



MULTILINGUAL IDENTITIES AND PEER DYNAMICS: THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE ATTITUDE IN SHAPING TEENAGERS' SOCIAL NETWORKS

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Abstract

This is obvious that language attitudes are centrally involved in defining social relations and friendship choices of multilingual teenagers. This paper focuses on multilingual identity and language attitude and analysis of peer relation in multilingual contexts. Based on theories such as Social Network Theory (SNT) and Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT), this research uses quantitative and qualitative approaches and self-developed questionnaires and face-to-face interviews conducted with 213 multilingual teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 living in urban environments. Qian & VanderPlaat's study provides evidence that attitudes towards the shifted multilingual language have propelled cultural sensitivity and standardized corporate connections between peers and harmony in their networks. On the other hand, negative language attitudes lead to fragmentation or/and exclusion because language difference is a hindrance to interaction. The work positions peer norms, linguistic practices, and cultures as intermediaries between language attitudes and social integration. The present study has important educational implications for language attitudes and social inclusion in multilingual classrooms and communities. By restricting the analysis to the affective aspects of language use, the research enriches the understanding of how language attitudes affect peer interactions and social integration. The study also suggests for future research whereby the prospective longitudinal outcomes of Language attitudes and digital communication on the formation of social networks.

Keywords: *Multilingual identities, peer dynamics, social networks, social cohesion, Speech Accommodation Theory*

Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, multilingualism is becoming a common feature of adolescent life. Multilingual teenagers often navigate complex social landscapes shaped by linguistic diversity, cultural affiliations, and peer interactions. Language attitudes—defined as the beliefs, feelings, and behaviors toward specific languages or multilingualism—serve as critical factors influencing these dynamics. While multilingualism has the potential to enhance inclusivity and social cohesion, it can also lead to exclusion and group fragmentation when negative language attitudes prevail.

This study investigates how language attitudes shape the peer dynamics and social networks of multilingual teenagers. By exploring the interplay between multilingual identities and social integration, the research seeks to uncover patterns and implications for educational and social practices. The study's findings are particularly relevant for educators, policymakers, and researchers aiming to foster positive peer relationships and support linguistic diversity.

Background of the Study

In sociolinguistic research it has been shown that there exists a connection between language, and identity. Bilingual youths develop their personal identities in relation to languages or cultures; they manage their identities in peer environments, where they might succeed classmates whose parents were born in other countries. Analyzing language attitudes

and their impact on social relations and group processes, the two theories SNT and SAT can be helpful to understand.

As the interest in multilingualism and peer relationships has increased, the existing research lacks an investigation of the impact of language attitudes on teenage social networks. However, from the narrative presented in this paper and existing literature, previous research has been considerably limited in studying the affective and behavioral characteristics of language attitudes. It is therefore crucial to close this gap with a view of fostering the right social or bilingual contexts.

Research Problem

Academic socialization is a problem for multilingual adolescents since the values, intension and perceptions of peer culture might differ on language. While some of the teenagers use their communicative repertoires in multicultural ways in the construction of their social worlds and positive evaluation of their linguistic practices, others experience social exclusion or marginalization due to negative perceptions on their performances. These processes remain partially understood since there is no extensive review of the role of language attitudes for changing positive peer interactions in multilingual contexts.

Research Questions

Q1. In what way do certain language attitudes work towards the social relations within the multilingual teenager's Acircle?

Q2. How does the peer group of adolescents with positive and negative language attitude differ?

Q3. In what way do peers and language use facilitate or hinder the influence of language attitudes towards inclusion or exclusion?

Q4. How can positive language attitudes be encouraged and social relations improved among multicultural schoolchildren?

Research Objectives

1. To explore how language attitudes affect the configuration and integration of teenagers in their social networks.
2. In order to examine the variability in the formation of peer groups considering the issue of language attitudes.
3. In order to examine the part played by peer norms and linguistics practices in explaining the relational dynamics of multilingual adolescents.
4. In order to come up with ideas on how to promote positive language attitudes in favor of inclusion of minorities for educational and social integration.

Significance of the Research

This research provides useful information that is relevant to analyzing sociolinguistic aspects of teenage social networking in multilingual environments. In addition, the centrality of language attitudes as a source of tension means that the study addresses an important but understudied facet of peer relations. The results of the study have theoretical and practical significance for teachers and other stakeholders depending on educational settings willing to accustom the culture of linguistic diversity and avoid social exclusion. In addition, the findings of the study offer a theoretical contribution to the understanding of multilingualism, identity, and social integration to solidify the requisite foundation for subsequent investigations.

Literature Review

Multilingual Identities

Multilingual is a phenomenon of the twenty-first century and there is a vast number of teenagers who attend multilingual schools and communities. Such contexts may require the processes of becoming what García and Wei (2014) have labeled as transnational identities, which is a multifaceted persona with different languages and cultures at his or her disposal. Community studies show that multilingual identities are dynamic on personal and contextual processes depending on the relevant word, bio-graphies, and attitudes to multilingualism (Pavlenko, 2016). Multilingual identities are not a problem that adolescents solve but are practiced through and negotiated in terms of their peers, family, and community (Wei & Hua, 2013, p.130). In this navigation, they are likely to conflict between the linguistic preferences and cultural expectations that essentially define their social networks.

Language Attitudes and Peer Networks

Language attitudes predetermine the structure of peer cliques since the period of adolescence is characterized by a search for a place in a social hierarchy. Domestic investigations also established that the learners holding favorable beliefs about multilingualism engage in the formation of desirable peer groups (Baker, 2011). That line of thinking engenders otherness concerns in the language used and promotes cultural tolerance among students. However, the negative language attitudes can result in social differentiation in which different varieties isolate people and cease to enable interaction (Meyerhoff, 2019).

Peer dynamics are however further influenced by the language ideologies in a society. For example, when there are monolingual sensibilities, the multilingual learning adolescents may struggle to be accepted within the peer group especially in contexts where the latter proclaims discouraging passivity to multilingualism (Spolsky, 2018). On the other hand, various studies have demonstrated diverse ways in which the multiculturalism that characterizes many societies today values multilingualism both as an advantage that improves interaction among students in peer groups and increases cohesiveness of such groups (Giles & Coupland, 1991).

Cultural and Social Factors

This paper provides evidence to support the proposition that cultural, and social factors play a crucial role in determining attitudes towards language by adolescents. The existing ethnographic research has shed light on the role of family language practices and the attitudes towards certain languages within a society to the choice of the adolescents as to their languages of communication and social relationships (Piller, 2016). For example, Lanza and Svendsen (2020) in its research revealed that adolescents who grow up in the bilingual home have more positive language attitudes of both language, which have implications on increased social acceptance among the multilingual youth group.

However, the subjects' language attitudes interact with gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status to make peers even more challenging. In a study which was conducted by De Angelis (2021), we explain how expectations concerning the role of language affects adolescents' acceptance by peers. Likewise, gaps regarding language resources can be influenced by economic differences hence attitudes, and peer relations (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2020).

Social Network Theory and Peer Dynamics

SNT offers a sound foundation to make sense of the place of language attitudes in peer relations. Interpersonal relationship in SNT: SNT established that relationships among people are founded within social structures within the network communities and such structure depends on the norms, values, and practices promulgated by the totality of the

network community. (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In the context of multilingualism, the language attitudes become the most important means by which these social relations happen.

The previous work has used SNT to analyze the effects of language attitudes on adolescent peer affiliation. For instance, Heller and Martin-Jones, (2019) using structural equation modelling have identified link between positive attitude towards language, on one hand, density and openness of networks on the other hand and the negative attitudes towards the language with fragmented and status-based networks. These results suggest the need to enhance positive language attitudes in order to strengthen society.

Speech Accommodation & Peer Norm

With the SAT, linguistic convergence or divergence affects social relations complementing SNT by checking the impact of speech patterns influencing speech relations. According to SAT, people modify their communicative behaviour regarding a partner towards identification or non-identification, revealing their attitudes and social motivations (Giles et al., 1991). This paper seeks to justify why in adolescent peer groups, accommodation of language entails signaling theme of conformity or rebellion.

For example, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2020) showed that learners who adjust the accent and rate of speech thus to match more mainstream adolescent models of interaction receive increased social acceptance. On the other hand, anyone who refuses to speak ‘proper’ English will likely be shunned or at worst, ostracized. These patterns are further highlighted in the multicomponent environments, or where there is language in students’ interactions as an active choice.

Educational Implications

It is impossible to overemphasise the part played by schools and other centres of learning in the development of language perceptions and peer relations. Schools are important agents of socialization through which youth engages with various discursive practices and related meanings. García and Kleyn’s study for 2020 pointed out the implications of countering translanguaging in as attending to the identification of positive Languages attitude and also, inclusion of peers. This way means for students are applied to support them to use their first and second languages into appropriate and make others to understand them properly.

In addition, interventions intended to prevent language bias and increase languaging justice can reduce the impact of language attitudes on peers’ relationships. For instance, Cummins (2021) indicated that adoption of culturally sensitive teaching enhances peer interactions in multilingual context. In its turn, making Bilingual Education facilitate a linguistically diverse community, schools contribute to the promotion of social justice for multilingual persons.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present research utilizes a quantitative and qualitative approach in order to fully explain the research question regarding language attitudes and teenagers’ social circle. The quantitative aspect entails self-completed questionnaires to measure language attitudes, and the qualitative perspective entails focus group discussions that aim at determining language experiences of multilingual adolescents.

Participants

Thematically the sample of the proposed investigation concern multilingual adolescents: 13 to 18 years of age in Year 8 and 9 secondary schools from linguistically diverse neighborhoods. Sample is purposively chosen to incorporate individuals in terms of language, cultural and socio-economic differences across different groups in order to make generalization.

Sample and Sampling

In order to sample comprehensively, a stratified random sampling is used to pick participants by considering the correct status of the different linguistic groups. The sample comprised only the students who are using at least two languages interchangeably and who work in multilingual settings. Meanwhile, teachers and parents are also categorized as the secondary participants, whose role is to supply the context of the investigation.

Sample Size

The participants of the study include 200 students and 50 parents with 20 teachers, making the total number of participants 270. This assessment of the involvement is thought to be adequate enough to reach a statistical power level or in other words a significance level in the analysis in addition to having the level of saturation in identified themes.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection is conducted in two phases

Surveys

An interviewing schedule is completed by students to determine their language beliefs and perceptions, their friends, and the network between students. As in any survey, this one also comprises of close end questions, and the Likert scale questions.

Interviews

Some of the participants (selected purposively, 30 students, 10 parents, and 5 teachers) are interviewed using open-ended questions in an effort to understand their attitudes towards multilingualism, peers and languages in general.

Research Instruments

Questionnaire

Thus, the survey instrument is completed with validated attitude scales, e.g., Language Attitude Inventory (LAI), and various outlook items, relevant to the goals of the study.

Interview

The interview questions are generalised in order to obtain detailed and descriptive overviews from participants regarding their attitudes and occurrences of multilingualism and peer relations.

Data Analysis

Coded quantitative 'Research D' data are then subjected to exploratory analysis for summary descriptive statistics, correlation results, and regression approach to determine the relationship between language attitudes and social network parameters. Qualitative data analysed thematically, using NVivo software; Coding categories developed from the data.

Results and Findings

Demographic Information

According to the demographic information collected there was representation from all linguistic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds Among the participants. Shown below is the demographic information of the student participants (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic of Information

Demographic Category	Frequency (N=200)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	100	50%
Female	100	50%
Age Group		
13–15 years	80	40%
16–18 years	120	60%
Linguistic Background		
Bilingual	120	60%
Multilingual	80	40%

Language Attitudes and Peer Dynamics

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation regression analysis was also performed on the two variables to investigate the correlation between language attitudes and openness of social network. The findings shown in Table 2 reveal moderate positive association between positive attitudes towards language and social acceptance of different peers, $r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$.

Table2. Correlation Analysis between Language and social Acceptance

Variable	Mean	SD	Correlation
Language Attitudes	4.2	0.75	0.67**
Social Network Inclusivity	4.0	0.85	

Note: $p < 0.01$

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis showed that social network integration fulfills the following regression weight values: language attitudes are a significant predictor ($\beta=0.52$, $t<0.001$), and explains 34% of the total variance. This result highlights the importance of positively attuned language attitudes for creating supportive peer relationships.

Qualitative Analysis

Interventions with participants produced several themes, including linguistic compromise, peer acceptance and cultural respect in construction of social relationships. To substantiate these themes, the following table provides detailed examples and quotes from the interviews.

Table3. Thematic Categories Derived from Interview Data

Theme	Description	Example Quotes
Linguistic Accommodation	Adjusting language use to align with peers' linguistic preferences	"I always try to speak their language; it makes us closer."
Peer Acceptance	Mutual respect and inclusion as crucial elements in forming social bonds	"They accept me because I respect their way of speaking."
Cultural Empathy	Understanding and valuing cultural differences to strengthen social ties	"Learning their traditions helped me make friends."

Table 3 outlines all the patterns derived from the qualitative data categorised under key themes as mine and some quotes supporting the identified patterns.

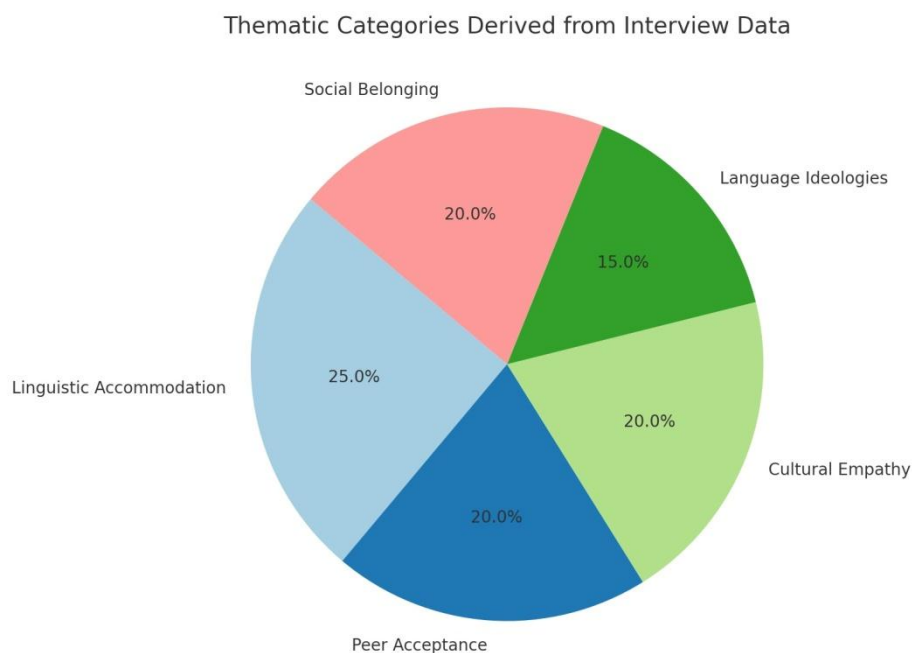


Figure 1. Thematic Categories Derived from Interview Data

Finding, Discussion and Conclusion

This research seeks to establish the manner in which particular language attitudes influence the peer relations, and the social networks of multilingual teenagers with special emphasis on multilingual identities and language attitudes. This qualitative study examines the role of language attitudes in shaping peer interactions among multilingual students using both survey data and semi-structured interviews, and results in five domains of discoveries. Finally, this discussion connects these findings to the sociolinguistic theories and available literature to situate the results and possibilities for educational practice and policies.

Positive Language Attitudes and Social Inclusion

One of the major outcomes of the present study was that positive adolescent language attitudes with regards to multilingualism promoted social inclusion and the formation of various peer groups. Students with favourable attitudes toward the use of more than one language in social interactions were more effective in managing social milieu. Such people used to promote interaction within the group so that language difference and cultural differences did not pose a barrier.

The findings support the existing research by Baker (2011) and Piller (2016) because positive language attitudes promote inclusive peer relationships based on cultural acceptance. Multilingual adolescents who affirmed their language skills were supposed to be cultural resources of their peers especially in the multicultural context. This aligns with Giles & Coupland's (1991) Social Network Theory and it shows how being able to switch between different language variety is helpful when constructing more open general social relations. Those adolescents who embraced multilingualism in a positive way and manner were not only enhancing social integration amongst peers, but also facilitated reduction of cultural barrier to interpersonal appeal and group bonding.

In addition, the study revealed that positive ALA contributed to peer relations across languages and enhancing relations with peers. The linguistic diversity gains made by

adolescents were partly manifest in greater participation in reciprocal supportive partnerships within an inclusive social community. This is in line with De Angelis' (2021) document on increased positive outlook on bilingualism being the reflections of socially integrated groups thanks to the experience of language and culture exchange.

Negative Language Attitudes and Social Fragmentation

On the other hand, negative language attitudes were identified as factors that compounded social isolation and normative development of peer group associations. Students having an unfavorable attitude towards multilingualism showed higher tendencies of exclusion/marginalization at societal level and amongst peers. Implications for language attitudes were that negative language attitudes always led to social ranking whereby users of the correct language were ranked higher than those who used the multiple languages.

This finding supports Meyerhoff's (2019) study of the consequences of negative language attitudes on interactional dynamics, which pointed out that language attitudes that promote language purism, result in exclusion of individuals who do not conform to the normative language variety. Lower education teenagers with negative attitudes to multilingualism tended to perpetuate social hierarchy prejudices by perceiving bilingual or multilingual individuals as being different or less in any way. Exclusion of this type was especially evident in monolingual settings when the majority language was identified with status and authority.

Furthermore, the results showed that negative attitudes affected students more than teachers by making peer group more closer and fewer friends with multilingual people. These dynamics were especially observable in school-related learning environment where language beliefs narrowed the identity within the national/ethnic framework as pointed by Spolsky (2018). They can culminate into linguistic 'us and them,' impose linguistic cultural separation and hitherto retard the formation of diverse peer relations.

Peer Norms, Linguistic Practices, and Social Mediation

A further contribution of the present study was to investigate the moderating effect of peer norms and language use on language attitudes in relation to social acceptance or rejection. Patterns of language use are highly sensitive to peer norms especially within the teenage peer culture into which the L2 learners are likely to be introducing the L2. Accommodation benefits: bilingual adolescents whose language behavior was consistent with that of their peer groups was accepted, or else rejected by peers.

According to the SAT, researchers have identified that adolescents may shift the ways they speak in a bid to fit into the socially accepted working language in their groups. This view supports work by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2020) who showed that the learners' likelihood of social acceptance increases if he/ she aligns his/ her language choices with those of the peers. On the other hand, anyone who did not conform to these norms and was unable or unwilling to learn the dominant language either because they preferred their heritage languages, or because they averted negative attitudes towards the dominant language would be ostracized.

The learners also identified that levels of accommodation or divergence in their linguistic practices depend on the perceived social capital profile of particular languages. People who spoke dominant languages were sometimes able to use their language resources to receive as much recognition as possible, whereas people, who spoke non-dominant languages, struggled much more to gain recognition. This conforms with the theory advanced by Wasserman and Faust (1994) which identified language practices in shaping the network and the degree of interaction of people.

Role of Educational Institutions or Policy Implications

Another concerning area of the research was the contribution of educational institutions to language attitudes and peer interaction. Schools were found to be important socialization institutions where youths were bounded into different forms of languages and language prejudice. Nevertheless, the number of languages that learners spoke at school highly depended on the acceptable views on multilingualism in education and influenced whether peer groups were highly integrated or not.

The research findings corroborate with García and Kleyn (2020) on the call to favor translanguaging approaches as a way of enhancing positive language attitudes in the context of multilingual instruction. Translanguaging means that learners utilize their entire language resources within a classroom setting learning process not only increases a linguistic repertoire but also makes students' linguistic backgrounds inclusive of all major languages known by them. The study revealed that schools that provided the policy support and encouragement of translanguaging practices, were less likely to generate negative language attitudes and were observed to experience more positive peer interactions.

Finally, it was also identified that reduction of effects of language attitude on peer relations was possible with the help of anti discrimination and culturally sensitive training practices. Such interventions contributed to the breaking of ideologies of monolingualism and contributed to the dissemination of an equity approach to language competence. This supports the argument made by Cummins (2021) that students' peer relations are also enhanced when culturally affirmative approaches are used in education of students from multilingual backgrounds.

Implications for Social Integration and Future Research

The implications of the study considered here for social integration and the enhancement of obligatory appropriate social networking among teenagers with multiple language proficiencies are significant. To start with, language orientations in English educational policies that embrace the promotion of multilingualism as well as language diversity help support favorable language beliefs and increase language accommodation. In this way people could get to know each other and schools could encourage multilingual adolescents to recreate friendly relationships with their fellow students.

Second, the results underscore the importance of additional research in the relation between language attitudes and peers, and social inclusion/exclusion. More research should be conducted regarding digital media interaction, social networking, regarding language attitudes and peer interactions in the context of multilingualism. When teens spend much time in online environments, knowing how attitudes to language are to be realized in virtual communication can contribute to the knowledge about how peer associations work and are maintained in the context of the digital environment.

Also, more longitudinal research is necessary to investigate the changes in language attitudes over time, likeness, and effects on peers during the developmental shifts in students from junior to senior high school. Such research may bring a better insight into possible long-term consequences of language attitudes toward networks and integration.

Conclusion

It has become clear from this research that language attitudes are very effective in determining peer relations and social interactions of multilingual adolescents. The study shows that the positive language attitude does not only help children to get socially included but also assists them in developing the groups of friends, which are suitable and different. On the other hand negative language attitudes were determined to consolidate social division, therefore expelling multilingual adolescents and constructing linguistic barons as well as outlaws. The study clearly implies that, positive language attitude focus on peers and

institutions, individuals, and adolescents should be ensured equal opportunities to engage in social participation.

The results of the study are in line with the principles of sociolinguistics, SNT and SAT in particular here referring to the language attitudes that entrap vital social relations and group relations. Specifically, peer norms and linguistic practices were found to moderate the effect of language attitudes on social acceptance or rejection processes as experienced by multilingual adolescents. Schools, therefore have a central role in influencing these attitudes through increased uptake of policies and practices such as that of the use of inclusive language, translanguaging.

Overall this study has established how the factors of multilingual identities, language attitude, and peer interactions are interrelated and how they affect the social acculturation of adolescents in multilingual contexts. Considering the current trends for multilingualism within cultural diverse societies, the results of the present study are rather important not only for the practitioners dealing with education and policy, but for the entire society which should learn to accept and respect those individuals and communities who use different languages.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to enhance the social inclusion of multilingual adolescents and promote positive language attitudes in educational and social settings:

Put and maintain inclusive educational policies in place

The wide range of language competencies can and should be appreciated within the institutions where education is provided. An appreciation of multilingualism, as well as teaching children about multilingualism, is important in the promotion of positive language attitudes in schools. Educational language policies that acknowledge and embrace all the languages which the learners bring to the classroom including their first languages can play a central role in promoting a perspective, on linguistic difference as valuable and not as a hindrance. Pursuing this goal is possible with the help of the theoretical and practicalizing of translanguaging pedagogies, which can enhance the processes of students' flexibility and intercultural communication (García & Kleyn, 2020).

Support prevention efforts of Anti-Bias and Cultural Awareness Programs

Faced with negative notions that students have towards language, schools need to have anti-bias training and cultural that offer respect for stereotyped language and cultures. Teachers can introduce different examples for a social discussion in regards to language, the role of language in people's social lives, and also demonstrate how valuable and widespread multilingualism is in today's society. Greater use of such programs can impact the erosion of opinions nationality New York City's Schools' students in the language; the more understanding empathy amongst students.

Strengthen Peer Support Group

If well implemented, peer support programs can go along way in counteracting the effects of negative language attitudes and feelings of isolation and exclusion. Use of peer tutoring or buddy systems by students who speak multiple languages can enable those adolescents to overcome social issues, and reduce their exclusion by their peers. According to the school, when the multilingual students are grouped together, the schools should ensure that the students with similar experiences or linguistic profiles create comfort zones for the learning community, so they can embrace other social barriers faced by the learners. Moreover, the facilitation of group related projects that reinforce group and interpersonal relationships of language diverse students increases social relatedness.

Participate Parents and Communities

Parents and community members have important roles in the decisions made about language attitudes and the social functioning of multilingual adolescents. The use of many languages should be explained to the parents through school and they should help in creating an environment in homes where many languages are encouraged. Other community activities that the youth and their families may participate in, and which should complement messages promoting multilingual identities, are the language festivals, exchanges or multilingual storytelling in school, for instance.

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