on language development, efforts can be directed toward establishing fair and inclusive educational environments for all learners.

**Keywords:** Second language acquisition (SLA), socioeconomic status (SES), social stratification, linguistic competence, linguistic performance

### Introduction

In the contemporary interconnected world scenario, the proficiency to communicate in more than one language is increasingly becoming an essential skill for ensuring personal, social, and economic success. Globalization, technological advancement, and the accelerating need for cross-cultural communication have resulted in the unheard-of importance of second language acquisition (SLA). Ensuring mastery of a language learned subsequent to acquiring the First language (L2) is not an easy task. Several Internal and external factors control the process of L2 acquisition. Of the various external factors that control the process of L2 acquisition, Socioeconomic status plays a very crucial role. Different groups of people in society are found to demonstrate disparate levels of proficiency in acquiring the second language (L2), owing to different levels of socioeconomic status (SES). Socioeconomic status (SES) is a nuanced notion that subsumes economic resources, educational possibilities, social capital, and cultural capital. Individuals with higher socioeconomic status (SES) often have more extensive access to educational resources, such as high-quality teaching, language enrichment activities, and chances for language immersion. Conversely, individuals from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds may face impediments such as restricted availability of educational

resources, inadequate support networks, and socio-economic pressures that hinder the process of acquiring language skills. The differences in language skills have significant consequences on learners' academic performance, social advancement, and general welfare. Moreover, they play a role in wider trends of social stratification and disparity, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage that are transmitted intergenerationally. Therefore, it is vital to comprehend the processes by which socioeconomic status (SES) affects the acquisition of a second language. This understanding is necessary for the development of effective interventions and policies that seek to promote fair and equal learning outcomes.

This research aims to explore the intricate mechanisms that influence linguistic proficiency by examining the relationship between social stratification and second language learning. This study intends to contribute to efforts in building more inclusive and equitable educational systems by identifying the variables that drive socioeconomic status (SES) discrepancies in second language acquisition (SLA) and offering solutions to minimize these disparities. In essence, by acknowledging the impact of socioeconomic class on language learning results, we may work towards establishing settings that encourage linguistic variety, enhance societal unity, and enable people to achieve their optimum abilities.

## Review of Literature

Within the domain of second language acquisition (SLA), the issue of social stratification, which can be described otherwise as socioeconomic status (SES), is of substantial importance.

Ellis (1985) opines that socioeconomic status (SES) exercises influence on several aspects of language learning, which include the accessibility of resources and opportunities. Individuals with higher socioeconomic status (SES) often have more accessibility to educational resources, linguistic proficiency programmes, and optimal learning environments. These factors have the potential to impact their language improvement. In assessment, people with a lower socioeconomic status (SES) may additionally face difficulties such as limited opportunities to get good schooling and various other socio-financial hurdles that preclude the acquisition of language skills (García *et al.*, 2009).

Empirical research constantly makes the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) conspicuous on the outcomes of second language acquisition (SLA), accentuating the disparities in linguistic competency (Bialystok and Hakuta, 1999) [2]. Research carried out by Hoff (2006) [15] has demonstrated that learners with higher socioeconomic status (SES) outclass their peers from economically marginalized families in terms of vocabulary acquisition and linguistic performance. Along the same line, Magnuson *et al.* (2003) identified disparities in the progression of linguistic abilities based on socioeconomic status (SES). Evidence suggested that learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds exhibited a slower rate of linguistic development over time.

Shedding light on the processes by which socioeconomic status (SES) shapes language acquisition is of paramount importance for devising effective strategies and policies that strive to ensure fair and equal learning outcomes. By identifying, recognizing, and addressing socio-economic status (SES) gaps in second language acquisition (SLA), educators and policymakers must aim at providing inclusive educational settings that foster the linguistic growth of all students, irrespective of their socio-economic status.

Sociocultural theory casts light on the socio-cultural aspects of language learning experiences in the arena of second language acquisition (SLA). Vygotsky (1978) puts forward that language development is closely interlinked with social interactions and cultural circumstances. Language, in this view, functions as a tool for communication, cognitive growth, and the negotiation of identity. This perspective emphasizes the importance of social interactions, collaborative learning, and cultural mediation in the language acquisition process (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) [16].

In adherence to sociocultural theory, researchers have highlighted the importance of social interactions and cultural surroundings in shaping language learning experiences. Lave and Wenger (1991) [18] initiated the concept of "communities of practice," emphasizing the need to participate in authentic social contexts for language acquisition. Swain (2000) [23] suggested the notion of "language socialization," highlighting the importance of social interactions in facilitating language learning and cultural competence.

Adding to this point, sociocultural theory emphasizes the dynamic nature of language acquisition, emphasizing the reciprocal impact between individual learners and their sociocultural environment (van Lier, 2004) [24]. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) [16] contend that language acquisition is not just a cognitive process, but also a sociocultural phenomenon that is shaped by learners' interactions with others and their

engagement in meaningful activities within certain socio-cultural contexts.

By implementing a sociocultural perspective, educators and researchers may improve their understanding of the social and cultural factors involved in language learning. This understanding can help them design teaching strategies that encourage meaningful interactions, cultural understanding, and the formation of identity in language learners.

## Socioeconomic Status and Linguistic Attainment

**a) Definition and Components of SES:** Socioeconomic status (SES) is an intricate idea that incorporates several socio-economic measures, such as income, education, employment, and social standing. These components, taken together, represent the economic resources, social capital, and opportunities available to a person or family (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002) [4]. Although money is often used as a metric for socio-economic status (SES), it is typically complemented with educational achievement and occupational reputation in order to get a more holistic comprehension of an individual's socio-economic position (Sirin, 2005) [22]. Socioeconomic status (SES) is often seen as a spectrum, where people or families are categorized into various social and economic groups according to their relative wealth, educational attainment, and occupational standing.

**b) Impact of Socioeconomic Status (SES) on Language Development:** A wealth of literature has showcased the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) on language development. Numerous ongoing studies aim at unearthing how SES controls linguistic proficiency. Learners with parents from higher socioeconomic status (SES) show stronger verbal proficiency than their classmates from lower SES backgrounds (Hoff 2006) [15]. As observed by Walker *et al.* Language acquisition disparities associated with socioeconomic status (SES) become apparent in early childhood and persist throughout infancy and adolescence (1994). Early childhood schooling, exposure to surroundings with a strong language presence, and parental support are all important factors in defining language development trajectories (Hart & Risley, 1995) [14]. Moreover, stresses connected to socioeconomic status (SES) and environmental variables that pose a risk, such as poverty and family instability, might have a detrimental impact on the process of acquiring language skills and academic performance (Evans & Kim, 2013) [9].

**c) Disparities in SLA Achievement across Socioeconomic Strata:** The influence of socioeconomic status (SES) on ensuring second language acquisition (SLA) is evident, as individuals from higher SES backgrounds often outperform their counterparts from lower SES backgrounds in terms of success. Magnuson *et al.* (2007) [19] carried out a research that revealed variations in language development patterns among bilingual children, depending on their socioeconomic class (SES). More precisely, children from higher socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds evinced faster rates of language development over time. Studies have shown that disparities in socioeconomic status still persist in the learning of second languages into adulthood, affecting individuals' proficiency and communication skills in their second language (Adesope *et al.*, 2010) [1]. The disparities underscore the need to address socio-economic disparities in access to language learning resources, educational opportunities, and support systems in order to attain

equitable and uniform outcomes in second language acquisition.

### Factors Influencing SES Disparities in SLA

- a) **Access to Educational Resources:** The accessibility of educational resources has a substantial effect on the outcomes of second language acquisition (SLA) and is often affected by socioeconomic status (SES). Individuals of higher socioeconomic status (SES) often possess more access to resources for language acquisition, technology, and extracurricular activities that facilitate language development (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010) <sup>[10]</sup>. Individuals of lower socioeconomic status (SES) may encounter difficulties such as limited availability of libraries, language enrichment programs, and educational technology, which might hinder their language acquisition abilities (Dollaghan, 2004) <sup>[7]</sup>. Restricted access to educational resources worsens the differences in proficiency in acquiring second languages (SLA) across different socioeconomic groups. This highlights the need to enact laws and implement efforts that strive to provide fair and equal access to language resources for all individuals who are learning.
- b) **Pedagogical Superiority:** The efficacy of second language acquisition (SLA) outcomes is heavily contingent upon the quality of instructional practices, which is influenced by several factors such as teacher qualifications, pedagogical methodologies, and institutional resources (Cummins, 2008) <sup>[6]</sup>. Individuals belonging to higher socioeconomic status (SES) prefer to enroll in educational institutions that have instructors with more expertise, lower student-teacher ratios, and more advanced facilities. These factors contribute to an improved standard of language teaching (Schnepel & West, 2011) <sup>[21]</sup>. Conversely, individuals from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds are usually found to be enrolled in educational institutions that have fewer resources, less seasoned educators, and a greater number of students per instructor. These factors might hinder their advancement in language acquisition (Hakuta *et al.*, 2000) <sup>[13]</sup>. The disparities in teaching quality contribute to disparities in second language acquisition (SLA) results, underscoring the need to address resource disparities and improve teacher training and support in classrooms with diverse linguistic origins.
- c) **Parental Involvement and Home Environment:** Parental involvement and household environment quality significantly influence language acquisition and are influenced by socioeconomic status (Lareau, 2011) <sup>[17]</sup>. Children from households with higher socioeconomic status (SES) generally perk from caring home environments, which may provide them with advantageousness. Under these conditions, parents actively participate in activities that foster cognitive development, such as offering intellectual stimulation, engaging in literacy activities, and exposing their children to a wide array of languages. On the other hand, individuals from lower socioeconomic status (SES) families may have less parental participation because of financial limitations, lack of time, or restricted availability of educational resources (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) <sup>[13]</sup>. The unequal levels of parental participation and home environment disparities are significant factors that contribute to the inequalities in second language acquisition (SLA) accomplishment. This

highlights the crucial need to establish strong collaborations between educational institutions and families, as well as to provide help to parents from various socio-economic backgrounds.

- d) **Socio-Cultural Factors and Identity:** Socio-cultural elements and identity have intricate impacts on language learning experiences and results, and are impacted by socio-economic status (Norton, 2013) <sup>[20]</sup>. Individuals with higher socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to have increased access to culturally enriching experiences, travel opportunities, and social networks that facilitate language acquisition and the development of one's identity (Block, 2006) <sup>[6]</sup>. On the flip side, individuals from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds may face socio-cultural obstacles such as discrimination, marginalization, and linguistic prejudice that impact their language acquisition and feelings of inclusion (Cummins, 2000) <sup>[5]</sup>. The presence of differences in socio-cultural characteristics and identity leads to disparities in second language acquisition (SLA) success. This emphasizes the need to create inclusive and culturally sensitive learning settings that acknowledge and support learners' varied identities and experiences.

### Implications for Practice

**Equity-Centered Education:** Non-discriminatory education necessitates educators to use pedagogical methodologies that stress equality and inclusivity in language learning. This necessitates the identification and resolution of learners' varied socioeconomic circumstances, together with the provision of customized support to fulfill their specific requirements. To promote fair language learning experiences, educators may use diverse teaching approaches, provide additional support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and cultivate a culturally conscious learning environment.

**Resource Accessibility:** Equitable access to language learning resources and opportunities should be ensured by schools and educational institutions, irrespective of students' socio-economic status. This may include allocating resources towards language learning materials, technology, and extracurricular activities, additionally, implementing scholarships or financial assistance programs to aid kids from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes.

**Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Educators should get training and support to effectively address socio-economic disparities in language learning outcomes. Professional development programs should prioritize the development of cultural competency, the comprehension of the influence of socio-economic status (SES) on language development, and the implementation of evidence-based interventions to assist students from varied socio-economic backgrounds.

**Family and Community Engagement:** Establishing collaborations among schools, families, and communities is crucial for fostering fair language acquisition results. It is essential for educators to actively include parents and caregivers in the language acquisition process of their children, by equipping them with resources, knowledge, and assistance to enhance language proficiency within the home environment. In addition, partnering with community groups and cultural institutions may improve the development of valuable language learning opportunities outside the traditional classroom setting.

**Policy Overhaul and Advocacy:** Policymakers and educational leaders should actively support and promote policies and programs that specifically target and alleviate socio-economic disparities in language acquisition. This may include promoting more funding for language education programs, adopting specific interventions to support students from underprivileged backgrounds, and supporting inclusive educational policies that stress fairness and social equality.

Through the implementation of these strategies and programs, educators, policymakers, and stakeholders may foster cooperation in order to establish language learning settings that are fair and unbiased. This initiative will facilitate the language progression and scholarly achievement of all youngsters, irrespective of their socio-economic position.

### Future Scope

**Longitudinal Studies:** To improve future research, it would be beneficial to perform longitudinal studies that track the language development trajectories of individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds over an extended period of time. Longitudinal studies may provide useful insights into the long-lasting effects of socio-economic status (SES) on language acquisition. This entails comprehending the dynamics of socio-economic disparities as they evolve over time and their impact on educational and career accomplishments.

**Intersectionality:** Research is necessary to examine the intersectionality of socio-economic status with other attributes, including race, ethnicity, gender, and immigrant status, to comprehend the impact of these variables on language learning experiences and outcomes. A thorough understanding of the interplay between various aspects of social identity concerning language acquisition might enhance our understanding of socio-economic disparities in second language acquisition (SLA).

**Intervention Measures:** Future research should emphasize examining the effectiveness of intervention programs aimed at reducing socio-economic gaps in language learning outcomes. Conducting experimental research and program evaluations may reveal effective treatments and suitable strategies for supporting language acquisition in children from disadvantaged homes.

**Technology and Innovation:** Given the growing prevalence of technology in education, future research should investigate novel methods of using technology to enhance language learning outcomes across students from various socio-economic backgrounds. This may include creating mobile apps, internet platforms, and digital resources that provide cost-effective and readily available language learning opportunities for persons of diverse backgrounds.

**Global Perspectives:** Engaging in comparative research across several nations and regions may provide useful insights into how socio-economic variables impact language learning results in various socio-cultural settings. Researchers may analyze differences in educational policies, practices, and results to discover common patterns and effective strategies for tackling socio-economic disparities in global second language acquisition (SLA).

**Public Policy and Advocacy:** Future research should persist in influencing public policy and advocacy endeavors that strive to provide fair and impartial language learning opportunities for all learners. Researchers may use empirical data to demonstrate the influence of socioeconomic differences on the results of second language acquisition (SLA). This data may be used to strengthen policy changes

and initiatives aimed at addressing systemic obstacles and promoting fairness in the area of education.

The extent and complexity of future research on the relationship between socioeconomic status and second language acquisition is extensive. By investigating these possible study topics, academics have the opportunity to make substantial contributions to the progress of knowledge and the creation of evidence-based treatments that may assist language learners from various socio-economic backgrounds.

### Conclusion

This research has conducted a comprehensive investigation of the intricate interplay between socioeconomic status (SES) and the acquisition of a second language (SLA). The meticulous analysis of the empirical data and theoretical frameworks has made it conspicuous that socioeconomic status (SES) substantially influences the development of language learning experiences and outcomes. Learners with higher socioeconomic status (SES) often have more reach to educational resources, get better teaching, and benefit from beneficial learning settings. These determinants augment their linguistic proficiency. Conversely, learners from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds often encounter obstacles such as depleted resource availability, socio-economic pressures, and environmental hazards that hinder their advancement in language acquisition.

The differences in the attainment of second language acquisition (SLA) proficiency levels across different socio-economic groups discloses the necessity of addressing socio-economic inequities and the availability of language learning opportunities. It is imperative for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders prioritize fairness in language education by offering customized assistance and resources to address the varied requirements of learners from various socio-economic backgrounds. To promote equitable learning outcomes, it is essential to put into action initiatives such as educational programmes that focus on fairness, ensuring equal access to resources, offering comprehensive teacher training, enhancing family engagement, and implementing legislative reforms.

On top of that, it is imperative for future research to give precedence to longitudinal studies, intersectionality, intervention programs, technological integration, global perspectives, and policy advocacy to ensure an in-depth understanding of and effectively address socioeconomic disparities in second language acquisition (SLA). By furthering understanding in these domains, researchers may contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies and regulations that foster equal chances for language acquisition among all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic standing.

With a view to building fair and inclusive educational institutions, it is imperative to acknowledge and address the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on the outcomes of second language acquisition (SLA). This endeavour aims at improving linguistic proficiency and academic upliftment for all learners.

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