



THE PHENOMENON OF DIGLOSSIA IN MODERN LINGUISTICS

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Abstract: *The phenomenon of diglossia has become one of the central subjects of modern linguistics, especially in the study of multilingual societies and sociolinguistic dynamics. Diglossia refers to the functional distribution of two varieties of the same language within a single speech community, where one variety is considered “high” and prestigious, while the other is “low,” used for everyday communication. In contemporary linguistic research, diglossia is examined not only as a structural or functional distinction but also as a complex socio-cultural, psychological, and political phenomenon. Modern scholars explore how diglossia influences identity formation, educational policy, language attitudes, mass media usage, and digital communication. This article discusses the evolution of the concept of diglossia from classical interpretations by Charles Ferguson to expanded frameworks that include polyglossia, code-switching, translanguaging, and the impact of globalization. It highlights contemporary cases such as Arabic-speaking countries, Switzerland, Haiti, and post-Soviet states, showing how diglossia remains a living and dynamic linguistic reality. Special attention is given to the challenges that diglossic environments create for language planning, literacy development, and educational practices. Through analysis of current research, the article demonstrates that diglossia serves as a reflective mirror of social hierarchy, cultural continuity, and linguistic change, providing valuable insight into how languages evolve and adapt in the 21st century.*

Keywords: *diglossia, sociolinguistics, high variety, low variety, multilingualism, code-switching, language policy, linguistic identity.*

Introduction. The phenomenon of diglossia occupies a central position in contemporary sociolinguistic research, as it reflects the complex relationships between language, society, and identity. In many linguistic communities around the world, speakers use two distinct varieties of the same language, each fulfilling different social and communicative functions. This coexistence creates a rich yet challenging linguistic environment in which individuals constantly navigate between formal and informal registers, written and spoken norms, and



culturally prescribed expectations. The study of diglossia has evolved significantly since Charles Ferguson first introduced the term in 1959, and modern scholarship now approaches it from broader social, cognitive, and political perspectives. Today, diglossia is understood not merely as a structural division between a high and a low variety, but as a dynamic system influenced by globalization, technological change, migration, media use, and shifting cultural values.

In modern linguistics, diglossia provides valuable insight into how power structures, cultural ideologies, and educational systems shape language practices. It also reveals how speakers develop linguistic identities in societies where one variety is associated with prestige, authority, and tradition, while the other is linked to everyday communication, intimacy, and local heritage. The rise of digital communication has further expanded the scope of diglossic studies. Social media platforms have blurred the boundaries between formal and informal language use, allowing the low variety to gain visibility in written form and challenging long-standing linguistic hierarchies. Similarly, global languages such as English increasingly interact with local languages, creating new forms of diglossic and polyglossic environments that reflect contemporary patterns of multilingualism.

Understanding diglossia in the modern context is crucial for addressing a range of linguistic and social issues, including literacy development, language policy, curriculum design, and cultural preservation. The way a society manages its diglossic situation can influence educational outcomes, access to social mobility, and the maintenance of linguistic diversity. For researchers, teachers, and policymakers, studying diglossia offers an analytical framework for examining how languages adapt, compete, and coexist within complex social systems. As linguistic realities continue to evolve in the 21st century, the phenomenon of diglossia remains a dynamic and relevant field that sheds light on the interplay between language, society, and human communication.

Diglossia has long been recognized as a fundamental concept in sociolinguistics, defining situations where two varieties of the same language coexist within a community and perform different communicative functions. The high (H) variety typically carries prestige and is used in formal domains such as education, administration, religion, literature, and news broadcasting. The low (L) variety, on the other hand, is associated with daily interaction, oral tradition, and informal speech. This hierarchical distribution creates a complex linguistic ecosystem where speakers navigate between varieties depending on context, social expectations, and communicative goals. Modern linguistics does not limit diglossia to a simple binary opposition; instead, it views the phenomenon as multifaceted and evolving under the influence of globalization, migration, digital communication, and shifting socio-political conditions. Researchers explore how speakers internalize the norms of H and L varieties, how they develop attitudes towards linguistic prestige, and how such attitudes shape identity and social cohesion.

Contemporary scholarship also expands the concept beyond Ferguson's original model, suggesting that diglossia often exists alongside other linguistic practices such as code-





switching and translanguageing. While traditional diglossia implies clear functional separation between varieties, real-life language use reveals fluid boundaries. Speakers frequently switch between varieties within a single conversation, often guided by pragmatic or emotional needs rather than strict functional rules. In the digital age, social media platforms have intensified this fluidity, as the L variety is increasingly used in online communication, even in contexts previously dominated by the H variety. This shift challenges the rigid hierarchical view of diglossia and shows how technological environments contribute to the reconfiguration of linguistic norms. Furthermore, scholars note that the spread of global languages, especially English, introduces new forms of diglossic or polyglossic situations, where local languages adjust their functional spaces in response to transnational influences.

The sociopolitical implications of diglossia remain highly significant. In many regions, the dominance of an H variety affects literacy acquisition, educational success, and social mobility. Children who grow up speaking only the L variety at home often face difficulties when entering school systems that exclusively use the H variety. This mismatch leads to debates about language planning, bilingual education, and the need for more inclusive policies that acknowledge linguistic realities. In countries such as the Arab world, Haiti, and several post-Soviet states, attempts to reduce diglossic tensions have led to reforms aimed at promoting the L variety in writing, media, and education. However, such reforms often meet resistance due to strong cultural attachment to the prestige of the H variety. Thus, diglossia becomes not only a linguistic issue but also a cultural and political one, reflecting broader discussions about identity, tradition, modernization, and national unity.

From a cultural perspective, diglossia contributes to the preservation of heritage while simultaneously encouraging language evolution. The H variety often carries classical literature, religious texts, and formal cultural identity, whereas the L variety preserves oral traditions, humor, and local expression. This distribution enriches the linguistic landscape and allows communities to maintain connections to their past while engaging with contemporary modes of communication. At the same time, the tension between varieties can lead to language shift or the gradual disappearance of the L variety if it becomes stigmatized. Conversely, increased recognition of the L variety in media and education can revitalize its status and encourage speakers to embrace it as a symbol of cultural authenticity.

Conclusion. In conclusion, the phenomenon of diglossia in modern linguistics extends far beyond the classical definition of two functionally differentiated varieties. It operates within a dynamic interplay of social, political, and cultural forces that shape language use in both traditional and digital environments. Modern research highlights diglossia as a key to understanding linguistic diversity, identity formation, and the negotiation of power within speech communities. As global communication continues to transform linguistic practices, the study of diglossia remains an essential lens through which linguists interpret the evolving realities of language in contemporary society.



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