

Language Identity of Undergraduate ESL Learners: Understanding role of L1 Identity in English language learning at Undergraduate Level

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Abstract

The study aims to highlight the language identity of undergraduate ESL learners and role of L1 identity in English language learning. Attachment, use of language and encouraging learners' towards their language continuation and vitality efforts are necessary for construction of language identity. In the Pakistani multilingual setting these procedures are vigorously endorsing learners' in representing and constructing their language identities. So for, the current study is mixed method research followed by concurrent triangulation or convergent parallel design suggested by Creswell & Plano Clark (2011). The quantitative data were collected from 200 third and final year undergraduate students of the departments of English, Education and Information Technology studying at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad (SBBU, SBA) by using simple random sampling. The collected data were analyzed by using IBM (SPSS 26th) version. The results were shown in frequency and percentage organized in tabular form and discussed. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews from 8 students studying in 3rd and final year in the department of English at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad (SBBU, SBA) by using purposive sampling. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed by using thematic analysis model suggested by Saldna (2009). The findings disclose that learners' identity is changeable. ESL learners' construct their linguistics identity through use of L1 in ESL classrooms, interaction through code switching and speaking English language with L1 accent. However, they construct L1 identity at their home and hybrid identity at ESL classroom. It is found from the above findings that L1 identity has great impact on English language learning and plays vital role in constructing identity in ESL classrooms.

Keywords

Linguistic identity, Mother tongue, English as second language, Linguistic capital, Indigenous languages.

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Introduction:

Constructing second language identity in multilingual classrooms is one the challenging tasks for English as second language learners. Especially in multilingual countries like Pakistan where more than 65 languages are spoken (Mushtaque & Zaki , 2018). English in Pakistan used as official language and it became medium of instructions at colleges and universities level. It is taught as second language in the different universities of Pakistan (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). Nowadays English became widely spoken and written language of the country. English obliges work for the more privileged leading institutions of country such as parliaments, bureaucracy, court law and military etc. (Rahman, 2004). Consequently, communication ability in the English language brings important rewards inside and outside the classrooms and it has much more value not only than local languages but also than national language (Shamim, 2008; Rahman, 2001). Identity denotes to the persons and their association with the social lives. While speaking a language, learners not only exchange information with each other but also frequently unify and reconstruct a sense about themselves and their interaction in the society. Identity varies according to the social circumstances and person`s exposure to the language and also economic status of the language learners (Shamim & Rashid, 2019).

Learning English as a second language is not only goal of obtaining a new language, but the purpose of learning a new language is also socialisation and constructing a language learners` identity. Language cannot be seen as a mean of communication or exchange of rapid ideas; it is a tool for the learners` as express the ways of acquiring linguistics knowledge, within the historical and social perspective. Therefore, understanding ESL learners language identity at undergraduate ESL learners and role of mother tongue (L1) identity in second language learning in public sector universities like Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad (SBBU, SBA), Sindh Pakistan.

Research Aim and Objectives of Study

The aim of this study is to explore language identity of undergraduate ESL learners and role of L1 identity in English language learning.

Following are the objectives of the current study:

- To understand language identity of tertiary ESL learners studying at SBBU, SBA in Sindh/Urdu (L1) and English (L2).
- To understand the interaction of L1 identity interaction with their second language (English) language learning.

Research Questions

Following are the research questions of the current study:

- Q no 1: What is the undergraduate ESL learners' language identity for Sindhi/Urdu (L1) and English (L2) at SBBU, SBA?
- How does the L1 identity of the learners at SBBU, SBA interact with their second language (English) language learning?

Literature Review

Understanding the Meaning of Identity

There are multiple definitions for a single term identity. However researchers in East and West have different opinion regarding identity. The Western researchers' discernment of identity is considered "hybrid and multiple" while the Eastern researchers point of view about identity is "sense of belonging" (Ha, 2008, p. 64). Identity is the way through we may understand ourselves and others. It is associated with the community where from we belong. Identity additionally constructed through social interaction among the people in daily life practice. Identity is a vast notion can be defined as "the sense of self that the subject shares with other members of some collective group or organization" (Levinson, 2001, p. 342) .

The Concept of Language Identity

Language and identity oblige the purpose of acknowledgment for an individual and society. The use of language responses to the language learners' identity and it is not complicated as we practice to communicate; we develop our identity with the use of language. (Rezaei, Khatib, & Baleghizadeh, 2014). According to Khatib and Rezaei (2013) language identity is an individual`s association with self and sense of language in which interact.

An individual`s response towards language use consists on their community association and outgoing activities in which they participate actively. Our ordinary interaction based on our sociocultural setting and language we use within it. An individual`s discourses empower to communicate and translate languages and disclose their identities in certain circumstances. Consequently, languages are used to express the identity and due to usage of language an individual`s direction is for language identity. However languages and its procedures are in diversities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). The researchers recognized solid association between language learning practice and identity though endured overlooked in ESL learning classrooms. As much as a person speaks more languages, constructs more identities. In the same sense any person who communicate in more than one language may possesses different identities at the same time, though don`t have awareness of all languages lengthy practices and foundations of its culture and language resources (Ha, 2008).

According to Hall (2013) one who uses language resources governed by their group of association and ongoing interactions in which take parts. We communicate in our socio-culture perspective and feel our presence in a specific community and use language resources accordingly (Hall, 2013). Hall (2005) argues one`s discourse not only helps them for communication but enable them to interpret their linguistically constructed identities while uttering were formed. "Thus identity is an association between one's sense of self and different

means of communication, understood in terms of language, a dialect or sociolect” (Block , 2009, p. 43). Moreover, use of language is a process of shaping an identity because it reflexes a sense about self and sentimentally attached with the learners those who speak it (Rassokha, 2010).

English as the Linguistic Capital and Identity

In the light of English language as a form of linguistic capital Bourdieu`s framework of “forms of capital” is very much essential for understanding the place of English in the globe. Gao (2008) explains that Bourdieu`s notion of linguistics capital is appropriate in examining high stack tests of English language proficiency such as “Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL)” and “ International English Language Testing Service (IELTS)” (Gao, 2008). The English language increasing its status and considered as “global lingua franca” it is beneficial for South Asian countries like Pakistan where it is used in the academic setting and professional development (Shamim, 2011). In the field of TESOL identity is viewed as general but the language and identity is viewed as the centre. Identity denotes the standard of the people their understanding and relationship to the society and their possible future. Norton argues that “Every time language learners exchanging information while speaking and constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of self and their relation with the society” (Norton, 2013, p. 113).

Hence identity cannot be said stagnant because it varies according to the shifting of person`s socio-economical situations. In addition Pavlenko and Norton (2007) stated that identities are imagined by the learners for possible future. So, they invest in the language learning process and preferred identity. All of these certain identities can be viewed as linguistics capital which denotes to the linguistic resources controlled by an individual during process of learning a new language (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). In Pakistani educational setting linguistic capital viewed as a centre for learners` language identities. It is interesting to see how learners construct different identities on the basis of inadequate accumulation of linguistic capital.

Methodology

The current study presents the mixed methods study followed by convergent parallel/concurrent triangulation research design suggested by (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, pp. 209-213). In order to explore, the research questions and draw conclusion. The purpose of conducting mixed methods study is to be aware of ESL learners` language identity construction. The concurrent triangulation design was used to collect the quantitative and qualitative data at the same time, then analysis separately and results of both quantitative and qualitative data are compared and interpreted as shown in the concurrent triangulation or convergent parallel design model (see figure 1).

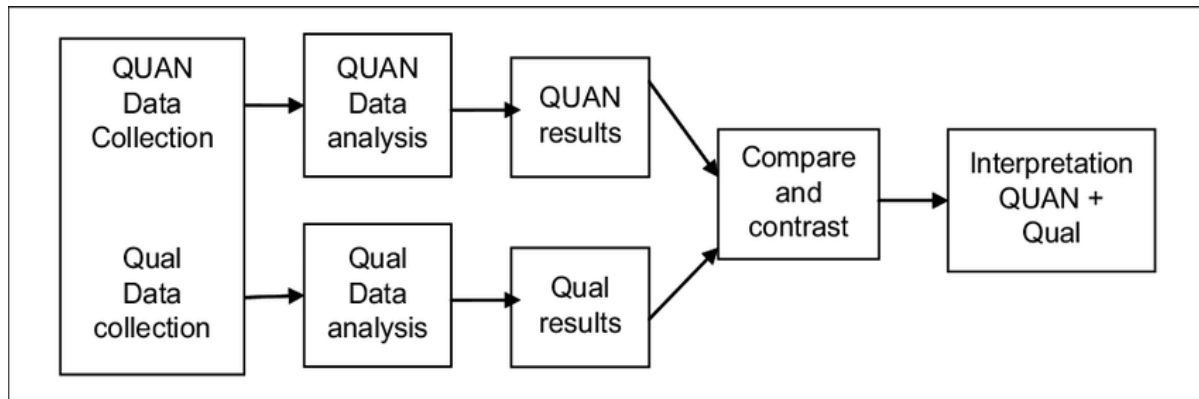


Figure 1 concurrent triangulation or convergent parallel design model

The researcher distributes questionnaire among 200 students by using simple random sampling in the departments of English, Education and Information Technology in order to measure learners' language identity. The questionnaire was based on 20 items and five pointlikert scales were used. The questionnaire was treated as quantitative, analysed and coded by using IBM (SPSS 26th) version for descriptive statistic. The adapted questionnaire of language identity was piloted in the same group of the learners 'and the Cronbach alpha results of questionnaire was measured through inter-item reliability, which is 0.9 well thought-out and very much reliable. The selected participants were 55% male and 45% female. On the other hand semi-structure interviews were conducted from 8 students by using purposive from the department of English for qualitative data. The average time for each interview was 10 to 15 minutes. The interviews were taken individually, audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed by using thematic analysis model suggested by Saldna (2009).

Finding and Discussion

The finding is divided in two parts, in part one results of quantitative data discussed in order to answer research question one, while second part qualitative findings are presented in themes followed by Quantitative findings in order to answer research question two.

Research Question 1: What is the undergraduate ESL learners' language identity for Sindhi/Urdu (L1) and English (L2) at SBBU, SBA?

The responses of the learners on the items of the variables are illustrated in the following tables.

Table 3 Learners' Attachment to the Mother Tongue (L1) in Comparison (L2)

Items	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
The medium of instruction while teaching courses should be English rather than Sindhi/Urdu L1.	46.5%	23.5%	13.0%	9.0%	8.0%

I like to attend English classes with Sindhi/Urdu medium of instructions.	8.5%	15.5%	21.5%	32.5%	22.0%
I love to communicate in English language at university and Sindhi/Urdu language at home.	47.0%	25.5%	11.5%	8.5%	7.5%

Table 3 correspond to the items inquiring related to language identity seek out information regarding learners` attachment to the mother tongue (L1) in comparison English as second language (L2). The findings concerning above mentioned item one reveal that 46.5% learners were strongly agree and 23.5% were agree this shows that learners strongly preferred to learn their courses in English language rather than Sindhi/Urdu. They denied from L1 as a medium of instruction as shown in the second item 32.5% were disagree and 22% were strongly disagree believed that English language to be used in the classroom and preferred English language as medium of instruction rather than L1 Sindh/Urdu language. However, 47% were strongly agree and 25.5% were agree that the learners chose separate language for communication purposes. They gave importance English language at University and Sindh/Urdu language at home according to their culture and use of language.

Table 4 Pronunciation attitude towards (L1 & L2)

Items	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
I think speaking English with a Sindhi/Urdu accent is not bad.	41.0%	30.0%	11.0%	9.5%	8.5%
I feel proud of speaking Sindhi/Urdu with an English pronunciation.	26.0%	32.0%	24.5%	9.0%	8.5%
I like Sindhi/Urdu pronunciation more than English pronunciation.	20.5%	19.5%	24.0%	18.5%	17.5%

Table 4 presents learners` attitude towards (L1 & L2) pronunciation. The findings reveal that 41% learners were strongly agree and 30% agree in the light of item one in the above table the learners favored native language (L1) accent while speaking English language. The item second in the table reflected that 26% learners were strongly agree and 32% were agree it means most of the learners feel proud while speaking English language in L1 accent. A part from this when learners asked regarding their accent of L1 in comparison L2 24% learners were remain neutral however 20.5% were remain strongly agree and 19.5% were agree. On the other hand very close to it 18.5% were disagreed and 17.5% strongly disagree. They preferred equal respect to both languages.

Table 5 Language and Social Status

Items	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
A person who is Speaking English has much more respect social status in the society.	41.5%	33.0%	12.0%	8.0%	5.5%
Knowledge of English language has more social value then L1 Sindhi/Urdu.	41.0%	24.5%	14.5%	11.5%	9.5%
When I speak English I feel, I am superior to others.	32.0%	25.5%	23.5%	10.5%	8.5%

Table 5 presents all above items, in the light of item one 41.% strongly agree and 33% agree put light that a person who is speaking English has much more significance, respect and social status in the society. In terms of item second 41% learners were strongly agree and 24.5% agree it inclined that knowledge of English language provides reverence than mother tongue (L1) Sindhi/Urdu in Pakistani communities. Moreover, in the response to item three 32% learners were strongly agree and 25.5% agree reflected that learners` feel superior while speaking English to other.

Table 6 L1 and L2 Use in the Society

Items	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
I speak English language daily with friends.	21.0%	31.0%	17.0%	18.0%	13.0%
While speaking Sindhi/Urdu as I use English language words.	25.5%	31.0%	11.5%	17.5%	14.5%
I do practice of L1 with L2 speakers who know Sindhi/Urdu.	12.5%	14.0%	10.0%	43.0%	20.5%
In university I often use English language while communication with friend instead of Sindhi/Urdu.	38.5%	24.5%	15.0%	13.5%	8.5%
I read English texts more than Sindhi/Urdu texts.	39.0%	37.0%	37.0%	9.0%	3.5%

Table 6 corresponds the learners daily life use English language 21% learners were strongly agree and 31% learners were agree. This showed that learners` speak English a lot in daily life. However, In terms of use of L2 words while speaking L1 25.5% learners` were strongly agree

and 31% were agree. The outcomes reflect that learners use English language words when they speak their mother tongue Sindhi/Urdu as (L1). When they asked about speaking L1 with foreigners 43% showed disagreement and 20.5 % were strongly disagree. Learners` favoured English language while speaking with the foreigners. In terms of speaking university friends 38.5% were strongly agree and 24.5% were agreeing. The learners` preferred English language while speaking with the friends who know English language. In case of textbook reading 39% learners were strongly agree and 37% agree. The learners` inclined that they read English textbooks more than Sindhi/Urdu.

Table 7 Language Knowledge

Items	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
I like to know about the history of English language in translation of Sindhi/ Urdu language.	34.0%	28.5%	19.0%	11.0%	7.5%
I like to know more about English poets and writers rather than Sindhi/Urdu.	17.5%	17.0%	43.0%	17.0%	6.0%
I read English poetry and stories in Sindhi/Urdu translation.	39.0%	22.5%	17.0%	13.5%	8.0%

Table 7 illustrates the language knowledge, when the learners` asked about history of English language 34% learners` were strongly agree and 28.5% were agreeing that they preferred to know the history of English language by using translated books of English language. But when asked about poets and writers 43% learners were remained neutral. However, learners were equally familiar with the poets and writers of English and Sindhi/Urdu languages. Although when they asked about reading English poetry and stories in L1 translation 39% were strongly agree and 22.5% agree. The learners showed inclination for reading English poetry and stories in Sindhi/Urdu.

Table 8 Script/Alphabet

Items	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
I use English language while writing text message or email.	36.0%	26.5%	14.0%	15.0%	8.5%
I am sentimentally attached with Sindhi/Urdu alphabets in comparison to English.	18.0%	19.0%	12.0%	37.5%	13.0%

I like to write Sindhi/Urdu in (Roman) Latin alphabets.	40.5%	32.0%	11.5%	11.0%	5.0%
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Table 8 demonstrated script, 36% learners were strongly agree and 26.5% agree that the learners gave preference to English language in writing text messages and emails. In the context of learners alphabetical attitudes towards L1 & L2 37.5% learners were disagree with the item or statement. It means they have equally attitude towards L1 & L2. Furthermore, 40.5% learners were strongly agreed and 32% were agreed that they sentimentally attached with their mother tongue but they write Sindhi/Urdu language in (Roman) Latin alphabets.

Research Question 2: How does the L1 identity of the learners at SBBU, SBA interact with their second language (English) language learning?

The use of L1 helps to preserve the linguistics identity of ESL learners

The use of L1 helps learners` to classify the language input, and improve language learning ability. Learners` predict the contextual and literal meaning through their L1. When they use their own language in figure out the English language their understanding and performance always improved and linguistic identity of (L1) interferes while learning English as a target language. This occurs due to dissimilar sociocultural norms and linguistic structures between L1 and target language. Language always shapes an individual`s identity. In the same case our mother tongue is our L1 identity. L1 identity is building new relationship between English language and English language learners. Hence, learners` L1 knowledge is in their brain, which leads learners` to the highest level of L2 use.

The use L1 accent while speaking English in ESL classroom

The accent is a part of identity. Learners` showed attitude towards English language speaking with native language accent. They indicated that their accent represents their Identity. While speaking English language teachers` should use English language with native language accent instead of L1 use in the class. However, they reported that L1 use is also helpful in learning English language but they feel better while speaking English language with their L1 accent.

Use of Code Switching in ESL classrooms

Code switching is often applied by non-native speakers in order to make proper delivery of meaning to listeners/learners since English is not their L1. Learners` preferably, mix languages and that are quite easy to switch from English to local language but also switch L1 to L2. In this process learners` feel free from any ambiguity regarding English language learning. Code switching helps them while speaking and enhances the understanding of the English language. They overcome the hesitation and actively participate during the classes. It develops self-monitoring expertise and helps them while delivering presentation. Learners` don't have enough vocabulary to articulate what they need to say. Code switching helps them in a sense when they speak English language they replace some words or phrases from English to Sindh/Urdu their own languages. This reduces gap in their communication. Since, they are multilingual/bilingual learners so code switching is their motive to know things accordingly. It

conveyed meaning and became the cause of understanding to other speakers. Hence by doing this they construct both language identities.

Discussion

Learners' sociocultural and linguistic identities interfere while learning English as a target language. The findings are in line with Mushtaque and Zaki (2018) learners` inclined that L1 is used in the constructing L2 learners` identity such as L1 accent while speaking English language, use of English language words while speaking L1, reading English language and literature books with L1 translation for better understanding if any who is not good in English language. A part from this, they construct L2 identity by using English language. They believed that knowledge of English language provides reverence than mother tongue (L1) Sindhi/Urdu in Pakistani communities; their perceptions regarding speaking English language were that they feel superior, have respect and social status in the society. So for, they preferred English language while speaking with the foreigners, teachers and friends. They further showed agreement that medium of instruction must be in English language. They may be like to explore English language from the various perspectives. Learners' identity at ESL classrooms is hybrid and mixed. The learners` stated that after degree completion in English will provide a wider-level scope in the national and international market. Furthermore they learnt English at school and college level via translation method which was quite interesting and easy to grasp and learn English language by translating English sentences into L1. Hence identity construction process in the target language echoes with the language use.

Conclusion

Language identity nowadays very much focused in the field of research worldwide and investigated through various methods, tools, and philosophical or logical standpoint. This study was aimed to explore role of mother tongue in constructing second language identity among ESL learners at undergraduate level. The motive of language identity can be understood in a best way with the references to the study of (Anbreen, 2015; Mushtaque & Zaki , 2018; Anbreen, 2015; Norton & Kamal, 2003) in the postcolonial perspectives because English language considered as vernacular and shaped learners identities hybrid. The current study presents that students even they are ESL speaker of English language use knowledge of second language and started to develop their identities and also try to predict themselves through these identities. The learners were paying attention in order to gain proficiency in English language. They remain assured that English will be beneficial at various market places. Learners declared that their mother tongue helps them to understand English language and constructing and understanding identity in ESL context.

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