

THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH ON CULTURAL IDENTITY OF ESL LEARNERS IN PAKISTAN: A STUDY OF A PRIVATE SECTOR UNIVERSITY IN LAHORE

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Abstract

The primary aim of this research is to investigate how second language learners develop their identities in classroom settings. It looks into how English as a second language affects Pakistani students' identity. A person's physical, mental, and emotional health are all impacted by the extensive process of learning a new language. In terms of how they "identify," language learners range from acknowledging that they are first-language speakers (L1) to realizing that they are second-language learners (L2). This study is designed to investigate the perceptions of ESL learners regarding the relationship between learning English and identity reconstruction. A qualitative research design is used to analyze the data for this study. The population of this study was the undergraduate students of the English department of The University of Lahore. Focus group interviews are conducted with ten undergraduate English as second language (ESL) students in order to collect information. This qualitative study employed Norton's Social Identity theory as a theoretical framework to describe how learning a second language affects students' identities based on social elements that influence a person's identity after learning a language. The findings show that, identity is flexible and open to change. Teachers and policymakers are advised to create policies that can help learners better define themselves as Muslims, Pakistanis, and peaceful members of the international community.

Keywords: identities, first-language speakers, identity reconstruction, social elements, policymakers.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The study on development of identities and second language acquisition has significance (Canagarajah, 1999). A person's physical, mental, and emotional health are all impacted by the extensive process of learning a new language. Regarding how people "identify," language learners vary from acknowledging that they are first-language speakers to (L1) and recognizing that they are learning a second language (L2). Therefore, it is believed that the process of using language to build one's identity is dynamic, continuous, and ongoing (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2007). Building relationships between individuals, objects, and the greater context is necessary for identity development, which is achieved through active involvement and participation in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Identity is viewed as flexible, varied, encompassing various viewpoints, fragmented, and often holding inherent contradictions because of how adaptive communities are. The concept of community is

closely related to identity (Teng, 2018). According to Edwards (2009), language is also thought to be essential for human identity creation, self-development, and cognitive function. Norton (1997) asserts that a person's language both shapes and is shaped by their identity. It is essential to conduct research on the connection between identity formation and learning a second language. Students negotiate their sense of self and how they perceive their relationships with others, as well as employing language to shape their discussions (Norton, 2000).

English has been spoken on the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent since before Pakistan was created. In the 16th century, British colonisers introduced the English language to the Indo-Pak peninsula (Mahboob, 2009). During British rule, the English language grew in importance in government, politics, and society. This language's economic and social mobility contributed to its first emergence during British control (Mahboob 2009; Rahman, 2001). English was largely learnt in official educational institutions. Although Urdu is the national language, English has played an important role in Pakistan's official, commercial, and educational realms since its foundation in 1947 (Mahboob, 2009). On the occasion of Pakistan's independence, Muhammed Ali Jinnah, the country's founder and first governor general, delivered an English-language inaugural address to the first constituent assembly, demonstrating the country's high appreciation for the English language since its establishment (Mahboob, 2009). To put it briefly, English was so ingrained in Pakistani society and politics by the time of its independence that it was maintained as an official language under the constitution (Mahboob 2009; Rahman, 2001).

1.2 Research objectives

The objective of this research is,

1. To explore how Pakistani university students' cultural and personal identities are affected by learning English as a second language.

1.3 Research questions

1. How does English have an impact on the development of Pakistani university students' social and personal identities?

1.4 Significance of the study

The study on development of identities and second language acquisition has great significance (Canagarajah, 1999). Although learners utilize language as a tool to create their discourses, they also negotiate their sense of self and how they perceive relationships with the outside world (Norton, 2000). This study has been done to demonstrate how ESL (English as a second language) affects learners' identities in native language environments. Furthermore, English is taught as a second language (ESL) in formal educational settings. The lengthy process of learning a new language affects a person's mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Language learners "identify," ranging from recognizing that they are first-language speakers (L1) to recognizing that they are second-language learners (L2). This study aims to find out how ESL students see the connection between identity reconstruction and learning English. The main goal of this study is to investigate how English affects Pakistani ESL learners' identity.

2. Literature Review

According to Virkkula and Nikula (2010), there are two methods to conceptualize identity: essentially and non-essentially. The essentialist perspective sees identity as something that is linked to a person's self; it is unique and stable, in contrast to the non-essentialist perspective, which sees identity as a dynamic term. Across discourses, places, and times, it suggests that identity is dynamic, complex, and ever-changing (Hall 1996; Woodward 1997). When it comes to identity, most current research adopts a non-essentialist

perspective (Virkkula & Nikula, 2010). Identity, according to Norton (2000), is the way an individual perceives their relationship to the world, how that relationship is formed throughout time and space, and how they perceive the possibilities for the future. These definitions, which define identity creation as the result of one's interactions with the social world, are important since ties with family, friends, and coworkers are valued in Pakistani culture and have an impact on one's identity. According to Blood (1994), relationships and families serve as the cornerstone of social organization in Pakistan, giving its members protection and identity.

Identity creation never ends and is constantly evolving as a result of interactions with other individuals, according to Andersen et al. (2009). As a result, students' native tongue was replaced with English when they arrived at university. During university, they began studying and using English extensively, which affected who they were, and as a result, they began to progressively change who they were in school. Norton (2000) examined the identity building and ESL learning of five immigrant women in Canada, a country where English is the primary language. Nevertheless, not enough study has been done to examine how ESL affects students in non-native settings, particularly in postcolonial societies where native speakers do not teach English.

2.1 The multiple traits of Identity

Both identity continuity and identity transformation undergo "stability within changes or changes that take place along the lines of continuity," as Phan (2008) puts it. Therefore, focusing on either identity continuity or identity change will not help with a comprehensive examination of identity. Therefore, in order to understand the process of identification as a whole, it is necessary to look into the interaction between the two natures of identity—identity continuity and identity change. Less focus has been placed on the relationship between continuity and identity transformation (Huizhu, 2012). Thus, in line with (Huizhu, 2012), the two natures of identity were investigated in a Pakistani university.

2.1.1 Continuity of Identity

In addition to drawing from the work of contemporary theorists like Wertsch (1998) and Rogoff (2003), who have built upon Vygotsky's (1978) insights into the social aspect of learning, sociocultural theories also draw on Vygotsky's ideas. Vygotsky (1978) maintained that people use both symbolic and physical tools to influence the world. He emphasised the symbolic tool of language and proposed that learners acquire more control over the mediational tools provided by their culture, such as language for intrapersonal (thinking) and interpersonal (social interaction) purposes (Lantolf, 2000). This point of view holds that learning is a social process in which students engage in activities that are pertinent to their culture and history and employ cultural instruments. They consequently learn the behaviours required for participation in social groups (Norton & Toohey, 2011). As long as students have similar social, cultural, and historical experiences, they will continue to feel like themselves because of these social, cultural, and historical components (Huizhu, 2012).

According to Norton (2010) and Pierce (1995), language learners are distinct individuals with complex social backgrounds. Students use their social history—particularly their learning histories—to aid in their language acquisition (ibid). The students regularly assist their current learning in unfamiliar situations by drawing on their past knowledge. Social experiences help learners feel more like themselves. The formation of an identity is also heavily impacted by the learners' past experiences, and this sense of identity is usually sustained due to the same recurrent occurrences (Huizhu, 2012; Phan, 2008). In the following section, identity change is discussed

Poststructuralist concepts define identity as multiple, fragmented, fluid, and dynamic (Norton, 2000). Huizhu (2012) asserts that characteristics such as fluidity or multiplicity cause identity shift, and he also discusses two significant aspects of identity change: a) relational and b) built and formed. Although constructed and shaped identity comes from Norton's (2010) argument that identity categories are the sets of relationships that are socially and historically constructed within the specific relations of power, relational refers to the idea that people define themselves in relation to other people. Whether it is genuine or imagined, research shows that the concept of identity change is embedded in many characteristics, most prominently the change in setting.

The current study is an attempt to partially address the dearth of local research on English language instruction and learning and its effects on students, according to Mahboob (2009). Although it has been covered as a related topic in certain studies, the nation has only up to now carried out study that is entirely focused on the English language and identity (Ashraf, 2007; Mansoor, 2002).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research design

A research methodology may be described as the constructive parts of a research by means of that information is collected and clarified (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). According to Morita (2004), identity studies typically employ a qualitative methodology that includes narratives, case studies, diary entries, interviews, and observations; nevertheless, this approach is sometimes criticized for subjectivities. According to Norton (2010), a large portion of identity research disagrees with the idea that any study can be said to be neutral or objective. A qualitative approach has been used to make this research as objective as feasible. It used qualitative research techniques. According to some recent research investigations, the qualitative approach also included semi-structured interviews (Khodadady & Navari, 2015). This qualitative method consists of in-depth interviews with the participants of the department of English language and literature to explore their experiences and perceptions related to language learning and identity reconstruction.

3.2 Participants

The participants for this research were included the English as second language (ESL) learners of The University of Lahore. The participants were selected by a basic random sampling technique based on language proficiency levels. The EFL learners of The University of Lahore, in this research also represent the ESL learners of other universities in Pakistan. The sample size for this study was of 10 participants within The University of Lahore. Out of these 10 participants, 05 students were male and other was female ESL learners of English department.

The selected participants participated in qualitative approach of the study and interviews were conducted from them and their age group was between 20 to 22 years. For this research, a certain criteria are specified, for example, (1) ESL learners, (2) undergraduate students, (3) The University of Lahore, (4) aged 18-20, 21-22.

3.3 Data collection

The data for this study was gathered by conducting in-depth interviews with the participants. The researcher conducted semi structured interviews from 10 ESL learners of UOL with age group of 21-22 years in order to collect the data for this research.

3.4 Data analysis

After collecting the data through different procedures, it was studied for the investigation of the research topic. At this stage, after the transcription of the interviews, a thematic analysis of the interviews was executed focusing on the understanding of the respondents. In thematic analysis the researcher can present the data in depth.

3.5 The limitations of the study

This research aimed at investigating the impact of English on ESL learner's identity in Pakistan. Due to the limited size of the population in this study, the results of the study cannot be applied broadly. The study is limited to the English second language (ESL) learners from the University of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. The decision of the researcher to select limiting participants for this study is only to limit the relevance regarding the findings of the current study. Moreover, in this research, the data was collected from the ESL learners of The University of Lahore, as all the learners have different social and economic background and for all of them, English is a second language while they all are with different first languages.

4. Results and Discussion

In order to address the study objectives, the researcher has included the participants' perceptions of interpersonal interactions, opinions of regional social customs, and their resulting identity formation in the qualitative data analysis, much like Norton (2000) did. The term "former identity" describes one's identity in high school. Regarding the amount of time allotted and the scope of subjects taught, English language instruction in Urdu-medium schools is severely constrained. Only the subjects suggested by the Punjab text-book board are covered in English classes, and they center on regional identity and culture. Therefore, in accordance with the framework of Huizhu (2012), it is assumed that the interviewees' attitudes (liking) toward school represent the school identity that is still upheld, while their interests and attitudes toward university contexts reflect a shift from their previous identity. Every statement was analyzed as a distinct category. These categories, which indicate identity continuity and change, clearly demonstrated the participants' inclinations. Interview data was also used to analyze participants' answers regarding potential future developments. It is believed that identity shift is "related" to the participants' previous school identities. According to Huizhu (2012), in ESL contexts, the first year of university represents a transition from secondary to tertiary education, where students undergo identity building as a result of English language instruction. Therefore, it was believed in the current study that learning English caused learners' school identities to shift during their first year of university. Their past experiences serve as the foundation for their present identities. The identity change or continuance was analyzed using the following six categories:

4.1 The responses of learners to their increased self-confidence as a result of ESL

The first interview statement, "Learning English at school did not increase my self-confidence as much as it now increases in university," was "agreed" with by six out of ten participants. Ninety percent of those surveyed believe that learning English as a second language (ESL) boosts their self-confidence. Rahman (2020), asserts that because English is seen as the language of power in the local society, learning the language could boost learners' self-esteem. Because they identify with the sophisticated English-speaking group, the speakers become more confident. The studied literature on the topic indicates that learners' attempts to form an identity are greatly influenced by their daily experiences. In Pakistani government schools, Urdu serves as both the medium of instruction and the main language of teaching and learning. The English language is not given much attention outside of test preparation, which usually involves cramming (Rahman, 1996; Ashraf, 2016). This could be explained by the fact that students formed identities tied to their local language and culture while they were in school. However, after they enrolled in college, the language context shifted to English, which became the primary language in the classroom and the medium of instruction. As a result, 90% of them reported feeling more confident after increasing their English practice; this is viewed as a step towards changing their identity and is a positive

shift. The participant SA's interview, which is included in Excerpt 1 below, clearly demonstrates how studying English has improved her confidence.

Expert 1: As I sit here at university, my thoughts have completely shifted. Studying English language and literature has made me more practical, realistic, and confident. At the moment, I run my business in English-speaking countries. (SA)

Although the data indicates that four out of ten (40%) students felt more secure at school; individuals occasionally stick to their previous school identities, as shown in the interview excerpt 2 below. Therefore, it's possible that It is possible for identity continuity and change to occur simultaneously.

Expert 2: I was more self-assured in school since I spoke Urdu, but now that I'm learning English more at college, my confidence has been destroyed. Even yet, I have no trouble understanding Urdu or Punjabi. I lost confidence as an Urdu-medium girl when I started university because I observed some classmates from English-medium schools who spoke English fluently, and I still feel a little less confident than a schoolgirl sometimes. (IQ)

4.2 Effects on students' identities of ESL (subjects taught in classrooms)at schools and universities

Regarding the interview statement I am more interested in following the themes and topics covered in university textbooks than I was in following the themes and topics covered in English class at school (high school textbook topics). The outcome displays the respondents' varying answers. Six out of forty people (57.5%) said they did not focus as much on the subjects covered and addressed in required English studies in school as they do today. However, 3 out of 10 individuals (37.5%) did not agree with the statement. The subjects included in university textbooks attracted more attention.

In her interview, RA claimed that her social identity, which she had formed at school, had completely changed at university as a result of "eye-opening ESL lessons," in which the topics of conversation range greatly from those presented in the classroom. She made special mention of the problems with English literature, especially the novels that were studied for two semesters and dealt with women's roles and social relationships, such *Pride and Prejudice*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Jane Eyre*. According to (Day and Manyak, 2007), students' identities are shaped by their engagement in social practices rather than being freely chosen, and classrooms serve as active spaces for students to create and reassemble their identities. As a result, the respondents who indicated that they agreed with this statement appear to have been shaped by the subjects covered in school and based their identities on them.

However, 37.5% of participants disagreed with the assertion, which might be due to their adherence to school-related identities that they preferred or because they did not follow the themes covered in the university classes. According to one interviewee named IQ, taking ESL classes also slightly changed her perspective on how people and the environment interact. Thus, continuity and change are generally seen to go hand in hand.

4.3 The students' perspectives on preserving relationships (politics, and profession shift) in response to family opinions

The third excerpt, which is included below, demonstrates how IQ came to understand that the English language imparts attitudes and viewpoints that differ from those in her family. She presents herself as a progressive and open-minded girl when she participates in English language classes, as the passage below demonstrates. One can communicate to others who someone is and what they stand for through interaction (speaking) (Andersen et al., 2009).

Expert 3: I enjoy the liberal viewpoints that are presented in English-language publications and addressed by university instructors. I utilize them when I talk to my family and friends,

but because I abide by them; my opinions on other people and things are a little different from my parents'. (IQ)

The research indicates that students' varying positions are reflected in their differing viewpoints. People's decisions, about who they want to be in their private lives and about themselves, according to the examined literature, reflect their acceptance of belonging to a certain group. This collected data shows that students are okay with changing their identity and renouncing their previous status (family membership) in favor of joining a newly recognized English-speaking group.

4.4 Feeling disconnected from family members when speaking to them in English

Lave and Wanger (2003, 1991), who refer to students as "practitioners" and who instantly change their identities after acquiring language knowledge, abilities, and discourse, were the basis for the interview remark,

Speaking to my family in English makes me feel apart from them. Despite the fact that family members urge students to study English in academic contexts, it is often uncommon in the local culture for them to use English in family settings; doing so may require them to give up intimacy and sincerity. 70 percent of students disagree, according to the findings. Of the pupils, two out of ten strongly agreed, and six out of ten agreed. 80% of respondents provided a positive answer. IQ (see Excerpt 4 below) said in her interview that:

Expert 4: We are simply Urdu speakers, and I prefer to speak Urdu at home (with family members) because it helps me feel closer to my parents and other family members. I dislike speaking English exclusively with my parents and family because I feel less connected, maybe because I can't express myself as well in this language or because they can't fully understand me. However, I occasionally use English words in conversations without meaning to, and I think it is impolite to speak English exclusively in a family setting because it will distance our relationships. (IQ)

Additionally, SA said, "I frequently mix Punjabi and English, and nobody minds." Data clearly demonstrates that, generally speaking, learners do not feel separated from their family members when speaking English. This viewpoint contrasts with the widely held belief that using a language other than one's mother tongue detracts from intimacy in relationships. As a result, participants' altered attitudes reflect their changed identities, which the research suggests may be caused by the potential that individuals have many identity possibilities available to them during interactions at different times. The participants began utilizing English somewhat as an alternative identity option, one that differs from the past (school time), because their families are generally supportive of studying the language.

4.5 Effects of ESL in greeting, meeting, and assisting with teaching and learning with university classmates and teachers

According to the results of question 5, As a result of my ESL studies at university, eight out of ten students (85%) offered a good response, which is different from how I used to respond to my school classmates and teachers in terms of greeting, meeting, and helping with teaching/learning. This is because three out of ten (10%) pupils gave a negative response.

Expert 6: I have gained something from learning English, but I have also lost something. People and relationships are at the heart of learning English, and teachers frequently discuss this topic. I occasionally recognize this instinctively, but other times I use the English class discussions in my everyday life. I don't react to my university pals the same way I used to react to my schoolmates. I was worried about them in school, but now that I'm in college, I'm more focused on myself; I'm usually really selfish. (SA)

The data collected clearly demonstrates that the learners' attitudes toward greeting, meeting, and assisting with teaching and learning have changed in response to classmates and teachers. According to Norton (2010), social relationships are linked to identity, and people's identities

shift as their contexts do. According to Norton (2010), participants' attitudes toward the relationships in the new context altered as they transitioned from the high school setting to the university setting, which is known as identity transformation.

4.6 Effects of ESL on students' perceptions of their high school friends

According to the findings of interview statement 6, learning English has changed the way my high school friends interact with me (the ones who are currently enrolled in my institution) in terms of attitude, demonstrates that 7 out of 10 students (82.5%) gave the statement a good response. Participants perceived that learning English had an impact on how their high school pals who are now enrolled at the same institution interacted with them.

Expert 7: My connections have evolved. At university, relationships are more formal and constrained; perhaps as a result of receiving too much English instruction, I and my old school friends underwent significant change. My friends concur that I've changed a lot since I was a schoolgirl. I am more severe and isolated, like the heroines of English novels. (SA)

According to the data, 7.5% of students maintained their school-based identities and denied that learning English had any effect on their schoolmates' attitudes. Flowerdew et al. (1998) showed that even though English is a highly valued language at City University of Hong Kong, many students still display their previously formed Cantonese identity, even though this was only perceived by 7.5% of participants. This is interpreted as a shift in their sociocultural identity; learners' evolving discourse and knowledge are a component of their evolving identities, according to Lave and Wenger (1991).

5. Conclusion

Investigating how ESL affects Pakistani university students' identities was the goal of this study. This study was inspired by the notion that students' identities are best understood in relation to the "politics of location" (Canagarajah, 1999) (Norton & Kamal, 2003), where English coexists with vernacular languages and learners' identities are hybrid and shaped accordingly. The current study demonstrates that students, even in non-native circumstances, use their ESL knowledge to construct their identities and use those identities to see their opportunities for the future. Teachers and language policy makers can profit from this. Teachers face the challenge of developing guidelines that can assist pupils in better identifying as Muslims, Pakistanis, and peaceful members of the global society. Students are interested in ESL even if they are unsure of what they would achieve by enhancing their English beyond obtaining a BS (Hons) degree. Nonetheless, they had been observing encouraging prospects for how English might help them in various contexts, such as communicating with people to achieve professional goals, etc. This study recommends that students' perspectives be taken into account while developing English courses or policies. Additionally, as Huizhu (2012) contends, additional chances should be provided to understand and talk about students' perspectives as well as to investigate other forms of communication. Given that parents are usually contacted before students approve their identity or future career, it is highly urged that students and their parents' perspectives be heard in the context of traditional Pakistani culture. To collect information about students' family origins, past and present experiences, future opportunities, etc., surveys, parent-teacher conferences, or student-teacher conferences are recommended. The information gathered should be considered when developing English language policies or courses. It is desirable for ESL classes to harmoniously express both local and global cultures in order to match the expectations of the pupils.

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