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Negotiating Cultural Identities: Sociolinguistic Analysis of English Use among Pakistani University Level ESL Learners

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Abstract

The current qualitative case study explores the theme of negotiation of cultural, academic, and professional identities by Pakistani ESL students in BS English classes at Superior University in an English-Medium Instruction (EMI) context. Based on sociolinguistic identity theory, a notion of investment presented by Norton and the theory of translanguaging, the study position sees identity as dynamic, interactive, and the result of classroom talk. The main aim was to test the ways in which students utilize English and multilingual resources to place themselves in institutional and peer hierarchies and how the norms of EMI determine their linguistic investment. The data were gathered by only non-participant observations in the classroom in several BS English classes including about 20-25 undergraduate students with diverse schooling backgrounds. The thematic analysis and interactional discourse analysis were used to analyze the data to determine the patterns of stance-taking, code-switching, positioning of the identity, and alignment of power. Results indicate that English is a symbolic capital in the aspect of academic legitimacy, professional aspiration and institutional authority and Urdu is a resource of cultural authenticity, peer solidarity, and emotional expression. Students would have a balance between the two languages strategically in order to cope with the risks and opportunities of identity. The paper demonstrates the interplay between the power, language, and belonging in Pakistani higher education.

Keywords: English-Mediated Identity, EMI, Investment, Translanguaging, Pakistani ESL Students, Classroom Discourse, Identity Negotiation, Sociolinguistics.

Introduction

English in higher education in Pakistan is not a subject of the classroom only: it is a social resource that measures academic authority, professional competence and associations of modernity related to urban belonging. English is a visible category where students are divided based on, and students divide themselves as confident, capable and future-ready according to many university students, particularly in the context of

the private-sector based institutions where presentations, internships, employability discourses are highly promoted and practiced (Norton, 2013; Darvin and Norton, 2015). However, since Pakistan is a highly multilingual nation, students in their daily life functions can hardly work using English only. Rather, they cross Urdu, English and regional languages in such ways as to achieve solidarity, respect, humor, authority and membership to a peer group. This implies that identity is not a mere possession by learners but it is enacted, negotiated and realized through real language practices in interaction (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Kramersch, 2009).

In sociolinguistics, identity has popularly been interpreted as emergent and relational: speakers create identity by taking up stances, positioning, style and interactional moves that indicate membership or outsourcing to a certain group (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). This view is appropriate in Pakistani ESL settings, as students often have to abide by conflicting identity demands, including being an authentically Pakistani and at the same time exemplifying an educated English speaking representative that is often rewarded in institutions. It has also been highlighted in poststructural and sociocultural scholarship, with identity being constructed by power and access: learners might want to speak English, but their performance might be limited by unequal resources (premeditative schooling, exposure, ideologies of accent) and the possibility of losing face in performance situations such as classroom speaking (Block, 2007; Darvin and Norton, 2015; Pennycook, 2017). These dynamics are important in an individual university like Superior University whereby the students are not assessed based on content knowledge alone but also by the fluency, confidence, and professionalism indexed by the use of the English language.

This argument is reinforced by Pakistan-oriented studies that record how English is used as a high-status language that is associated with social stratification and institutional power. Scholarship Policy and planning define English as being historically deep-rooted in administration and higher education, establishing long-term conflicts between access, equity, and linguistic national identities (Mahboob, 2017;). EMI studies have also indicated that the adoption of English-medium policies in Pakistani higher education institutions is not merely a matter of technical decision; it alters the way classes are taught, the teacher student relations and what qualifies as an acceptable academic performance (). As an identity aspect, EMI might thus lead to the emergence of the so-called double-bind experiences: students might desire to be an English-speaking professional self, but can experience anxiety or marginalization when their accent, vocabulary, or interactional style is evaluated against a set of ideals (Block, 2007; Darvin and Norton, 2015).

Meanwhile, research in the field of translanguaging and code-switching suggests that multilingual students activate their entire linguistic arsenal as a common, and even competitive, act of meaning-making: not necessarily an indicator of language impairment (Canagararaj, 2013; Garcicia and Li, 2014). Pakistan based research has pointed out many times that code-switching and translanguaging are means by which university students can deal with comprehension, establish rapport, and bring culturally based identities to bear, particularly in peer communication and in classroom dialogue where English-only norms might not be realistic (). More recent studies also directly relate the loss of English to identity positioning of Pakistani university students, demonstrating how English can index aspirationality, modernity and prestige as an educational system, and local languages index intimacy, authenticity and cultural anchoring (). These results indicate that identity negotiation among Pakistani ESL students can be studied with attitudes (what students think about English) as well as with the situational language practices (what students do with English and other languages in communication).

Nevertheless, there are also notable gaps in the literature that lead to the desire to conduct a specific study in Superior University. To begin with, much of the Pakistani research considers university students as a general entity and a smaller number of studies give a finer, institution-specific description of the process of identity negotiation within the micro-culture of a single university (e.g., its classroom rules, disciplinary cultures, peer cultures, and assessments expectations). Second, much of the research is based on surveys/interviews and reports and identity is presented as a constant type, as opposed to how identity is produced in an interactional

manner across various events (presentations, group work, informal campus talk, digital chat practices). Discourse-based evidence based on naturally occurring academic and peer interactions is relatively weak even in the context of discussion on identity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). Third, the intersectional variations, like schooling (Urdu vs English medium), discipline, and varying exposure to English are accepted discursively but not systematically linked with daily identity performances of the same institutional context (Darvin and Norton, 2015;).

It is on this background that the current paper investigates English-mediated identity construction among Pakistani ESL students enrolled in Superior University in terms of how students negotiate cultural belonging, academic legitimacy, and professional personae by utilizing language in classroom and campus settings. The proposed study would demonstrate how identities could be performed based on tangible language decisions (e.g., stance markers, politeness strategies, code-switching patterns and style shifts) but not as a self-reported attitude only.

Research Objectives

1. To explore how Pakistani ESL students at Superior University construct and negotiate their cultural, academic, and professional identities through English and multilingual practices in classroom and campus interactions.
2. To examine how institutional norms (e.g., EMI expectations, assessment practices, peer evaluation) influence students' investment in English and shape their identity positioning.

Research Questions

1. How do Pakistani ESL students use English and multilingual resources to negotiate their identities at university?
2. How do institutional norms and interactional pressures influence students' investment in English and their identity-related language choices?

Rational

This study is necessary because English plays a powerful role in shaping academic success, professional aspirations, and social identity in Pakistani higher education. In private universities such as Superior University, English is not only a medium of instruction but also a marker of competence, confidence, and employability. While existing research in Pakistan has examined English-medium instruction and language attitudes, it has largely overlooked how ESL learners actually use English in everyday academic interactions to construct and negotiate their identities. Much of the literature relies on surveys and interviews, offering limited insight into real classroom and peer discourse where identity is performed. Moreover, prior studies often treat English as either empowering or oppressive, ignoring learners' strategic agency in balancing professionalism, cultural belonging, and identity risk. This study addresses these gaps by providing an institution-specific, discourse-based analysis of language use at Superior University. Its findings aim to inform more inclusive and context-sensitive ESL and EMI practices in Pakistani higher education.

Literature Review

The meaning of identity in second language acquisition.

In modern sociolinguistics, identity is perceived not as a predetermined nature but as a practice, done, and enacted in communication by people - in terms of postures, accounts, styles, and claims of belonging. It is a perspective that is best reflected in the sociocultural and poststructural traditions where identities of learners vary depending on the context (classroom, peer groups, online spaces) and time as they gain access or lack of access to resources as well as recognition by others (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Block, 2007). In this prism, English among Pakistani ESL students is not merely a means of interpersonal communication; it is a social

semiotic to negotiate who (modern, competent, employable, global) and where (Pakistani, Muslim, Punjabi/Urdu-speaking, multilingual, local) I belong (Kramersch, 2009; Norton, 2013).

One of the points is that power is related to identity construction. Students might want to learn English because it will lead to mobility, status, and institutional legitimacy, but the conditions of unequal opportunities and gatekeeping rules (accent ideologies, regimes of good English, classroom evaluation practices) condition their participation (Pennycook, 2017; Darvin and Norton, 2015). In a context such as Superior University where English tends to be a marker of academic professionalism and employability, this framework is anticipated to map that the identity work will manifest itself in the self-positioning of the students, in classroom talk, presentation styles and language choices among the Urdu-English-regional languages.

English as representational capital in Pakistan: empowerment vs inequality.

One of the current streams of research in Pakistan sees English through the prism of symbolic capital which creates not only aspiration but also stratification. On the one hand, English could facilitate a sense of confidence, prospective identity, and academic/professional connections; on the other hand, it could replicate inequality and the advantages to students who have attended elite schools and remain exposed to it (Mahboob, 2017; Siddiqui, 2022). The most recent work on Pakistan specifically points to the fact that English is more intertwined with social class and institutional advantage and determines the sense of legitimacy and belonging in higher education in Pakistan (Anwar, 2025; English Language and Cultural Identity in Pakistan, 2024).

Cross-argument English is described as empowering in some studies (including those that help learners to affirm modern and professional identities) and exclusionary in others (including where English becomes a kind of filter that delegitimizes local linguistic repertoires and identifies students as incompetent) (Mahboob, 2017; Siddiqui, 2022). In a literature review about Superior University, no narrative of English as an empowerment or English as an oppressor should be taken, but the analysis must be on when English opens the door and to whom, and when it is a system of symbolic domination.

identity, investing, and visioning the future.

Investment is also becoming a significant part of research on identity in SLI, which explains why learners will participate in English: not merely because of motivation, but because English participation is associated with the futures (jobs, prestige, global mobility) they aspire to, as well as the imagined communities (global professionals, educated elites, digital cosmopolitans) (Darvin and Norton, 2015; Norton, 2013). Pakistan-based research has already started using these concepts to local learner paths, revealing that beliefs related to English determine the perceived identities of learners, their willingness to devote effort, time, and riskiness in speaking (Abbasi, 2024).

Cross-argument: According to the investment lens, learners can feel very much “motivated and yet still restrain in interaction when the classroom poses a threat of face, accent-based mockery, or teacher/peer condemnation. In such a way, the reduced participation in the classroom can be an indicator of identity risk and not low motivation (Darvin and Norton, 2015; Block, 2007). This is relevant to Superior University since the norms of the private-university (presentations, interviews, internships) can heighten the societal assessment of English and hence heighten the processes of identity management (silence, formulaic speech, memorized elite phrases or selective code-switching).

Identity work within the context of translanguaging and code-switching.

In Pakistan, a multilingual country, the students frequently combine mixed repertoires (Urdu + English + Punjabi/Saraiki/Pashto, etc.) to obtain social meanings: solidarity, humor, authority, politeness, distancing and expertise. Translanguaging studies have maintained that such practices are not the errors, but the strategic meaning-making practices that manifest the fluid identities and local communicative rationality (Garcia and Kleyn, 2016; Canagarajah, 2013). The studies conducted in Pakistan recently confirm the pedagogical and

sociocultural topicality of translanguaging and code-switching, the connection between mixed practices and class participation, understanding, and negotiation of social relations (Javaid, 2025; Nawaz, 2023). The socio-pragmatic functions and the relationship between switching and the development of proficiency and classroom interactive requirements are also accentuated in the works on code-switching in Pakistani higher education (Murad, 2024; “Socio-Pragmatic Effects of Code-Switching...,” 2025).

Cross-argument: There is an ongoing conflict that occurs in the literature: (1) translanguaging as inclusion and identity affirmation vs (2) English-only ideologies as academic rigor and professionalism. In numerous colleges and universities, students say that English-only policies are symbolic in expressing the quality, and their actual practice is based on the use of multilingual resources to learn and to be considered part of the institution (Mahboob, 2017; Javaid, 2025). In this tension, the identity negotiation is actually positioned, and students can be seen to use English in formal contexts (presentations, Viva, interviews) and have multilingual identities in peer talk environments, WhatsApp groups, and informal campus discussions.

The production of identities through the English-medium instruction and the institution.

According to the results of EMI studies in Pakistan, English has been historically and politically established, and it tends to persist as a colonial residue and policy option in the context of a modernization discourse (Siddiqui, 2022; Mahboob, 2017). EMI not only alters the language used, it restructures how classroom activities are conducted, what is expected in assessment and what is worth knowing. Students can have a conflict between academic self (professional with expected English fluency) and social self (Pakistani multilingual own self), with the conflict being addressed in terms of strategic linguistic styling or silence or peer scaffolding (Siddiqui, 2022; Block, 2007).

Cross-argument EMI scholarship controversies whether EMI makes access and competitiveness more, or epistemic injustice more, by marginalizing local languages and local modes of knowing. In a case of a Superior University, the question to be asked is: is English a bridge to professional identity--or an obstacle to students being reclassified as competent vs weak? (Mahboob, 2017; Siddiqui, 2022).

Pakistani evidence in higher education: partial and tentative coverage.

New studies on Pakistan specifically relate English with cultural identity shift, and state that learners can experience pride and fear: pride in having a modern identity, and fear of cultural erosion or social critique due to sounding too Western (Zaheer, 2025; English Language and Cultural Identity in Pakistan, 2024). The complexity of English use in universities is also highlighted in other works in which identity is being negotiated on a regular basis according to institutional norms and expectations of peer groups (A Sociolinguistic Analysis of English Use among Uni..., 2026). Also, identity research is moving outside the student context to university teachers/lecturers with emphasis on professional identity negotiation within ESL classrooms and institutional expectations pressure (Rizvi & Krishnasamy, 2024).

Cross-argument: Although some studies assert that English is remaking identity, they differ on the directionality: some describe English as resulting in hybrid or bicultural identities, and others describe it as resulting in alienation, inferiority or linguistic insecurity. This controversy usually comes as a consequence of contextual variation (public vs private sector, elite vs non-elite backgrounds, culture in a discipline, and the intensity of enforcement of English only) (Anwar, 2025; Zaheer, 2025). An institution-specific review of the Pakistani ESL learners should thus not be seen as one group but rather as a heterogeneous group.

Gap in the past research

In the literature, three gaps are particularly applicable in the case of English-mediated identity construction among Pakistani ESL learners in Superior University:

1. The named private universities in the Lahore-like ecosystems have little site-specific evidence. Numerous researches tend to generalize the notion of Pakistani universities or sample several institutions,

whereas a smaller number of studies offer in-depth and localized ethnographic or discourse-analytic research on identity negotiations in the culture, policies, and peer networks of a single institution (Siddiqui, 2022; Zaheer, 2025).

2. Identity is usually quantified in terms of attitudes but not quantified in terms of interaction. Some of them are based on questionnaires/interviews related to identity, but fewer examine actual language use (unless classroom talk, presentations, group work, digital chats) to indicate how identities are enacted at any given moment (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; A Sociolinguistic Analysis of English Use among Uni... 2026).

3. Little-known intersectionality and micro-inequalities. Recent studies recognize the importance of class and access but show less systematic comparisons between the impacts of gender, discipline (e.g., business vs CS vs humanities), schooling background (Urdu/English medium) and regional language repertoires on forming English-mediated identities within the same university (Anwar, 2025; Abbasi, 2024).

Methodology

The research is based on an interpretivist research paradigm and a poststructuralist approach of identity which presupposes that identities are dynamic, socially constructed and negotiated in discourse. Language, in this context, is not regarded as a neutral communication tool, but rather a social practice, which is produced and influenced by power relations, institutional ideologies as well as investment in imagined futures. It fits into the interpretivist position since the research aims at gaining insights on the construction and negotiation of cultural, academic, and professional identities by Pakistani ESL students in the classroom setting that occurs naturally. Instead of quantifying identity as a static variable, the study investigates the interactional performance and co-construction of identity in the English-mediated higher education institutions.

Research is qualitative with case-study design based on Superior University, which is a confined sociolinguistic location. Case-study method can help to conduct a deep and context-specific study of identity negotiation in a specific institutional context in which English is symbolically and academically capitalized. These are not aimed at statistical generalization but analytical richness and localized understanding of the processes of English-mediated identity practices as they occur in actual classroom environments. The study narrows down to a single institutional setting and thus reflects the effects of local norms, school cultures and EMI expectations on the language decisions and identity positioning of students.

The only data gathering method used is non-participant classroom observation. Several undergraduate ESL classes of various disciplines (e.g., business, computer science, and social sciences) will be monitored over a long period so as to record natural language practices. The instances of the English-only use, code-switching, translanguaging, stance-taking, patterns of participation, presentation styles, peer collaboration, and teacher-student interaction will be systematically registered in terms of field notes. Particular focus will be put on the instances of identity negotiation visibility, like presentation, question-answer, group conversation, and informal academic conversation. The observation protocols will be designed but loose to ensure that both language features and the situational aspects, such as institutional expectations and peer reaction, are taken into consideration.

Purposive sampling is used to sample out about 20-25 undergraduate ESL students in various academic programs, gender, schooling backgrounds (English-medium and Urdu-medium) and self-reported proficiency levels. This heterogeneity enables one to compare identity courses in the same institutional framework. The combination of thematic analysis and interactional sociolinguistic discourse analysis will be used to analyze data. Thematic coding of field notes of observation will help recognize recurring themes like academic legitimacy, linguistic insecurity, professionalism, cultural affiliation and institutional pressure. Interactional analysis will be applied to the ways the identity is performed based on the code-switching, stance-taking, politeness strategies, and stylistic variation. Lastly, the interpretation of the results will be done via the theoretical prisms of identity theory, investment, and translanguaging to relate the micro-level classroom practices with the larger institutional and ideological frameworks that inform the use of the English language

in Pakistani higher education.

Data Analysis

The use of English as an identity construction of BS English classes at Superior University.

1. Performance of Legitimacy as an Academic Identity.

Among the most evident trends which were witnessed in the classrooms of BS English at Superior University was the tactical use of English to create academic legitimacy. Students often changed to formal English when they needed to be regarded as serious, intelligent, or authoritative.

Classroom Sample 1

At a literary theory course, one of the students started her presentation saying:

“Today, I will critically examine identity theory in post structuralist theory in reference to discourse practices.”

But as she commenced the explanation she glanced round a little toward her peers, and said to them in a low voice:

“Yaar sincerely mujhe khud bhi yeh theory pehle muddle rahe thi.”

Analysis

This change is an indication of identity layering. The initial line of the English sentence creates an academic self that is in line with the institutional requirements. It displays a bet on English as symbolic capital English here measures intellectual capability and academic authority. The second Urdu sentence, however, puts the speaker back to what he or she talks of in peer solidarity. Seeking to demystify the authority that she has just exuded, the student dilutes the statement by saying, “Yaar honestly mujhe khud bhi yeh theory pehle confusing lag rahi thi.”

This two-fold performance is a manifestation of the principle of relationality by Bucholtz and Hall (2005): identity is created with regard to audience. The English utterance makes her aligned with the institutional authority and the Urdu utterance with the peer intimacy. English in this case is not neutral, it is prestigious. Urdu on the other hand is warmly relational. The student strikes the right balance and shows that translanguaging is more a strategic identity negotiation and not a linguistic deficiencies.

2. Linguistic Insecurity and Identity Risk.

The other theme of observation in classrooms was linguistic insecurity. There were those students who spoke other languages when they were asked to speak English in an impromptu dialogue but were very confident when given the opportunity to combine languages.

Classroom Sample 2

In a classroom discourse about the process of globalization, the teacher posed the following question:

How does the English language affect cultural identity in Pakistan?

One of the pupils at first faltered, but replied:

“I believe English has opportunities... sir... but... matlab... kabhi kabhi lagta hai ke apni culture peeche reh jati hai...”

Another student added:

“Yes sir, English makes us confident in our professions, and at home we speak English enough, but beyond that, what more than that, people start saying to us that we are angrez ban gaya hai.”

Analysis

It depicts identity tension in this interaction. The former student starts with English to conform to the standards of EMI but adds Urdu (matlab kabhi kabhi lagta hai ke apni culture peeche reh jati hai) when writing to express a point of emotion or sensibility related to his culture. Urdu makes itself the language of originality and heartfeltness. The English language is the language of framing, which is organized and academic.

The phrase:

“angrez ban gaya hai” is of special importance. It shows cultural anxiety - the competence in English is

associated with cultural betrayal. The students therefore face identity threat when they perform over and above in English. The investment in English, so far as investments are concerned (Norton), is made by the students on a basis of future professional gains, yet with a social cost. The classroom is a location where they are very cautious of regulating linguistic expression to avoid peer reproach.

3. Professional Identity/ Future Orientation.

Students in BS English often associated the use of English with their perceived careers.

Classroom Sample 3

In one of the presentations on career development, one student was sure that:

To compete with others on the international level, we need to learn to speak fluent English.

Then during peer discussion:

“Hum English ne job market problem hoge to, superior mein agar hum improve nahi karein ge.”

Analysis

English is positioned as a system of upward mobility. The expression of competing internationally creates a globalized professional self. English in this case is a symbolic capital of modernity and belonging to the world. The Urdu text supports an urgency and a sense of reality:

“job market mein problem hogi”

This means that English is not seen as optional and they have to speak English to survive.

The language portrays imagined communities in the minds of students (Kramsch, 2009). Their classroom performances in English are practice in future workplaces. Therefore, it is the identity negotiation, which is future-oriented. Presentation use of English was more formal and rehearsed, which suggests the conscious identity construction. But in peer transactions Urdu was being used again to mediate anxiety and solidarity.

4. Authority, Power, and Alignment.

It was observed that the students started to use more English when directly addressing teachers.

Classroom Sample 4

Student speaking to teacher:

“What I would like to explain, sir, is the understanding of hybridity on this part.”

Later whispering to peer:

“Mujhe samajh nahi aa raha tha hybridity ka matlab.”

Analysis

This opposition illustrates positioning of identity that is sensitive to the audience. English is spoken upwards - towards authority. Urdu is employed horizontally - towards equals. English therefore measures the institutional compliance and academic discipline. Urdu is also exposed and unauthentic. The performance of language depends on the classroom hierarchy. Students hardly interacted directly with teachers in Urdu when they were not encouraged. This shows that EMI norms control identity expression. The classroom turns into a controlled linguistic environment in which English is representative of identification with the power arrangements.

5. Translanguaging as Strategic Resource.

The multilingual practices of students were not random as it seemed to be.

Classroom Sample 5

A student in a group exercise on identity in Pakistani media described it:

The character is having a form of cultural hybridity... “matlab woh do cultures ke beech phansa hai.”

Another added:

“Yes, he is trying to preserve izzat, and he is trying to adjust to modern values.”

Analysis

In this case translanguaging adds value in meaning. The socio-cultural meaning of izzat has a socio-cultural connotation that cannot be easily substituted with respect. Urdu is used by the students to convey culturally implicit meanings. Translanguaging identifies itself as an asset. It enables them to contextualize the abstract

concepts of the English language on local cultural knowledge. This helps the translanguaging model presented by Canagarajah: the multilingual speakers resort to complete repertoires to create meaning. Notably, there was no correction on such switching and this implies that although EMI norms exist, classroom practice is still dynamic.

6. Gender Patterns of English Consumption.

There were slight differences by gender, which were observed. Women students tended to write more formalized English answers whereas men students tended to be more spontaneous in mixing.

Classroom Sample 6

Female student at time of the presentation:

The study shows the intersectionality of the language and identity formation.

Male student during discussion:

Basically, sir, “yahan flexible hai, fix nahi hoti.”

Analysis

The speech of female students was more academic. This could be an indication of greater perceived pressure to prove competence.

The flexible mixing of male students indicates the confidence in bargaining the institutional norms.

These trends are indicators of larger sociolinguistic studies in Pakistan that have related English fluency to social mobility and gender roles.

7. Positioning of silence as Identity.

Not everything in identity negotiation was a negotiation. Other students simply would not speak during English intensive classes. It was observed that students with Urdu-medium background of schooling used fewer words in the theoretical discussions that were done in English.

In private (informal observation), one of the students replied:

“Sir class mein English fast hoti hai, liye main bolta nahi hoon.”

Analysis

Language marginalization is symbolized by silence. Participation can be curtailed by English dominance. Positioning of identity takes place both in absence and by speech. The linguistically insecure students will retreat hence reducing their academic presence.

This indicates how the institutions influence identity possibilities.

8. English as Symbolic Capital

In all the observations, English had been linked to prestige.

In a classroom discussion, one student was joking about:

“English achi ho to log impress ho jate hain.”

Another replied:

“Haan, presentation, mein confidence nahi aata.”

Analysis

Students are categorical about English being performative capital.

Fluent English = assurance + impression + authority. English is consequently internalized as the competence language. This however places performance pressure as well. The identity gets connected to the quality of linguistic display.

9. Urdu Retention as a means of Cultural Belonging.

Although there was a high proportion of English, Urdu was still at the centre of emotive conversations.

During a discussion about the cultural origins in a classroom:

“Hum modern ho sakte hain, deshoun meno apni pehchan naha bhoolni chahiye.”

This was in pure Urdu although the class was EMI.

Analysis

Urdu authenticates the authenticity and cultural rootedness. Students revert to Urdu when the subject of

belonging is under discussion.
Ambition is created by English. Urdu constructs belonging.
Students keep on swinging between these identity poles.

BS English Classroom Institutional Norms, Investment and Identity Regulation.

1. Institutional Pressure of English-Medium Instruction (EMI).

The dominant norms of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) was one of the few things which were very stable yet very influential in almost all the classes of BS English in the Superior University. Even though in some cases teachers were willing to accept Urdu to explain something, the speaking and writing of English was and still is expected to be the most dominant, as speakers have to compose presentations, formal answers, and tests to demonstrate their knowledge. This institution provided a controlled linguistic zone in which students were forced to display competence in English as a symbol of academic validity.

Classroom Sample 1

In a seminar talk, one of the students started explaining in an assured manner in English:

The definition of the identity is socially constructed and negotiated by the discourse.

But she stopped in the middle and added:

“Hum khud nahi banate, identity, society bhi usko shape karti hai, Matlab.”

The teacher mildly broke in:

Please attempt to explain in English.

The student at once rectified herself:

“Sorry sir. I refer to the fact that society also forms our identity.”

Analysis

This brief discourse illustrates the regulatory role of EMI. As much as the teacher could sound neutral through the instruction, please explain in English, it promotes the ideology of institutions that favor English as a valid academic code. Even Urdu, when applied to elaborate complicated theoretical sense, is moved to the back seat. Investment wise (Norton, 2013), the student immediately obeys as she knows the value of learning English in the long term in academic assessment regimes. Her apology, which is the expression of internalized linguistic hierarchy, is: “Sorry sir. English is identified with being right and professional where Urdu is identified with being informal or not fitting in formal academic performance.

This institutional regulation does not kill the multilingual practice but it imposes a frame of hierarchy whereby the English language is at the top. Students consequently get to know how to keep a check on their language production at all times to adapt with the perceived institutional expectations. Here, identity is disciplined using language norms.

2. Evaluation Activities and Evaluation Identity Fears.

Another important point of observation was the intensification of English performance by the use of assessment regimes. Students were more linguistically careful, used less Urdu and were more formal during graded presentation or viva sessions. Grades were directly related to English proficiency, which increased identity anxiety.

Classroom Sample 2

In a graded presentation, one student said:

This paper is an evaluation of how language, power, and postcolonial discourse interact in Pakistani society. When she was done, speaking informally to her group member when not in the presentation mode she whispered:

Do not commit grammar errors, two bas.

Later she added:

“Marks English pe bhi depend karte hain, sir fluency dekhte hain.”

Analysis

The anxiety of performing English, the very thing that causes the student to whisper, is revealed in the student whispering, which translates to Bas dua karo grammar mistakes na hon. The practices of assessment develop what can be called linguistic surveillance. Students are conscious of the fact that fluency, pronunciation, and grammatical accuracy affect the perception of the teacher. English is therefore not only a medium of communication but also an assessing mechanism. The definition of a good student is mixed with fluency in English. Less confident students can also face marginalization in terms of identity, although they might be well conceptually informed in English.

This is the way institutional power influences identity positioning. Under pressure of assessment English strengthens investment in English. To satisfy the standards of the institution regarding professionalism, students practice speeches, learn words and do not use Urdu when grading occurs.

The grading system thus controls not only the academic performance but the identity performance.

3. Social Policing and Peer Evaluation.

In addition to teachers, peers were relevant in the regulation of the use of English. Observation in classrooms showed that there was some peer evaluation in an indirect manner where a person was either speaking too much or too little English. Students were in the knowledge that they were being evaluated by their peers.

Classroom Sample 3

One of the students made the following remark after hearing a rather fluent presentation:

“Wah Wah, full British accent aaj.”

Another learner laughed and commented:

“Mayer bewarn, dam shomka bani angrez ban gaya hai.”

The presenter smiled yet answered in Urdu:

“Nahiyaar, bas practice kar raha hoon.”

Analysis

This interaction depicts peer mediated identity regulation. The full British accent aa gaya hai is a funny remark that has a tension attached to it. The mastery of English is envied at the same time ridiculed. The remark angrez ban gaya hai is once again cultural distrust of too much English acting. Students thus take a thin line. Excessive investment in English exposes one to social alienation by classmates. Hypoinvestment runs the risk of academic marginalization.

This peer policing establishes an intricate identity negotiation setting. English should be shown, however, not overdone. Urdu should be maintained- however not in formal evaluation places. The response of the student bas practice kar raha hoon tries to counter any possible arrogance and rejoin peer solidarity. This is an act of identity balancing as a strategic continuum.

4. Participation in Classrooms and the Distribution of Power.

It was observed that students with English-Background of schooling were more engaged into English-only discussions. In the meantime, students with Urdu-medium backgrounds gave more when implicitly given permission to translate language.

Classroom Sample 4

In one of the theory intensive discussions which were carried out in English, there was limited participation. The teacher then said after a moment of silence:

You may speak in Urdu, in which you are at your ease.

A student answered immediately:

“Mera point yeh hai ke identity fixed nahi hoti, woh context ke sath change hoti rehti hai, sir.”

The teacher paraphrased in English:

Meaning that identity is fluid and situation dependent.

Analysis

This scene shows that institutional malleability may repatriate power of participation. In the process of the temporary legitimization of Urdu, hitherto silent students are allowed to be heard. Nevertheless, the re-

centering of the English as authoritative by the teacher in English is another way of reformulating English. Urdu emerges as a stepping stone as opposed to an equal medium.

This demonstrates that linguistic classroom power is organized. The domination of the English language can suppress some identity groups. In a situation where translanguaging is allowed, participation is more extensive - however, institutional hierarchy is not eliminated.

The process of identity negotiation thus is not individual but it is mediated structurally.

5. Investment and Imagined Futures.

Classroom talk frequently made repeated references to future careers, particularly in speaking about English improvement.

Classroom Sample 5

In one of the skills development discussions, a student wrote:

“We must be very proficient in English communication in case we wish to apply abroad.”

Another added:

“My degree tab worth is superior, and as long as English strong ho.”

A third student concluded:

“English ke bina professional growth meshkil hai.”

Analysis

These assertions depict high future-directed investment. English is pictured as a position of mobility, international education and professional growth. Existing linguistic activities of students are driven by potential gains in the future. This comes in tandem with the notion of investment by Norton where learners will invest in language learning in order to reap symbolically and materially.

The tab value of the degree rakhti hai jab English strong hai is a phrase that is very revealing. Without the knowledge of the English language, academic qualification seems to be incomplete.

The English language, therefore, gets immersed in the professional imagination of students. In the classroom, practise is global space rehearsal.

6. Defiance by Controlled Urdu Use.

Although institutional pressures were witnessed, small kinds of resistance were experienced. Other students actually spoke Urdu when talking about issues that were culturally sensitive or critical.

Classroom Sample 6

One student remarked:

“English hum par impose hui in history.”

He continued:

“Underestimate kar dete hain Is liye kabhi kabhi lagta hai ke hum apni language ko underestimate kar dete hain.”

Analysis

In this case, Urdu is employed in criticizing the rule of English itself. This use of language is symbolic. When it comes to the discussion of the issue of colonial imposition in Urdu, the local identity is re-centered subtly. Students are not inactive consumers of EMI ideology. They are marked by the awareness of the political history of English, which is critical. This proves that identity negotiation involves the cases of ideological resistance. Urdu is the means of re-conquering cultural agency.

7. Identity Authenticity and Expression of Emotions.

During emotionally charged classroom conversations (the issues about culture, family expectations, or pressure in the society), students massively shifted to Urdu.

Classroom Sample 7

As part of a conversation on family influence:

“Ghar walay kehte hain ke English seekho warna peeche reh jao ge.”

Another student added:

“Lekin ghar mein more English bolte bhi to kehte hain show off kar raha hai”

Analysis

Urdu in this case bears emotional authenticity. These words represent experienced sociolinguistic stress in the outside world of classrooms. English is built as a necessity of the economy. Urdu is still emotive. The identity of students is not only determined by the institutional norms, but also family and community expectations as well. The perspectives of classroom identity negotiation are indicative of larger social linguistic hierarchies.

Micro-level Discourse Characteristics and Identity Negotiation Theoretical Synthesis.

1. Stance-Taking and Identity Positioning.

By closely examining the discourse in the classroom, one can find that students are not just interchanging languages; instead, they utilize linguistic resources to adopt positions, epistemic, affective and evaluative positioning, which place students socially and academically. The importance of stance-taking to identity construction is the demonstration that students mind or dissociate themselves with ideas, authority, and peer groups.

Classroom Sample 1

In one of the discussions about postcolonial identity, one student stated:

“I am very much convinced that we are empowered through English in the world arena.”

Immediately after, he added:

The reason is, “Lekin kabhi kabhi lagta hai ke hum apni roots bhool jate hain.”

Analysis

I strongly believe denotes epistemic certainty and intellectual confidence. It develops a vigorous academic personality in accordance with international modernity. But there is affective hesitation in the Urdu clause. The transition to Urdu dilutes the aggressive epistemic position and brings about cultural ambivalence. This bivalent position relates to stratified identity negotiation. The student makes himself both a globally ambitious person and a culturally conscious person at the same time. The code-switch is not incidental, it refers to two ideological spaces the global empowerment (English) and the cultural rootedness (Urdu).

Identity, in this case, according to Bucholtz and Hall, is relational and indexical. English envy aspiration and power. Urdu indexes of belonging and emotional richness. It is in this way that stance-taking is a way of expressing identity multiplicity.

2. Civil Politeness and Alignment of Hierarchy.

The other micro-level trend that was noticed was the use of politeness signals when referring to teachers. Deference was often shown on using English whereas solidarity was shown on the use of Urdu. This tendency is a manifestation of the influence of power relations on the choice of language.

Classroom Sample 2

Student addressing teacher:

“I should like to differ with this interpretation, sir, with due respect.”

A few seconds afterward, murmuring to a classmate:

“Mujhe lagta hai sir ka point thora unclear tha.”

Analysis

The institutional politeness and hierarchical consciousness is expressed by the formal English saying with due respect. It creates an academic regimented image. The student avoids disagreement with a lot of care through the use of formal English register. The Urdu whisper, on the contrary, eliminates hierarchical distance. The term thora unclear tha is more relaxed and softer and shows intimacy among peers. This comparison reveals that identity changes based on power alignment. The upward alignment is done in English; horizontal connection is done in Urdu. It is institutional structures that do not only control the choice of language but also control politeness strategies. Academic diplomacy is converted to English.

3. Style-Shifting and Competence Performance.

Style-shifting Style of movement between conversational mixed code and formal academic English was common. The variation in the linguistic style was based on the graded, teacher-directed, and peer-based interaction the students had.

Classroom Sample 3

When making a formal presentation:

The paper is a research on the interface of discourse and power as far as higher education institutions are concerned.

During peer group work:

“Language power create karti hai, basically yeh research hai.”

Analysis

The initial sentence is reminiscent of rehearsed academic register, which might have been written in advance. It indicates ability, control, and conformity to the academic discourse. The second sentence makes the concept simple with the help of translanguaging to explain it to peers. Style-shifting in this case shows the consciousness of the audience and the flexibility of communication. Students are not linguistically weak but are contextually strategic. This shift of registers through the translanguaging theory implies the dynamic use of complete linguistic repertoire. Institutional visibility is of English. Urdu promotes mutual understanding. No such thing as identity is thus situational.

4. Repair Strategies and Self-Monitoring.

The self-repair habit was very common among the students when they were speaking English, particularly in teacher-led discussions. The internalized linguistic hierarchy and identity monitoring are exposed by these repair strategies.

Classroom Sample 4

Student response:

“Identity is... I say... it depends on the context... matlab identity change hoti hai.”

He stopped and amended himself:

“I am sorry sir, it depends on circumstances.”

Analysis

The fact that he corrected himself after saying sorry sir shows that he is linguistically surveilled of himself. The learner sees the insertion of Urdu as a correction bit. The English language is considered the academic code of legitimacy. There is identity vulnerability in repair strategies. Students struggle to retain academic credibility by doing away with Urdu when the authority detects it. Nevertheless, the first Urdu insertion implies clarity of concepts depicted in the context of familiar language. The fixing is thus more of an institutional stress than a communicative need.

This relationship shows how the EMI standards are disciplining the expression of identity at the micro-level interaction.

5. Humor as a Negotiation of Identity.

Joking appeared to be a less dangerous means of handling a language conflict. Jokes were used by students in coping with anxiety when it came to English achievement.

Classroom Sample 5

Having stammered at the pronunciation, one of the pupils laughed and remarked:

“Meri English aj strike pe hai.”

Another responded:

“Koi nahi, mid ke baad sab ki English improve hai.”

Analysis

Here humor serves as identity protection. The conversation within which the student makes a joke on linguistic difficulty will help him not to feel embarrassed but decrease the feeling of inadequacy. Jokes are put in Urdu and this reduces emotional tensions. It is through common laughter that the English mistakes are normalized.

This implies that peer solidarity overcomes institutional pressure. Emotional coping strategies form part of identity negotiation.

Jesting turns out a tool of opposition to strict linguistic norms.

6. Critical Positioning and Ideological Awareness.

Throughout a number of classes, students were meta-cognizant with regards to English in ideological role in Pakistan.

Classroom Sample 6

In one of the debates, one of the students said:

English opens world knowledge to us.

Another countered:

“That is why Lekin system ne English ko itna important bana diya hai ke jo Urdu medium se hain woh peeche reh jate hain.”

Analysis

Such exchange is ideological reflexivity. Students know that English is a gate keeping mechanism.

The Urdu word *peeche reh jate hain* is more emotive than English analogue can be in signifying social inequality. This shows there is macro-micro connection: language hierarchies in society are also being mirrored in the classroom discourse.

The identity negotiation of students involves the awareness of structural inequality. They invest in English and at the same time criticize its hegemony.

7. Theoretical Mapping: Identity, Investment, Translanguaging.

Classroom observations can be mapped onto theoretical frameworks, and what is observed is the multilayered processes. On the one hand, this leads to a rise in social norms and moral values, which consequently contribute to a higher level of productivity. On the one hand, this results in an increase in social norms and moral values, which in turn result in an increase in the level of productivity. Identity is relational, indexical and emergent during interaction. The indexes of code-switching by students change allegiance-power, loyalty, aspiration, opposition.

Investment (Norton):

Students invest in English since they relate to it with the prospective careers in their minds. But investment is bargained under the limitations of peer judgment and institutional analysis.

Translanguaging (Canagararaj; García and Li):

Multilingualism is a strategic and meaning-making resource rather than a failure. Urdu is a language through which students can use to explain theory, reveal emotion, bargain membership, and fight cultural erasure. Consequently, the ideological structures can be observed at the micro-level in terms of micro-linguistic features.

Students do not have to make binary choices in English and Urdu. On the contrary, they continuously juggle one another. The language they use indicates the process of negotiation between aspirations and belonging. The concept of identity, therefore, is not static. It is constructed co-constructively in a classroom interaction. The outer framework is determined by EMI policies and students take agency action within it.

The data shows that English-mediated identity of Pakistani ESL students at Superior University is neither strictly empowering nor strictly oppressive. It is ambivalent. English is an open door policy but a pressure maker. Urdu safeguards membership but can diminish institutional legitimacy. Students compensate in this tension. Their linguistic intelligence and adaptive competence are reflected in their practice of translanguaging as opposed to confusion. The classroom discourse, in turn, is a miniature of sociolinguistic reality of Pakistan - the place where the world and the local collide every day.

Conclusion

The research aimed to investigate how Pakistani ESL learners in BS English courses in Superior University

develop and reproduce their cultural, educational, and professional identities by using English in an English-Medium Instruction (EMI) setting. The study was based on an interpretivist paradigm and informed by the sociolinguistic identity theory, poststructuralist concepts of investment, and translanguaging models; the study relied on naturally occurring classroom interactions to define identity as an interactive process and dynamic. The result shows that English in this case is much more than a medium of instruction; it is symbolic capital or a mark of institutional legitimacy as well as entry-point to perceived professional futures. Simultaneously, the deployment of the same results in a sense of tension, anxiety, and cultural ambivalence that students have to negotiate.

Observations in classrooms portray that, students strategically use English to carry out academic competence and professional seriousness. In presentations, official reactions, and the discussions guided by teachers, English is the main means to express intellectual power and meet the expectations of the institution. Students show a sense of awareness of how English fluency is closely related to evaluation, credibility and academic visibility. This consciousness is also enhanced through assessment practices because the students feel that their grades as well as professional image are affected by the linguistic performance. In this regard, English is a judgmental currency in the university space. The definition of a successful student is joined to the possibility to show confidence and mastering English, which makes it a potent institution of norms.

Nevertheless, the results also show that identity negotiation is not a mere assimilation process of the English hegemony. Multilingual materials such as Urdu are still at the heart of communication in students. Students often switch to Urdu when describing emotional experiences, explaining complicated concepts or when supporting peer solidarity. Urdu turns out to be the language of genuineness, belonging to the culture, and the comfort of the interpersonal relations. Students use Urdu to express the full meaning that cannot be fully expressed in English in cases of humor, vulnerability, or cultural critique. This shows that the multilingual exercises are not indications of inadequacy but premeditated and purposeful identity endowments. Translanguaging also allows students to reconcile international academic discourse with local cultural realities, and in the process, build upon the identity of both as opposed to discarding one identity in favor of the other.

The paper also brings out the role of institutional norms and power structures in creating the identity positions. The policies of English-Medium Instruction indirectly control the discourse in the classroom, making English the legitimate form of academic code with Urdu as a secondary or supportive language. Even well-intended interventions by teachers of the kind that promotes responses in the English-only manner, support hierarchical linguistic ideologies. Simultaneously, peer assessment is a very important factor in the identity performance. Students are walking a fine line between showing their competence in English and not being socially distanced by their peers. Exceeding the norm in English can be regarded as jokingly being mocked or accused of being culturally detached, whereas performing worse can lead to being marginalized academically. The process of identity negotiation takes place, thus, in stratified structures of power institutional, social, and cultural.

Notably, the results show that the students do not remain subjects of EMI structures. They exhibit agency, reflexivity and critical awareness on the role of English in the Pakistani society. Conversations in the classroom show that English is being seen as an opportunity and a source of inequality. Students make investments in English since they see it as a guarantee of international mobility, career growth and social status, and also recognize the historical and sociopolitical consequences of this trend. This ambivalence is a symptom of the larger sociolinguistic environment in Pakistan, in which English is both a symbol of modernity and socioeconomic mobility and also works to replicate the hierarchy of schooling and access to linguistic resources.

Theoretically, the study is a contribution to the sociolinguistic literature in the that identity can be co-constructed through a real-time classroom interaction as opposed to being reported through attitudes or survey report. It is the combination of the identity theory, investment, and translanguaging that offer a multidimensional perspective of how micro-level discourse practices correlate with macro-level institutional

ideologies. The results are affirmative that the identity in second language situation is dynamic, relational, and contextual. The shift in the linguistic preferences of students indexes shifting alignments, that is, between students and authority, students and peers, students and cultural origins and students and imagined futures seeking to show the identity as a negotiation process and not a fixed characteristic.

Contextually, the study provides an idea of the very dynamics of a private Pakistani university that is subject to the rules of EMI. The study is effective in that by solely concentrating on classroom observations, the natural interactional practices are captured that indicate the experienced complexity of English-mediated identity. The results imply that increased inclusiveness in pedagogical methods that consider multilingual repertoires may improve the performance and decrease linguistic anxiety without compromising academic performance. Accepting translanguaging as an asset and not a liability can help to establish more equal classrooms.

To sum up, English-mediated identity among the Pakistani ESL students studying at Superior University has been described as an activity that involves balancing as opposed to the adoption or rejection. English is a symbol of aspiration, power and institutional legitimacy, whereas Urdu symbolizes reality, unity and cultural survivability. Learners schizophrenically and flexibly work around these dual forces, creating both global and local identities. The classroom then furnishes a microcosm of larger negotiations in the society between language, power and belonging. This work demonstrates the centrality of the concept of identity as a dynamic resource, not as a problem that should be managed, but as a tool that can facilitate learning, participation, and professional imagination in Pakistani higher education of today.

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