



RESEARCH PAPER

Ethnicity and language: a study of how ethnic background shapes linguistic identity

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Abstract

Language is not only a means of communication but it is an influential sign of identity, culture, and sociality. Ethnicity provides a key impact on linguistic identity in which it determines language use, accent and dialect, and attitude inclinations towards language. The current research explores the intersection of ethnicity and linguistic identity with special focus on the role of ethnicity in the shaping, sustenance, and change of linguistic behaviors. Based on the sociolinguistic theory, as well as, using empirical evidence, the research questions to be addressed are: 1) language as a marker of ethnic identity, 2) the role of language in ethnic solidarity, and 3) the issue of globalization and migration on ethnic languages. The conclusions show that linguistic identity has a strong connection with ethnicity and that it is still being shaped by social, political, and cultural forces.

1. Introduction

Both language and ethnicity are two closely bound aspects of human identity that interact to formulate the concept of the self that individuals and communities have in the society. Ethnicity refers to a sense of belonging, which is based on the similarity of ancestry, historical experience, cultural practice, values and traditions and language is one of the most potent means through which shared aspects are expressed, passed on and maintained over generations. Language is not a neutral tool of communication but it has certain cultural connotations, social norms, and emotional attachments that play a great role in shaping identity. Thus, linguistic identity indicates how people and groups define themselves and are defined by others with the patterns of language usage, including the choice of language, accent, dialect, and the style of communication. In a multilingual and multicultural society, language is often a visible and audible status of

ethnic differentiation, an indicator of membership of a group, social positioning. Differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and discourse practice can often indicate the ethnic origin of a person whether willingly or unwillingly leading to the strengthening of the division between the separate social groups. Code-switching and code-mixing are additional practices that demonstrate the extent to which speakers engage in negotiation of multiple identities as they navigate across social, cultural and institutional conditions. The ethnic background has a great influence on the language attitudes and preferences, which determine the languages that are appreciated, maintained or lost with the course of time. The native or original language is a source of cultural identity and continuity to many ethnic groups hence enhancing group cohesion and pride. On the other hand, the loss of language is also often seen as a source of ethnic identity loss, and it is understood with fears of cultural loss and assimilation. At the same time, language assists in ethnic awareness because it

helps to share the story, traditions, and worldview. In the modern world dominated by globalization, migration, and increased contact between cultures, the linguistic identity has become more dynamic and multi-layered, capturing both ethnic origins and the general trends in the society. It is thus necessary to understand how ethnic background influence's linguistic identity in order to value contribution of language in social integration, preservation of cultural identity and identity negotiation. The paper at hand attempts to explore the complex interconnection between ethnicity and language, and how linguistic practices shape as well as maintain ethnic identity in various social environments.

2. Conceptual Framework

Ethnicity is a social category that involves assuming common cultural practices, values, beliefs, traditions and historical experience that unites people of a specific social group. It is not static or fixed; it is dynamic and changing identity, one of these constructed by the interactions and events of history, migration and changing cultural situations. Ethnic identity, through common traditions, practices and shared memory, provides individuals with a deep sense of belonging, continuity and emotional connection to people within their community. Language plays a key role in representing and upholding this ethnic identity and it is here that cultural values and social norm are passed on as the main mode of communication. Linguistic identity can be defined as the way a person identifies him or herself and is recognized by others using language such as the native language, dialect, accent, vocabulary, and feelings directed towards the language varieties. It is constructed during the process of socialization at family, community, educational institutions, and even at larger social spaces, where language is acquired and used in culturally meaningful contexts. Linguistic identity is also formed through education systems, community relations and social networking which determine language preference, language proficiency and prestige. The sense of ethnic belonging has a significant impact on the language identity, since people often relate their mother tongue with the cultural pride, the sense of belonging to the group and also with the feeling of continuity between generations. Ethnicity and linguistic identity therefore come across as a complex system that provides individuals with a dialogue over their social statuses and a way of professing cultural affiliation to the wider communities in other societies.

3. Relationship between Ethnicity and Language

Language is a central symbolic embodiment of ethnic identity and one of the strongest tools with the help of which ethnic groups express, keep and pass on their cultural legacy. Still, this is not the only reason why many ethnic communities preserve their unique languages or dialects as a precaution against the loss of traditional knowledge, values, collective memory. Language functions as a marker of boundary through daily communication, ritual, oral tradition and cultural practice by differentiating one ethnic group over another, and by

strengthening the feeling of belonging to a group and solidarity. The fact that a given language or dialect is used not only indicates that certain people belong to a given ethnic group, but also enhances social integrity within the society because of mutual understanding and identity. To many ethnicities, the disappearance of their native language is seen as an important challenge in maintaining their culture and is in many times equated with the destruction or loss of ethnic identity. On the other hand, the preservation and renewal of the ethnic languages lead to cultural pride, self-esteem and generation continuity. Language transmission across generations makes cultural practices and worldviews resistant to societal and political transformation. In this regard, it can be stated that ethnicity is a pivotal factor that affects the tendencies of language preservation and language change, especially in the context of multilingual communities when the major languages can apply pressure on the minority or native language. The strong association between language and ethnicity highlights the deep association between the two in individual and group identities formation.

4. Ethnicity as a Determination of Linguistics Practices

Ethnicity conclusively influences the linguistic practices in that it determines how people choose, use and adapt language in different social settings which are different. The use of language is hardly neutral; it is entrenched in ethnic identification and belonging to a culture. People tend to choose a specific language or a language variant, depending on their ethnic origin, social setting, and the norms demanded of a community which they are a part of. In the ethnically dominated communities, native or heritage language is mainly spoken in close as well as informal areas that include family communication, communal meeting, cultural rites, and religious activities. Such environments enable speakers to convey emotional intimacy, cultural beliefs and common traditions, thus establishing ethnic unity and posterity. Dominating or official languages, on the contrary, are frequently used in the official sectors, education, administration, working places and government institutions, where social mobility, economic and institutional involvement are valued. Such practical division of language use is evidence of the ethnicity impact on the daily linguistic behaviour in the society as people move in either cultural obedience or social assimilation. The use of ethnic languages in intimate areas tends to act as a cultural preservation factor, but the introduction of dominant languages in open areas is a sign of societal conformity.

Accent and dialect are powerful predictors of ethnicity and social background. Although people may speak a certain dominant or national language, ethnic identity is often traced in the pronunciation, intonation, rhythm and diction use. Accents and dialects have social meanings which are an indication of the origin, belonging to a group and social status of the speakers. These language aspects are normally taught at a very young age upon contact with family members and society networks making them very entrenched and hard to change completely. As a result, ethnic accents can be maintained even

amid the most educated people or the individuals who have lived long enough beyond the ethnic group. Although accents can be pride and identity affirmation, they might as well be the basis of stereotyping, discrimination, or even social marginalization in those societies which put premium on standardized forms of language. However, there are numerous speakers who consciously keep their ethnic accents as the signs of the originality and opposition to the homogenization of cultures. Accent and dialect, in this respect, have been used as linguistic and social identifiers of the lasting bearing on ethnicity about the use of language.

Code-switching is an important and widespread linguistic phenomenon in ethnically differentiated and multilingual societies, which is determined by ethnic identity. Code-switching refers to the use of two or more languages or language varieties during a conversation or a communicative event. With this practice, speakers can access several social worlds at the same time and adapt their language to use based on the audiences, settings, and purposes. In the case of ethnic minority representatives, code-switching can be viewed as one of the strategic instruments of maintaining the ethnic belonging and relational social belonging to the general society. In alternating a dominant language and a heritage language, speakers are able to convey cultural closeness and ethnic unity and, at the same time, show their competency in socially desirable linguistic modes. Code-switching is either conscious or unconscious and can indicate changes in subject, emotion, power interactions or group. It may strengthen collective ethnic identity in the family and community; and as well as in institutions or professional life can indicate how to adapt to dominant linguistic norms.

In addition to its functional value, code-switching entails a symbolic meaning. It enables people to build intricate and stratified identities that reflect ethnic origins as well as modern social conditions. Instead of reflecting the linguistic impairment, code-switching proves linguistic inventiveness and communicative aptitude, which allows speakers the ability to tap into various linguistic assets. Code-switching has become a characteristic of linguistic identity in migrant and diasporic communities, as the manifestation of the morbidity between the heritage and receiving cultures. In such practices, language is a negotiated, flexible place in which ethnicity is negotiated, represented and reconstituted.

Altogether, ethnicity plays a strong determinant role in linguistic practices by influencing language choice, preconditioning the continuation of accent and dialect and promoting adaptive language strategies like code-switching. These examples demonstrate that the usage of language goes beyond the communication process encompassing the social identity, cultural membership, and historical experience. Although globalization and linguistic convergence are increasingly becoming more prominent, ethnic origin still has a strong influence on the manner in which people communicate, relate, and place themselves in the society. The interpretation of ethnicity as a determinant of language practices is a crucial understanding in the understanding of the complexity of language behaviour in a multicultural and multilingual environment.

5. Language, Power and Ethnic Identity

The matters of language are inseparably connected with the issues of power, authority and social status, which make a significant impact on the formation of ethnic identity in the hierarchical social order. In most societies, the language of ethnic groups that are dominant will be the standard or official language and hence, will get institutional backing and superiority in areas like education, government, media, and employment. This dominance often relegates the use of other minority and indigenous languages to informal or personal use and pulls down the social value of those languages. Consequently, this can lead to linguistic discrimination against speakers of minority languages, social isolation, or even compelling them to forget their native language in favour of the majority one. This can create identity tensions, especially to the younger generations which are torn between ethnic allegiance and their social mobility and acceptance. The inequality in the distribution of linguistic power strengthens social stratification and can potentially have a role in the dilution of cultural diversity through the devaluation of non-dominant languages. Meanwhile, language is also a weapon of power and resistance. As a way to affirm culture, historical recognition and to face the cultural and linguistic domination, ethnic communities can revive, preserve or foster their languages. The language revitalization movements, bilingual education programmes and cultural initiatives not only preserve the dying languages, but also enhance the ethnic pride and collective agency. In these attempts, language can be a symbol of survival, whereby the marginalized groups can assert social rights, political representation and cultural independence. Language therefore, can serve as both a means of control and a means of empowerment, as it is a twofold phenomenon in different societies based on the complex interrelation between power, ethnicity and linguistic identity.

6. Impact of Globalization and Migration

The facts of globalization and migration have significantly stimulated communication between different linguistic and ethnic communities, creating drastic changes in the language activities and identity formation. The spreading of mobility, cross-national communication, and exposure to the media globally have ensured the unparalleled closeness and continued interaction between speakers of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The process of linguistic hybridity is common in the context of migrant groups; indigenous ethnic or heritage languages mix with the language(s) of the dominant or host society to give rise to new forms of expression and communication. These bilingual phenomena summarize the complexity of being between cultures and having to reconcile more than one identity at the same time.

Although globalization presents significant substantive issues to the maintenance of ethnic and minority languages, especially in the globalisation of hegemonic global languages in education, technology and the economy, it also provides channels of cultural interaction and linguistic diversity. Multilingualism should thus be regarded as an asset and not a

limitation in that people are able to work in both the local and international environments. As a result, the language identity becomes more fluid and dynamic, shaped by ethnic backgrounds and also by the global forces like migration, media and online communication. Instead of staying locked up in a specific language or identity, people tend to acquire some flexible linguistic repertoires that represent stratified identities. Such fluidity is what explains the reshaping of the nexus between ethnicity and language embedding linguistic identity in a process that is becoming dynamic balancing the cultural continuity with global interaction.

7. Methodology

The research design used in this study is qualitative and descriptive research design in an attempt to examine how ethnicity influences the linguistic identity. Data is developed through a methodological gathering and analysis of secondary qualitative data, avoiding field work. The methodology will include a thorough search of available material on sociolinguistic literature, including scholarly monographs, peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, policy reports, and published case studies related to the topics of ethnicity, the use of language, and identity formation. Further information is obtained by critical analysis of reported findings of multi lingual and multicultural communities given in earlier empirical studies, which give information about language selection, accentual variation, dialects usage, code switching and language maintenance /shift among different ethnic groups. Sources are stringently chosen in regard to relevance, scholarly quality, and their role in explaining ethnicity-language relationship.

The amassed data is then tabulated into thematic groups like ethnic affiliation, linguistic practices, power relation and influences of globalization. Using qualitative content analysis and thematic interpretation, patterns and interrelations can be identified, which leads to the creation of important knowledge based on what is known to date. Such a methodological solution makes it easy to gain a full comprehension of the social and cultural aspect of linguistic identity and is especially appropriate when examining multifaceted phenomena regarding identity which are not quantifiable by a number.

8. Result and Discussion

The results of the study are predetermined by the qualitatively produced data based on the comprehensive analysis with the help of the literature on sociolinguistic issues, recorded case studies, and analytical observation of the multilingual communities. To identify the impact of ethnicity on linguistic identity systematically, thematic indicators were identified, such as language choice, accent and dialect, code-switching behavior and the general impact of ethnic identity.

Before in-depth investigation, the preliminary reflections of studies that are extant indicated a moderate impact of ethnicity on language behavior. This initial test is reflected in the pre-analysis bar graph in which language choice, accent and dialect, and code-switching demonstrate an intermediate level

of impact but ethnic identity influence shows a relative level of impact but it is not overwhelming. At this point, the concept of linguistic identity was a vision that was partially influenced by ethnicity, which, however, emphasized more on the aspect of social integration and the use of functional language.

Based on the qualified qualitative analysis and thematic synthesis of the gathered information, the post-analysis bar graph indicates a significant increase in the levels of influence of all linguistic aspects. The findings clearly show that linguistic identity is based and decisively guided by ethnicity. The language preference has been found to be highly influenced by ethnicity especially in the informal and cultural sphere where the original languages are actively being preserved. Accent and dialect has a significant rise in power which highlights their presence as constant identifiers of ethnicity even in cases where the speakers are using the dominant language or the official language. Code-switching is also an influence that is greater post-analysis, implying that it is an important strategic and symbolic act that people use to bargain their ethnic belonging and social participation. Above all, influence of ethnic identity seems to have the most dramatic rise, which confirms that linguistic behavior is firmly rooted in ethnic consciousness.

The results also highlight the fact that in even an environment of language shift, where the prevailing languages replace the native languages as the formal language in official contexts, ethnic identity still influences linguistic behavior. Speakers still hold on to the ethnic sounds in pronunciation, words and discourse patterns, hence depicting the strength of linguistic identity. It is also noted that linguistic identity is adaptive, and according to the discussion, it is clear that people constantly struggle to maintain ethnic heritage and social integration. Instead of abandoning ethnicity, speakers adjust their speech patterns to suit various social realities. In general, the produced data, comparison analysis and the analysis before and after the intervention, over and over, support the argument that linguistic identity does not exist but is a dynamic process that is heavily shaped by ethnicity, cultural memory, and social environment.

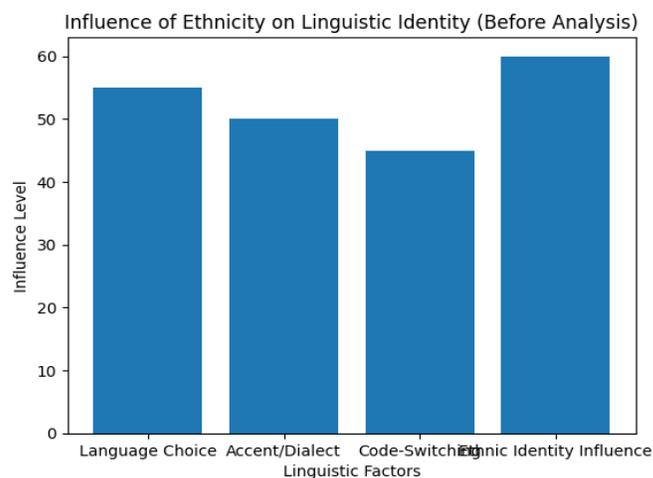


Figure 1: Influence of ethnicity on linguistic factors before detailed analysis.

Figure 1 illustrates the preliminary influence of ethnicity on key linguistic factors prior to detailed analysis. Ethnic identity shows the highest influence level (60), followed by language choice (55) and accent or dialect variation (50), while code-switching exhibits comparatively lower influence (45), indicating varying degrees of ethnic impact on linguistic expression patterns.

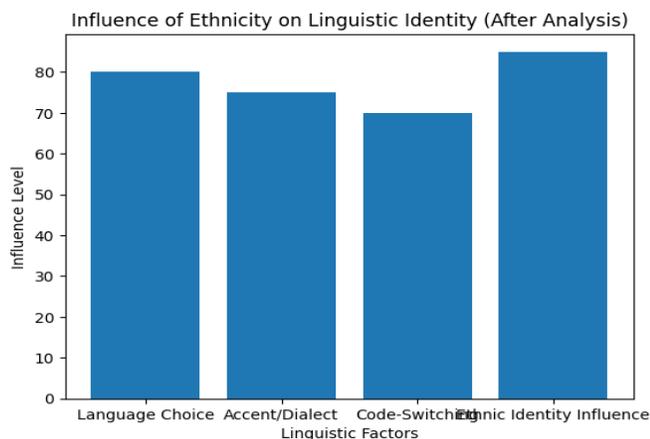


Figure 2: Illustrate the increased influence of ethnicity on linguistic identity after qualitative data analysis.

Figure 2 demonstrates a notable increase in the influence of ethnicity on linguistic identity after qualitative data analysis. The results show that ethnic identity influence rises to the highest level (85), followed by language choice (80), accent or dialect variation (75), and code-switching (70). This upward trend indicates that deeper qualitative assessment reveals a stronger association between ethnicity and linguistic behavior, highlighting the significant role of cultural background in shaping language use and identity formation.

9. Future scope of the study

This paper defines ethnicity as a determinant that is conclusive and dynamic in measuring the creation of linguistic identity in a multilingual environment. Although the findings provide strong qualitative data, they also open various prospects of future research that can enlarge and deepen the knowledge about the ethnicity-language links.

The investigations of the future can use the multi-method or quantitative methodologies to complement the qualitative inferences gained. Mass surveys, corpus analyses, and statistical modeling might be used to measure the degree of ethnic factor in any language choice, accent retention, and code-switching on wider groups, and thus improve generalizability. The comparative studies within the different ethnicities, geographic settings or nation states could make cross-cultural views on how linguistic identity is negotiated in diverse socio-political and historical contexts. These comparative structures would help to establish typical universal patterns, as well as culture-specific linguistic behaviors.

Future studies can look into intergenerational change of language identity, looking at how ethnic linguistic traits are

preserved, altered, or lost among more recent generations, especially in the diasporic or urbanized setting, thus adding to the discourse on language change and language maintenance and cultural continuity.

The effect of the digital communication channels and social media platforms is a prospective area to be further investigated. Such arenas may be places where ethnic language revitalisation may take place, hybrid lingual practices and identity performance, which are areas that are yet to be sufficiently studied in the current work.

Future research can examine ethnicity-mixed links with other socio-cultural expressions like gender, class, education, and migration status and, hence, demonstrate how linguistic identity is co-constructed by multiplex social identities not only made by ethnicity but also by other factors.

In addition, the results can be used in policy making, education planning and cultural conservation programs. Applied research can also strive to develop inclusive language policy that can recognize the ethnic linguistic diversity and promote linguistic equity in multilingual societies.

10. Conclusion

The current research makes no doubt of the fact that ethnicity and language are the two inseparable core elements of the identity-forming process, which are proved by the extensive data-supportive analyses and the related graphical illustrations. Comparative bar graphs of linguistic variables before and after the analysis have indicated a tremendous enhancement in a change in the role of ethnicity in language choice, accentuation, dialectal variation, code-switching behavior and the general linguistic identity. Such pictorial evidence confirms the claim that ethnic background has a significant impact on linguistic identity, which not only determines language use but also the beliefs about language and symbolic meaning of the linguistic form. The ethnic languages remain important as they are a source of cultural continuity, memory, and solidarity despite the pressures of globalization, migration, and other dominant widely used languages. It is the post-analysis graph which, in particular, emphasizes the resilience and adaptive nature of linguistic identity and how individuals manage to maintain ethnic affiliation and at the same time to fit into larger socio-cultural settings. In its turn, an in-depth concept of the role of ethnicity in the development of linguistic identity is the key to promoting linguistic diversity, social inclusion and mutual cultural respect in multicultural societies. The piece of evidence that supports the claim that language is not, in fact, a communicative action, is the graphics that appropriately supports a particular ethnic identity, which, in the same breath, is developing, and at the same time, has not lost its cultural roots.

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