LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND YOUTH CULTURE: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study examines how Pakistani youth use language on social media platforms to construct and express their identities. With the rapid growth of digital platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter), young people in Pakistan have found new spaces to communicate, interact, and present themselves to the world. This research uses a qualitative approach with discourse analysis to study approximately 50 public social media posts, captions, and comments created by Pakistani youth aged 18 to 30 years. The study is guided by Identity Construction Theory developed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), which views identity as something people actively create through language rather than something fixed. The analysis looks at language features such as code-switching between English and Urdu, Roman Urdu writing, slang expressions, internet abbreviations, emojis, and memes. The findings reveal that Pakistani youth use these linguistic practices to balance global and local identities. They present themselves as modern and educated through English, while using Urdu and regional languages to show cultural belonging and emotional connection. The study also finds that different social media platforms influence language choices in different ways. This research contributes to understanding how digital communication shapes youth identity in multilingual societies like Pakistan and provides useful insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers.

Keywords: *identity construction, social media, Pakistani youth, code-switching, Roman Urdu, digital sociolinguistics, youth culture*

1. Introduction

The social media has been adopted to form a fundamental aspect of the lives of the youths worldwide. Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook, and X (Twitter) are highly popular social networks amongst the young population in Pakistan. The recent statistics show that millions of young Pakistanis spend some hours a day on these sites and post, comment, and communicate with friends and strangers. On these sites, the youths are not only posting information about their lives; they are also using the language expressing who they are.

Identity is related to language closely. In our speech or writing we demonstrate others our background, our values and groups we belong to. This relation is even more interesting and complicated in the multilingual countries such as Pakistan. Pakistan has an extensive number of languages which include; Urdu as the national language, English as the official language and the regional languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, pashto and balochi. In Pakistan, children and youths are exposed to living and speaking two or more languages on a daily basis. Social media provides them an avenue on which they are able to exercise all their language capabilities creatively.

Although social media is very popular among the Pakistani youth, there is a lack of literature regarding the use of language by the youth to express themselves online. The available research

touches upon one of the dimensions such as code-switching or slang, but fails to look at the entire picture. Other scholars have examined code-switching on Instagram and Tik Tok among Pakistani influencers. Others have also examined the way in which students in Punjab universities adjust their language to digital communication. The use of social media to communicate their identities by Pashto-English bilinguals is also researchable. But a thorough research that could combine all these factors through an effective theoretical foundation is still required.

The proposed research will help address this gap by revealing the nature of youth language on social media using the Identity Construction Theory. Two specific questions which will guide the research are as follows: How do Pakistani youths use language in social media to constitute, negotiate, and perform their identities? The second question is: What sociolinguistic attributes describe the youth social media discourse, and the impact of various digital platforms on the choice and style of language among Pakistani youth? Such questions are related to not only the particular features of language that the youth utilize, but also the general question of how these features contribute to them forming identities on the digital spaces.

The research is significant due to a number of reasons. It allows us to first grasp the way the youth in Pakistan are finding a way of expressing themselves in the age of the Internet. Second, it demonstrates the way in which the global influences blend with the local culture in the daily communication. Third, it can be helpful to teachers who desire to know the language habits of their students. Fourth, it also adds to the study of the technology affecting language change. Lastly, it records the current language practice in Pakistan to be used by researchers in the future.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language and Identity

The connection between identity and language is an issue that has been on the focus of sociolinguistics over several decades. Initial researchers such as Labov (1972) demonstrated that the way individuals talk depicts their social identity such as their social classes, ages, and origin. Subsequently researchers came to understand that identity is not a given aspect that individuals possess but a process created by people using language (LePage and Tabouret-Keller, 1985).

When individuals interact, they make decisions regarding words, accent, and language. These decisions transmit messages to other people regarding their identity and their affiliations. As an illustration, a person using formal English may be perceived as educated and professional and someone using local slang may be perceived as having friends and being a member of a certain group of youth. In multilingual societies, such decisions are highly significant since individuals have several languages to choose.

2.2 Identity Construction and Social Media

The social media has transformed the way individuals represent themselves to others. In contrast to face-to-face communication, the digital medium enables users to take control over their appearance to others (boyd, 2010). They are in control of what they share, the language they speak and how they react to others. They also have a chance to edit their postings and therefore, have a greater chance to control their self-representation.

Studies indicate that the youths resort to social media to explore various identities. On the one hand, they may be serious students and, on the other hand, fun-loving friends. This is particularly necessary when it comes to young people, who are yet to form their identity. Androutsopoulos (2014) coined a new term networked multilingualism that refers to the creative use of multiple languages by people in online environments.

2.3 Pakistani language: A Multilingual World

The situation with the language in Pakistan is interesting and complicated. The major language is Urdu, which most of the Pakistani people understand yet the first language of only about 8 percent of people (Rahman, 2010). The spoken English is the official language of the government, business and higher learning. It comes with prestige, learning and international connection.

About 44 percent of Pakistanis speak regional languages such as Punjabi, Pashto, 15, Sindhi, 14, and Balochi 4 (Rahman, 2004). These are languages that are linked to ethnic identity and culture. To a large number of Pakistanis, the language spoken at home is regional and then they learn Urdu at school and English as an extra language. This poly lingual society implies that majority of the educated Pakistanis are able to alternate languages according to the circumstances.

These languages are not related on equal basis. English prevails over areas of privilege and access such as higher education and well-paid employment. The Urdi language is a unifying factor of the nation, and it is very popular in the mass culture. The use of regional languages may not have as much prestige and backing in official areas, even though they are first languages to many of the speakers. These ranks determine the ways individuals speak in various circumstances.

2.4 Code-Switching in the Pakistani Digital Communication

Code switching refers to the use of two or more languages during a conversation or writing. The usage of both Urdu and English among young people and more so the educated ones is so much common in Pakistan. Early Pakistani English works by Baumgardner (1995) have recorded this practice.

The current studies have analyzed code-switching online. Hajra and Akram examined code-switching by Pakistani users of Instagram and Tik Tok. They discovered that mixed language is used by influencers to appeal to their audiences and generate humour. The reactions of the audiences were also mixed, and this meant that they shared common cultural values. The researchers came up with a conclusion that code-switching in Pakistani digital platforms indicates cultural diversity and level of creativity.

Jamali, Rasool, and Batool (2022) also examined the use of code-switching by multilingual Pakistanis who use Twitter. They discovered that users alternate languages to convey various images of themselves and to reach a variety of people. Studies on Pashto bilinguals have demonstrated that they use Pashto to convey cultural and communal identity and English as a medium of humour, focus, and more extensive social affiliation.

2.5 Digital Writing and Roman Urdu

Roman Urdu is the concept of writing the Urdu words in Roman script rather than the old Urdu script. The practice started back in the days of mobile phones and the internet when there was no typing option of Urdu. Although today phones also have Urdu keyboards, Roman Urdu is extremely popular with the young ones.

As Anwar, Jamshaid, and Butt (2025) explain, Roman Urdu has emerged as a youth identity in Pakistan. It demonstrates that a person has no problem with technology but preserves his/her cultural language. Roman Urdu is lenient--the individuals can spell the words the way they sound, not giving spelling rules a second thought. As an example, Urdu khy (what) could be spelt as kya, kia or kaaa at the preference of the user.

Shahwani and associates discovered that Roman Urdu is widely used by the university students in Punjab in their online communications. This will enable them to preserve their linguistic identity that will enable them to accommodate the technological context of digital platforms.

2.6 Young Slang and Internet language

Youths all around invent their vocabulary to identify their generation and their peers. The Pakistani younger generation has come up with a rich slang which is based on Urdu, English and local languages. Such terms as scene (situation), "yar" (friend), and bro are typical online jargon.

Rafi and Saddiqa ethnographically examined Pakistani Gen Z speakers, born during the period between 1997 and 2012. They discovered that the youths regularly employ phrases such as cooked which translates to be tired after a deadline, kia scene hai? to enquire about something, and ragra to see what a difficult situation. They also adopt terms of English language such as red flag to emphasize on problematic individuals, low key to emphasize something subtle and W or L to emphasize on success or failure.

Global digital culture has also brought about internet abbreviations such as LOL (laugh out loud), OMG (oh my God), and BRB (be right back). These abbreviations are quicker to type and reflect the knowledge of the global internet standards. In their article exploring the subject of student digital communication, Shahwani and colleagues refer to a theme known as brevity and efficiency. Influencers and Youth Language Influencers and Youth Language This pertains to the influence of their language and culture on them.<|human|>2.7 Influencers and Youth Language Influencers and Youth Language This refers to what their language and culture have had on them.

Influencers in social media have turned into major users of influencing the language of youths. Popular content creators can use words and phrases, and they can be imitated by their followers. This disseminates novice pattern of language within the youth groups.

Hussain, Sadia and Safdar researched Pakistani Tik Tok stars and discovered that they communicate in a casual manner, using local dialects, and expressing dramatic emotions to attract their viewers. The way young followers talk is affected by the kind of language they use. The researchers discovered that influencers switch between Urdu and English, humour and emotional expression to create the effect of authenticity and relatability. Digital fame, according to them, is strongly associated with the category, taste, and exposure with the help of algorithms.

2.8 Multimodal Communication

Digital communication does not only involve words. Emojis, GIFs, memes, and pictures are all meaning-free and have meaning attached. Emojis assist in demonstrating the tone and emotion that are not evident in plaintext. As an example, an emoji of a person laughing indicates that the comment is a joke, whereas a heart emoji indicates affection.

Memes are images with captions used to provide humour or comment on the situations. Young Pakistani users have the habit of modifying global formats of memes to fit local content by including Urdu captions or cultural allusions. This merging of the global and the local has demonstrated how digital culture has been shaping the language practices.

According to Sarathe (2026), these images have turned out to be some form of a digital language in themselves. They enable the user to communicate intricate concepts in a fast and imaginative way. Pakistan studies of digital communication have revealed that emojis and memes are common to enhance the emotional tone of the textual message.

2.9 Regional Languages and Identity

Although Urdu and English are predominant in the Pakistani social media, regional languages are also represented, particularly in jokes and community-focused communications. Punjabi has a very active and expressive style and it is especially widespread in comic videos on Tik Tok. The online

usage of regional languages enables the youth to demonstrate their ethnic pride and associate themselves with certain communities.

A study of migrant Pashtun youth in Lahore discovered that the youths do code-switching to create hybrid identities in which they can reconcile their native identity with orientation to mainstream society and the rest of the world. Their language usage assists them to bargain on various identities in a new social setting.

2.10 Gender and Language Online

Studies have observed certain variations in language use between the male and female gender in the internet. The paper by Anwaar, Bilal, Asghar, and Ahmad was a corpus-based investigation of gendered code-switching in Pakistani online communication. They discovered that the language strategies used by the male and female users in negotiation and establishment of their identities in the Pakistani sociocultural set-up differ. Females are more expressive and supportive whereas males are more humorous and teasing. Nevertheless, on the internet, one can get rid of conventional genderist expectations as well.

2.11 Language and Social Status

English in Pakistan is associated with education and social status. Individuals that speak English proficiently can be perceived as learned or high-bred. Nonetheless, speaking Urdu or local languages may be indicative of the genuineness and belonging to the local culture. This puts language options in a complicated position where there are trade-offs of languages that relate to various types of social value.

Studies have indicated that fluency in English has been a good indicator of elite education and social economic status. Students in Urdu medium, regardless of their talent, might not have an easy time accessing opportunities in academia, and the professional world. The language a person grows up speaking turns out to be a filter towards success.

2.12 Research Gap

Although the research on digital communication in Pakistan is increasingly growing, most of the studies are conducted on either of the two aspects, code-switching or slang or Roman Urdu. Very little research examines the combination of all these features to form identity. Moreover, most of the studies do not have a solid theoretical framework that can be used to explain identity work that occurs via language. The paper fills such gaps by examining several language features simultaneously and clarifying their roles towards identity construction among the Pakistani youth.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Identity Construction Theory: The Framework of Bucholtz and Hall.

The present study is based on Identity Construction Theory that was proposed by Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2005). Their model gives a holistic approach to examining the emergence of identity in discourse. The theory is also applicable in the examination of social media especially when it is considered that identity is being constituted by real language use under particular circumstances.

Bucholtz and Hall develop five principles defining identity as a sociocultural linguistic phenomenon. All the principles provide a variant of the interpretation of identity work in digital environments.

The Emergence Principle is that identity does not pre-exist people speaking and writing. Rather, identity is created or is made in the course of interaction. Individuals construct identity by talking and the manner in which they talk at particular instances during the communication process (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 587). This implies that identity is not fixed because on social media

it is always created and recreated as one posts, comments and engages with people. One may establish an identity of a serious student in one of the posts and an identity of a fun friend in another. They are both actual personas made in those particular instances.

Positionality Principle understands that identity functions at various levels. Macro identities such as Pakistani, Muslim, woman are more or less constant. Local cultural identities such as university student or Tik Tok creator are more specific. There are also interactional positions which change every moment such as joketeller or advicegiver or even critic which changes every moment (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 591). Each of these levels is important in knowing how people bring themselves out. Within the social media, people always change their statuses according to what they are posting and with whom they are chatting.

The Indexicality Principle characterizes the way the forms of language reference or index to social meanings. Indexicality is a series of processes through which certain words, accents, or language use are linked to certain types of social people or positions (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 594). As an instance, the use of English words in a social media post in Pakistan could index education and modernity. The usage of inshallah (God willing) can be an index of religiousness. LOL usage might be an indicator of knowledge of the international internet culture. These tiny signals become greater identity statements.

The Relationality Principle focuses on the fact that identities are formed based on the relationships. Language is what helps people to display their similarity with certain groups and their differences with other groups (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 598). Identity work is a process that constantly entails identification with a certain group of people as well as differentiation with the other group. When the youth employs youth lingo, he or she demonstrates his or her belonging within the rigid group of youth. In formal English, they may demonstrate the alienation with informal friends or conformity with the professional groups.

The Partialness Principle is one that recognizes that the process of identity construction is never complete. There is no one interaction that demonstrates everything about a person. Identity is always partial. In addition, individuals are not free to develop any identity they choose; social set-ups and resources constrain the types of identities that people can have (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 605). An example is that with no English education, one cannot just identify himself/herself as an English-speaking professional. The principle of partiality helps to make us consider what identities are done and what identities are not done or not possible.

3.2 Framework for This Study

The social media discourse is also suitable to be studied using Identity Construction Theory due to several reasons. To begin with, it conceptualizes identity as a process that individuals engage in and not something that people possess. This is similar to the interactive aspect of social media whereby the users keep on creating and reacting to content. Second, the framework is adaptable to accommodate the complexity of multilingual communication in such a country as Pakistan. Third, it offers explicit analytical concepts that may be transferred to discourse data through systematic application. Fourth, it has already been effectively applied to previous research of Pakistani digital communication.

A number of recent works relied on the framework by Bucholtz and Hall to examine Pakistani digital discourse. It was used to analyze gendered code-switching by Anwaar and colleagues. The framework was applied to research on migrant Pashtun youth in Lahore, which analyzes the way

that they develop bilingual identities by code-switching. The work is extended by this study to more linguistic features and platforms and through the framework.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The research is based on qualitative research. Qualitative methods are more appropriate in explaining meaning and context as opposed to tallying numbers. Discourse analysis is also employed in the study and it looks at the way language functions in society. This method is suitable since the aim is to learn how the identity is created on the basis of the language, and it is necessary to pay much attention to the analysis of linguistic decisions within their social backgrounds.

The study design is based on the trend of contemporary qualitative researchers on Pakistani online communication. It integrates the systematic gathering of the social media content and the discussion led by the theoretical framework.

4.2 Research Questions

As it is mentioned in the introduction, the two primary questions that this research is focused on are:

What is the role of language on the social media sites in the construction, negotiation and performance of identities by the Pakistani youth?

What are the sociolinguistic characteristics of youth social media discourse, and how do the digital platforms shape the language choice and style of the Pakistani youth?

The questions are answered by analysing the content of social media in terms of the Identity Construction Theory.

4.3 Data Sources

Four social media platforms that are popular among young Pakistani people were utilized to gather data:

- ➢ **Instagram:** To have visual content complete with captions and comments. Instagram is a trendy application that is used to share photos and short videos and it is highly visual.
- ➢ **Tik Tok:** To watch brief videos with text overlay and comments. Tik Tok is highly popular with younger users and is characterised by creative entertaining content.
- ➢ **Facebook:** To discuss more and in groups. Facebook is still popular, particularly when it comes to community and posting updates about oneself.
- ➢ **X (Twitter):** To receive brief text updates and discussions. Twitter is well known in discussion of events happening and opinion sharing.

These spaces have been chosen since they are the most participating digital communication platforms with the Pakistani young people and they can support various forms of communication. It was a sample of publicly accessible posts, captions, and comments posted by Pakistani users of about 18-30 years old. This is the age bracket that comprises the young population of social media users. The choice of posts was based on the fact that they are good sources of informal language use and identity performance.

The sample was used to make the content of various contexts such as everyday conversation, humour, entertainment, social commentary, and content of influencers to make the data varied. About 50 social media posts and comments were considered in order to figure out common linguistic patterns.

4.4 Data Collection Procedure

The method of data collection was systematic observation and documenting social media language among the youth in Pakistan. Privacy and ethical considerations were observed by using only publicly available material. The analysis did not reveal any personal identifying information, which would have been the usernames, to ensure the protection of anonymity.

The author of the research gathered several examples of the posts that reveal the significant linguistic characteristics such as:

➢ Code-switching English-Urdu.
➢ Roman Urdu writing
➢ Slang words and abbreviations.
➢ Emojis and multimodalities.
➢ Language expressions of the region.
➢ Patterns of language as influenced by the person.
➢ Interactions and comments with evidence of identity work.

Examples were recorded and categorized in terms of the nature of linguistic feature being noticed and the platform that it appeared in. The material was collected during three months to have a variety of material.

4.5 Analysis Framework of the current study.

The analysis was two-level and involves identification of linguistic features and identity analysis based on the framework of Bucholtz and Hall.

Level 1: Feature Identification.

The initial level was of analysis aimed at determining the linguistic aspects that describe the social media discussion among the Pakistani youths. The features were examined based on:

➢ **Lexical features:** Vocabulary ones such as English loan words, Urdu expressions, slang, and abbreviations.
➢ **Structural features:** Sentence construction and grammar, particularly in utterances in code-switched.
➢ **Orthographic characteristics:** Writing habits such as Roman Urdu spelling and creative spellings.
➢ **Multimodal characteristics:** The use of text in combination with emojis, pictures and other visual materials.

Level 2: Identity Analysis

The second tier used the five principles of Bucholtz and Hall to discuss the role of the linguistic features of identity construction:

➢ Emergence analysis: How identities are made pertinent in particular posts?
➢ Positionality analysis: Which positions and roles do users take up with the help of language?
➢ Analysis of indexicality: Which social meanings are attached to particular language use?
➢ Relationality analysis: How do users demonstrate affiliation with certain groups and difference with other groups?
➢ Integration analysis: What is the interaction between several features to produce identity performances?

4.6 Analytical Procedure

The analysis was done in a number of steps:

Stage 1: Data familiarization. All the material that the researcher collected was reviewed to form a general impression related to language patterns and interactional contexts.

Stage 2: Identification of features. Posts were also analyzed in order to find cases of important linguistic characteristics. The coded features were typed and an example of the features was recorded.

Stage 3: Identification of patterns. Patterns in use of features were recurrent through out the dataset. The focus was put on the features that co-occurred and in what situations.

Stage 4: Identity analysis. The researcher examined the role of linguistic features in identity construction using the theoretical framework. This also included the interpretation of social meaning of language selections and studying the placement of users.

Stage 5: Integration. Results of feature analysis and identity analysis were combined to come up with comprehensive knowledge of functionality of language in identity building among youths.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The research was guided by a number of ethical considerations. The content that was analysed was only publicly available, and the difference between the public and the private communication was taken into consideration. The personal identifiers have been eliminated in order to maintain anonymity. The analysis was done based on language patterns as opposed to per-user analysis. This was aimed at seeing bigger patterns in youth communication, and not to criticize specific users.

4.8 Limitations

The research has a number of drawbacks. The qualitative method is rich in details but not applicable to the entire Pakistani young generation. Although the sample is quite varied, it probably does not embrace every type of youth communication in every platform and community. Under attention of publix can leave behind more intimate communications. The variation of regions and socioeconomic status might not be adequately reflected. Irrespective of these shortcomings, the study offers useful information on the role of language in identity construction by the youth on social media.

5. Analysis and Discussion of the Data

This part shows the discussion of the language practices that are apparent in the discourse of youthful social media in Pakistan. The analysis is structured based on some of the main features that could be found in the data and each subsection will discuss the roles of the features in identity construction based on the framework applied by Bucholtz and Hall.

5.1 Code-Switching, Identity Negotiation

The most prevalent feature in all platforms was code-switching between English and Urdu. Pakistani young people will always switch between languages in the same post, sentences and even in the same phrase. This feature is an indication of the extent to which both languages have been assimilated in their communication and it allows negotiating complex identities.

Example 1 (Instagram caption): I am done with exams! Mushkil tha but Alhamdulillah ho gaya. (Finally done with exams! Very hard yet thank God it is over.)

The user in this case begins with the announcement in English, then changes to Urdu as a sign of how difficult it is, and adds the Arabic-origin religious term Alhamdulillah to show thanks. Implementation of the theoretical framework:

Emergence: The identity of a relieved student is created through this particular mixture of languages. The user might have used one language to convey the same message, but he preferred to blend them.

Positionality: The user tries to place himself/herself in the role of modern, educated by speaking English, a culturally related one by speaking Urdu, and a religious person by using the Arabic phrase. The three positions are united in one utterance.

Indexicality: The English education and world connectivity index. Urdu gives the sense of belonging to the culture and an emotional outburst. Alhamdulillah is an index of religious identity. Every language option has a social connotation.

Relationality: The language mix demonstrates compatibility with other educated, religious Pakistani young people who have the same multilingual repertoire. It also differentiates the user and the monolingual speakers who are unable to get all these meanings.

Example 2 (Tweet): "Job mil gayi! First paycheck aya. Feeling blessed."

(Got a job! First paycheck arrived. Feeling blessed.)

In this case, the Urdu news is the one being announced and the emotional reaction is in English. Urdu reflects the individual success, whereas English reflects the emotion in the language of the world self-help culture. Such a combination enables the user to have a feel of place and connectedness with the world at the same time.

Example 3 (Comment on video): "Same here yar! Exactly what I was thinking."

The mixture of English words with Urdu address word yar (friend) creates integrity with the individual who uploaded the video. It demonstrates that the commentator speaks and understands English, as well as is attached to local peer culture.

These results are consistent with the earlier studies on the code-switching in Pakistani online spaces. Hajra and Akram discovered that cultural diversity and creativity are manifested through code-switching on Instagram and Tik Tok. A study of Pashto-English bilinguals also established that English they use as a medium of humor and emphasis and Pashto as a medium of communication based on cultural identity.

5.2 Digital Identity and Roman Urdu

The data contained very many Roman Urdu. Youths spell out Urdu words with English lettering generating a hybrid writing system that is come to be a digital youth identity marker.

Example 4 (Tweet): "Kal milte hain dost. Bohot yaad aa rahe ho."

(Will meet tomorrow friend. Missing you a lot.)

Example 5 (WhatsApp status): "What the heck is going on? Kal party hai, a rahe ho?"

(What's the situation? Tomorrow you have a party, are you going to it?)

Roman Urdu demonstrates a number of identity functions:

Practical identity: The users demonstrate that they are digital natives and technology-savvy. They value fast and effective communication rather than the principles of formal writing.

Cultural identity: They do not lose the Urdu vocabulary and grammar, and this demonstrates that they have not lost their ties with the Pakistani society despite the global technology.

Peer identity: Roman Urdu is so widespread among the young population that it is possible to identify oneself as a part of the younger generation when they use it.

Roman Urdu is creative and informal in the nature of the flexible spelling. The rules are not of interest to the users: they are concerned about effective communication. This is what Rafi and

Saddiqa refer to as minimal forms of linguistic expressions of which few words are used with more meaning due to a common context.

Applying the framework:

Emergence: The identity of a Roman Urdu using friend occurs through the use of the term casual, connected friend.

Positionality: The users establish a position of being casual and friendly-oriented instead of official and remote.

Indexicality: youth, informality and digital nativeness are indexed in Roman Urdu.

Relationality: It establishes connection with other people who share it and separates people using it and older users or those who are less active in digital space.

5.3 Generational and Slang Belonging

Slang terms were used commonly and identified the users of the terms as youth culture and peer group.

Example 6 (Comment on video): "Bro, this is OP! Scene on hai."

(Bro, this is outstanding! The situation is great.)

The gaming culture of "OP" is interpreted as overpowered or outstanding. Scene refers to Urdu-English slang saba. There is insider knowledge of youth culture in the correct use of these words.

Example 7 (Instagram comment): "Same yar. Literally me."

The fusion of English and Urdu yar yields a hybrid style that is real to the bilingual young people. This is consistent with the results by Shahwani and others on the students of Punjabi university.

Example 8 (Tik Tok caption): "Slay hai ye outfit bohot!

(This dress is so killing/marvellous)

Slay is a global internet culture that has been incorporated to mean doing something very well or looking good. In this case, it is mixed with Urdu grammar (bohot slay hai) to form an amalgamation.

Slang has a number of identity purposes:

Group membership: By speaking the present slang language you depict that you are together with other people. The terms that are not used the most can make those who are not aware of it feel excluded.

Creativity: It refers to the process of forming and adjusting new expressions, linguistic playfulness.

Generational difference: The use of slang isolates the young people and those who are not young enough to comprehend such terms.

According to Rafi and Saddiqa, such terms as cooked, red flag, and low key have compressed meaning that conveys emotional feelings, moral opinions, and social commentaries effectively. It is through such expressions that speakers are able to communicate much with less and it depends on the context that exists amongst peers.

5.4 Language and Discourse Diffusion of Influencers

On Tik Tok and Instagram, influencers employ their language styles that are usually followed by the followers. This disseminates fresh phrases with speed among the youths.

Example 9 (Tik Tok creator): Larki: "Main busy hoon.' Matlab: Interest nahi. Scene samjho."

(Girl: 'I'm busy.' Meaning: No interest. Understand the situation.)

The language used by this creator is simple and straightforward with dramatic pause between the situation and the real meaning. Many users have copied this format making it popular.

Example 10 (Follower comment): "Same power bro! Literally me every day."
The follower takes the dramatic style of the influencer, but adds his/her flavour. This demonstrates the diffusion of language on the digital networks.

According to the review by Hussain and others, Tik Tok influencers employ informal language, local accents, and dramatics to build authenticity and reach their audiences. Their choice of language has an effect on the way young followers speak. The scholars believe that digital fame is closely associated with class and aesthetic choices, as well as algorithmic visibility.

5.5 Multimodal Communication

Emojis and memes are used to provide multiple layers to the text to enable users to convey tone and emotion that would otherwise be ambiguous when using words only.

Example 11. (Post with emojis): "Finally met after 2 years[?]
The crying emoji depicts strong feelings, the heart depicts love and the praying hands depict gratitude. Such emojis convey emotions that would require many words to be described.

Example 12 (Meme with Urdu caption): [Picture of somebody lost in math].
Caption: Me: 10th class mein 80 percent lane ka soch raha tha. Reality:"
(Me: I was planning to score 80% in 10 th grade. Reality:)
The form of the meme enables the user to make a self-deprecating comment on the issue of academic overconfidence. The image contributes humor which can otherwise not be achieved through text. This fusion of the global compilation of memes and the local language depicts cultural blending.

A study carried out by Shahwani et al. noted that one of major themes in online communication is emotional expression, supplemented by the application of emojis to communicate emotions to the recipient.

5.6 Regional Languages and Ethnic Identity

Although not as prevalent as Urdu-English mixing, local languages were used in certain situations, particularly comic materials and communication between locals.

Example 13 (Punjabi on Tik Tok): K Mur aa? Sikh munde ne kamal kar dittaa!
(What's up? Punjabi boy has done amazing!)
The Punjabi here virtually asserts ethnic identity and pride. The vigorous style corresponds with the cultural affiliations of Punjabis.

Example 14 (Pashto remark): "Da video kho de wariyal!
(Really fun/entertaining video)
Connection to Pashto speaking community is evident in the Pashto comment during content interaction. This is based on the research results of Pashto-English bilinguals who have Pashto as a mode of cultural and community identity.

A study of migrant Pashtun young people in Lahore established that migrant youths employ code-switching in the construction of identities that strike a balance between their indigenous identity and being integrated into the mainstream society. This demonstrates that the use of regional language online is beneficial to ethnic identity as well as the wider social integration.

5.7 Gender and Language Patterns

The data implied that there are some gender variations in language use, but the variation between individuals was high.

Example 15 (Comment by a female user):"Omg yesss! You are way too beautiful [?]. Proud of you girl!"

This comment is written with the use of expressive language, underlined letters (yesss), several emojis, and supporting material.

Example 16 (Comment by a male user): "Bhai ne to kaam kar diya Scene on hai!

(Brother has done the work! Scene is on!)

In this remark, the author applies jocular praise accompanied by a crown emoji and the colloquial phrase scene on hai.

Anwaar and colleagues established that male and female users adapt various linguistic strategies to negotiate and execute their identities across the digital spaces. These tendencies can be social as well as personal creativity.

5.8 Platform Differences

The comparison indicated that there are differences in language use between platforms, which indicate the difference in affordances and audience of different platforms.

Instagram content is more refined and graphic. Captions are usually written in English and Urdu with good presentation of aesthetics being a concern.

The language used in Tik Tok is more flirtatious and dramatic. Producers employ hyperbolic phrases, local dialects and jokes to appeal to viewers.

Facebook demonstrates a greater variety of language usage, including formalities in the community groups and informal chatter between friends.

X (Twitter) promotes conciseness and snippiness. Users encourage meaning by filling short posts, abbreviations, hashtags, and brief phrases.

These differences in the platforms demonstrate that identity construction is not only what people can say using language features, but where and how they do it. The linguistic repertoires of users are flexible, as they will adjust to various digital spaces by modifying their language.

6. Discussion

6.1. Responding to Research Question 1

The initial research question was as follows: How do Pakistani youth communicate their identities through language on social media, how, and in what ways do they negotiate and perform their identities through language on social media?

The discussion has revealed that Pakistani youths employ language as a tool kit. They use the languages of various languages (English, Urdu, regional languages), various scripts (Roman, Urdu), and various modes (text, emojis, images) to form identities that can suit various situations. They do not just have the options of being modern and traditional identities. Rather, they merge both of them to come up with hybrid identities that attribute to their complicated lives.

Using the framework of Bucholtz and Hall, it is possible to make some important points:

Identity is constructed: There is no predefined identity when a user joins social media. Rather, identities are created out of certain posts and interactions. One post may make a user seem like a serious student, whereas another makes him a fun friend. These do not contradict, but form part of different identities that are made in varied situations.

Users are positioned in various ways: With language, users place themselves as educated (English), culturally-grounded (Urdu), religious (Arabic phrases), humorous (slang) and connected (digital native forms, such as Roman Urdu). These identities are formed through these positions.

Choices of language index social meanings: Each language choice has social meaning. Education and global awareness with English indexes. Ethnic pride is in Punjabi indexes. The use of "LOL"

indicates the knowledge of internet culture. Such minor signs coincide to bigger identity statements.

Identity is relational: The language makes users belonged to certain groups and be unrelated with others. Slang demonstrates the youth culture. Roman Urdu exhibits the aspect of being digital native. Code switching depicts the membership of bilingual, educated groups.

Identity is fragmented: No post describes the entirety of who a user is. Identities are never complete and are influenced by the resources users of a platform have and what they can do.

These results correspond with the past studies of digital communication among Pakistani. The creative language use among the youth has also been recorded in studies of code-switching, slang use and influencer discourse. It is a continuation of that work by demonstrating how all these features are combined into a logical theory.

6.2 Having replied to Research Question 2

The second research question was as follows: What sociolinguistic characteristics define the speech of youth in social media, and what impact digital platforms have on the choice of language and style?

In the analysis, some of the main features were observed:

The most widespread aspect is code switching between the English and Urdu languages. It is manifested in all platforms and has various identity functions. Users alternate languages to convey various elements of themselves and also to reach various audiences.

Roman Urdu is very widespread and it reflects local language allowing digital technology to influence it. It has turned into a symbol of youngness and digital nativeness.

Generational belonging is characterized by the use of slang and abbreviations. Such words as scene, OP and red flag demonstrate the knowledge of youth culture. Abbreviations such as LOL and OMG indicate correspondence to the internet culture across the world.

Multimodality such as emojis and memes provide a touch of emotions and culture to communication. They assist in tone and meaning which might be missed by text.

One can use regional languages in certain situations notably humorous material, and localistic communication to show ethnic identity.

Digital mediums have a number of effects on language:

The possibilities and suitability of language are influenced by platform affordances. The nature of twitter with its character limit promotes the use of abbreviations. The visual nature of Instagram promotes the multimodal communication. The video format used in TikTok promotes the use of dramatic and performative language.

The expectations of the audience differ according to the platform. The users have their language varied depending on the people they are likely to encounter. Professional networks may use more formal language as opposed to the language used in entertainment sites which may be less formal.

The question of algorithmic visibility determines the increase of a language. Social platforms push content that is interesting to the users and this can give preference to a particular type of language more than others.

These results are parallel to those that have been found regarding digital communication elsewhere. Research has observed the way language is used in relation to platform design and that users adjust their communication to the various digital platforms.

6.3 Youth Identity of Hybrid Character

The major discovery of this research is that Pakistani young people form the hybrid identities with the help of language. They are not making a decision between modern or traditional and between global and local. Rather, they are merging all these aspects in imaginative manners which are part of their actual lives.

This non-pakistanisem is reasonable in the multilingual community of Pakistan. Youths are raised to go through languages, either Punjabi or Pashto at home, Urdu at school, English on the net. Social media provide them with a platform upon which they can unite all these languages. According to one of the researchers, code-switching in Pakistani online platforms is the most appropriate model of cultural diversity and creativity.

Youth form online hybrid identities, which are not restricted to being digital performances. They are indicative of actual social developments in Pakistan-greater globalization, greater education and technology proliferation. The changes that are more widespread can be understood by understanding the youth language.

This observation is in line with what has been established by other researchers. Rafi and Saddiqa explain the language used by Gen Z to be an evolution of language, and not a shortcut or degradation. Shahwani and the co-authors discovered that students amalgamate the traditional norms with digital influences in creative manners. The studies of migrant youth indicate that code-switching assists in building multi-strata bilingual identities.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Findings

The present paper analyzed the use of language by Pakistani youths in social media, as the way to form identity. By examining Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook, and X posts, the study established that youths have a rich combination of language characteristics such as switching between English and Urdu codes, Roman Urdu scripts, slang expressions, internet abbreviations, emojis, and memes.

Implementation of Identity Construction Theory (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005) demonstrated that identity is not pre-determined but it is created in particular circumstances through a particular use of language. Code-switching enables the youth to juggle between modern and traditional identities. Roman Urdu displays the process of adaptation of local language to digital media. Slang is a sign of generational affiliation. Memes and emojis are emotional and cultural. Ethnic identity is manifested by regional languages in cases where appropriate.

The research also established that language use is influenced differently on various platforms. Instagram embraces pictorial and refined material. Tik Tok encourages the use of dramatic performative language. Twitter requires conciseness and snarkiness. Facebook also has different styles of language according to the context. It is observed that users adjust their language to these new settings indicating that their communicative repertoires are flexible.

7.2 Contributions of the Study

The paper offers various contributions to the knowledge:

Theoretical contribution: The article demonstrates the functionality of Identity Construction Theory in the online setting and offers a guideline on how the theory can be applied to the discussion of social media.

Empirical contribution: It records the language practices of youth in Pakistan, which is a contribution to accumulating the body of data on digital communication in South Asia.

Methodological contribution: It offers an accessible analysis system incorporating feature analysis and identity analysis which can be modified by other scholars.

Practical contribution: It provides information to educators regarding the communication behavior of the students and the policy makers regarding the language and technology.

7.3 Implications

To teachers: Knowing digital language among the youth will allow them to bridge the gap between teaching in the classroom and the actual communication habits of the youth. Instead of considering digital language as bad writing, educators could acknowledge it as innovation in the new environment. It would be more in line with real language practice to promote pedagogy, which acknowledges that translanguaging is a cognitive resource (Rafi and Saddiqa). This should not be to substitute one with the other but rather assist students to shift between the digital and academic registers.

To parents and other adults of concern: This paper offers suggestions that youth digital language, emerging as it is in the context of traditional norm violations, is quality identity work. The youths are not destroying language but changing the language and making it fit in their new demands. The awareness of this can lessen the fear of language change.

To researchers: The paper is a model of studying identity in online discussions that may be applied to other multilingual settings. Future studies may include comparison of the Pakistani youth against the youth of other South Asian states or a study of the changing practices.

To policymakers: The linguistic diversities of digital spaces can be used to formulate language and technology policies. Preservation of the linguistic diversity, such as supporting the use of regional languages online, might also aid in preserving linguistic diversity and allowing digital engagement.

7.4 Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations in this study that point to the future research:

Geographic scope: The research concentrated on publicly available material which could be biased towards urban and educated youth. Research in this field should be conducted in the future with a larger variety of representatives of various regions and social strata.

Platform coverage: Although the study covered four large platforms, it was not done with the new platforms or the personal messaging applications such as WhatsApp which are also of significance in youth communication.

Temporal constraints: The study is a snapshot overview of the existing practices. The longitudinal research would be able to follow the change of language and identity practices over time.

Limitations in methodology: The qualitative methodology gives precision but is incapable of determining the prevalence of such practices among the population. This could be solved through mixed-method research which involves qualitative analysis and surveys.

Comparative study: The comparison of Pakistani youth with youth in other multilingual countries might reveal some general tendencies and peculiarities of the situation.

7.5 Final Reflection

The Pakistani young language on social media is innovative, complicated, and significant. Using code-switching, Roman Urdu, slang and memes, the youth construct identity which is localized and at the same time inter-global. They are not merely picking up foreign lifestyles of speaking a language and leaving their own language. Rather they are inventing something new -hybrid forms that show the complexity of living in modern Pakistan.

Knowledge of such practices makes us know not only language, but life of children and youths living in a changing world. With the further development of digital communication, the methods of youth using language to define themselves and the identity they desire will also keep changing. Studies should not cease to record and study these developments so that our knowledge will not run behind the innovativeness of youth themselves.

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