Impact of social identity on second language learning anxiety: The Pakistani perspective

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Abstract

The language learners in Pakistan are required to get adequate knowledge of English language in order to strive for a better future. It has been investigated that in few parts of the world the learners are inclined towards their social identity, culture, tradition and values which sometimes hinder them to speak foreign language. It has been observed by the linguists that social identity is a cause of anxiety in second language learners in different parts of the world. Due to inclination towards their own language, the students become reluctant to use another language which ultimately makes them anxious and less proficient learners. This study has been conducted to investigate whether social identity is also a cause of anxiety in second language learning in Pakistan. The researchers have focused the main and core issues of identity which are stuck in the minds of the language learners when they learn English language.

Keywords: *Social Identity, Language learning Anxiety, Pakistani Students, Second Language Learners, Southern Punjab*

1. Introduction

The way of people to understand themselves in comparison to others making a relationship with their past and future comes under the discussion of social identity (Peirce, 1995). In second language learning, the connection of social identity is close to the language proficiency of the learners. It has been observed that anxiety of the language learners is increased due to the difference of their social views with the aspects of language. Language develops a triangular relationship between the identity of the learners and language & the learner. While speaking a second language, the language user hardly search for words and expressions but makes an effort to influence the listener. There is a combination of various social and psychological factors that play a vital role in learning a language.(Jing and Jianbin 2007). The elements of respect, obedience and complete understanding are always present in the mind of the speaker. In a similar way, while using second language the learners get themselves involved socially and psychologically in the speech.

The researchers have, therefore, focused to find out the realities related to the identities of the second language learners which impede the progress of second language learning.

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2. Review of the related literature

Defining social identity

Distinction in the group of language learner and the group of second language or target language is frequently referred to the term "Social" (Schumann**,** 1976**).**

Generally, Identity is a term in which one question is asked "Who am I?" It tells us about ourselves and our relations with the social world. Identity is also referred to subjectivity which has been described by the post-structural theorists (Norton, 2011).

Social identity theory and language learning

Social identity theory describes that our social identity plays a vital role in the use of language that comes from our social comparison with other groups (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

It is further described by Tjfel (1982) that an individual's identity has many constituents but psycholinguistic ethnicity is an important one. Ethno linguistic theory can be used to explain the relationship in an individual's identity and language use. Vitality, group boundaries and compound group attachment are three variables that affect the social identity and language use according to ethno-linguistic theory. Vitality is linked to the langue used by a particular group and its social identification. Perception of ethnic categorization is linked to 'group boundaries' and the thinking of an individual to have relationship with another group is termed as 'compound group attachment'. All three variables have different effect on different learners depending upon the ways the learners live.

There is a unanimous acceptance by a number of linguists that language is a symbol of racial identity Wigglesworth (2005). A debate has been carried out in the previous two decades that there is a relationship between language and identity. A group that has a strong group identification considers language a vital sign of identity. By using this identification, language can be translated into bigger use (Giles and Johnson, 1987).

The educational performance of the learners is affected by the identity of the learners. Language learning and level of learners' learning is affected by the identity of the learner (Giles & Johnson, 1987; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Bracher, 2002; Cummins, 1996; Cummins, 2000).

By using language, the individuals of a community show their identity and association of their group. The identity of the individual as well as the group is developed by language (Ochs**,** 1993).

It is the language that develops our attitude and identity which we speak. Development of a few critical features of our identity and our personal analysis are developed by our language. Language is not only restricted to the reality that people judge us by our language but we judge ourselves from the language (Bialystok and Hakuta, 1994).

Language is not only a source of communication but it is considered as a base of strength and power which is used by its users to preserve their interests and practical capability. Linguistics habits and linguistic groups have a closer link with the words used by the speakers of a particular group and the linguistic utterances of the linguistic groups. The speakers of a social group adjust their words and speech according to the situation where they speak (Bourdieu, 1991).

Toohey (2001) conducted a three years' study of long ethnography in Canada. She conducted the study from kindergarten to second grade. The main theme of her study was to investigate the

involvement of the students in classroom activities and their way to understand English language. She focused on teachers' practice, development of identity, distribution resource and discursive association. English language learning, classroom activities and educational understanding of the learners are found to be increased by the participation of the learners in social interactions and status of the learners. A wider range of social identity and proficiency in target language use.

3. Research design

This is a questionnaire-based study in which 13 items have been addressed to the participants for their opinion. A total of 250 participants were selected from the two public sector universities of southern Punjab. All the participants selected were doing their MA in English Literature and Linguistics and were enrolled in 3rd semester.

The validity of the questionnaire is found 0.70.

4. Findings

Each table describes the mean and frequency of the observed data against every item of the questionnaire.

SA= Strongly Agree, A=Agree, SD=Strongly Disagree, DA=Disagree, UD=Undecided

Table 1. I am proud of my country

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
Male	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
	32	43.8	8	11.0	40	54.8	10	13.7	11	15.1	21	28.8	12	16.4	3.34
Female	56	44.1	14	11.0	70	55.1	25	19.7	11	8.7	36	28.4	21	16.5	3.60
Total	88	44.0	22	11.0	110	55.0	35	17.5	22	11.0	57	28.5	33	16.5	3.29

It was a general statement which was asked to know the inclination of the participants towards their country and its cultural values. The mean of remained 3.34 for male and 3.29 for females.

Table 2. My aim is to contribute for the development of my country

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
Male	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
	44	60.3	27	37.0	71	97.2	0	0	1	1.4	2	2.8	1	0.8	3.62
Female	74	58.3	50	39.4	124	98.4	1	0.8	0	0	1	2.4	2	2.4	3.60
Total	118	59.0	77	38.5	195	97.5	1	1.0	1	1.5	3	2.5	3	0.0	3.61

The response rate has shown that all the participants of both the genders have a great wish to upgrade the status of their country in the modern world. The mean of remained 3.62 for male and 3.60 for females.

Table 3. I love to watch TV programs broadcasted in Urdu

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
Male	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
	31	42.5	10	13.7	41	56.2	10	13.7	9	12.3	19	26.0	13	17.8	3.38
Female	40	31.5	23	18.1	63	49.6	15	11.8	17	13.4	32	25.2	32	25.2	3.45
Total	71	35.5	33	16.5	104	52.0	25	12.5	26	13.0	51	25.5	45	22.5	3.42

The participants responded that they like to watch programs broadcasted in Urdu language and they hardly watch the programs broadcasted in English language. The mean of remained 3.38 for male and 3.45 for females.

Table 4. While using Urdu language I feel myself relaxed

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
Male	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
	27	37.0	10	13.7	37	50.7	12	16.4	12	16.4	24	32.8	12	16.4	3.21
Female	44	34.6	12	9.4	56	44.0	25	19.7	23	18.1	48	37.8	23	18.1	3.13
Total	71	35.5	22	11.0	93	46.5	37	18.5	35	17.5	72	36.0	35	17.5	3.16

Response rate depicts that the male participants are more inclined to use Urdu language whereas the female participants are comparatively less inclined towards the use of Urdu language. The mean of remained 3.21 for male and 3.13 for females.

Table 5. I believe I cannot express my ideas accurately in English.

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
Male	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
	29	39.7	24	32.9	53	72.6	6	8.2	4	5.5	10	13.7	10	13.7	3.45
Female	48	37.8	34	26.8	82	64.6	14	11.0	11	8.7	25	19.7	20	15.7	3.39
Total	77	38.5	58	29.0	135	62.5	20	10.0	15	7.5	35	17.5	30	15.0	3.41

A majority of the participants agreed that they think they should not express their ideas in English language. The tendency has been found greater in male participants than the female participants. The mean of remained 3.45 for male and 3.39 for females.

Table 6. My social status is up to the mark of the learners who use English language

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
Male	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
	27	37.0	14	19.2	41	56.2	10	13.7	6	8.2	16	21.9	16	21.9	3.45
Female	52	40.9	21	16.5	73	57.4	18	14.2	9	7.1	27	21.3	27	21.3	3.48
Total	79	39.5	35	17.5	114	57.0	28	14.0	15	7.5	43	21.5	43	21.5	3.47

The response rate is found to be higher in females than male candidates. The mean of remained 3.45 for male and 3.48 for females.

Table 7. I live in a community where English is taken as language of higher class

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
Male	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
	29	39.7	15	20.5	44	60.2	12	16.4	4	5.5	16	21.9	13	17.8	3.37
Female	47	37.0	22	17.3	69	54.3	21	16.5	15	11.8	36	28.3	22	17.3	3.27
Total	76	38.0	37	18.5	113	56.5	33	16.5	19	9.5	52	26.0	35	17.5	3.31

The response rate is higher in males than female participants. The mean of remained 3.37 for male and 3.27 for females.

Table 8. I want Urdu to become an international language

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
Male	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
	33	45.2	12	16.4	45	61.6	6	8.2	9	12.3	15	20.5	13	17.8	3.52
Female	40	31.5	19	14.9	59	46.4	25	19.7	29	22.8	54	42.5	14	11.0	2.91
Total	73	36.5	31	15.5	104	52.0	31	15.5	38	19.0	69	34.5	27	13.5	3.13

A high percentage of male participants agreed that Urdu should become international language. On the other hand, the female participants did not agree with the percentage as the male did. Collectively, the ratio of both the genders 'comparatively' remained less from the other statements which were asked. The mean of remained 3.52 for male and 2.91 for females.

Table 9. I am enthusiastic to live in my own country

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
Male	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
	25	34.2	10	13.7	35	47.9	12	16.4	16	21.9	28	38.3	10	13.7	3.07
Female	43	33.9	14	11.0	57	44.9	24	18.9	28	22.0	52	40.9	18	14.2	3.02
Total	68	34.0	24	12.0	92	46.0	36	18.0	44	22.0	80	40.0	28	14.0	3.04

This question has found a less ratio of the participants from both the genders who agreed with the statement. Female participants have shown less enthusiasm to live in their own country as compared to male participants. The mean of remained 3.07 for male and 3.02 for females.

Table 10. I believe all the languages are equally important

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
Male	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
	29	39.7	13	17.8	42	57.5	9	12.3	12	16.4	21	28.7	10	13.7	3.26
Female	41	32.3	19	15.0	60	47.2	24	18.9	19	15.0	43	33.9	24	18.9	3.17
Total	70	35.0	32	16.0	102	51.0	33	16.5	31	15.5	64	32.0	34	17.0	3.21

A less number of female participants agreed with the statement as compared to male participants. The mean of remained 3.26 for male and 3.17 for females.

Table 11. I always translate the lectures in Urdu to understand the concepts

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
Male	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	3.56
	33	45.2	14	19.2	47	64.4	5	6.8	8	11.0	13	17.8	13	17.8	
Female	52	40.9	30	23.6	82	64.5	15	11.8	11	8.7	26	20.5	19	15.0	3.39
Total	88	44.0	44	22.0	129	64.5	20	10.0	19	9.5	39	19.5	32	16.0	3.45

A high percentage of both the genders agreed that they translate the lectures in Urdu language in order to better understand them. The mean of remained 3.56 for male and 3.39 for females.

Table 12. I frequently mix words of English language when I speak in Urdu language

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
Male	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	3.30
	32	43.8	10	13.7	42	57.5	15	20.5	4	5.5	19	26.0	12	16.4	
Female	54	42.5	24	18.9	78	61.4	17	13.4	10	7.9	27	21.3	22	17.3	3.43
Total	86	43.0	34	17.0	120	60.0	32	16.0	14	7.0	46	23.0	34	17.0	3.38

The participants responded that they frequently mix words of English in their daily speaking and conversation. The mean of remained 3.30 for male and 3.43 for females.

Table 13. I feel myself a civilized and cultured citizen when I express my feelings and ideas in Urdu language

	Agreed						Disagreed								Mean
Male	SA		A		Total		SD		DA		Total		UD		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	3.07
	26	35.6	9	12.3	33	47.9	16	21.9	11	15.1	27	37.0	11	15.1	
Female	39	30.7	17	13.4	56	44.1	26	20.5	19	15.0	45	35.5	26	20.5	3.16
Total	65	32.5	26	13.0	91	45.5	42	21.0	28	14.0	72	36.0	37	18.5	3.12

Most of the participants responded that they feel proud of their language and they consider it as part of their culture and civilization. The mean of remained 3.07 for male and 3.16 for females.

5. Frequency and significance

The frequency and significance of all the statements of the questionnaire are analyzed to make a comparison of learners' identity and proficiency in English language learning.

Statements	F	Sig.
I am proud of my country.	.066	.797
My aim is to contribute for the development of my country.	.109	.741
I love to watch TV programs broadcasted in Urdu.	.115	.735
While using Urdu language I feel myself relaxed.	.121	.728
I believe I cannot express my ideas accurately in English.	.156	.693
My social status is up to the mark of the learners who use English language.	.022	.882
I live in a community where English is taken as language of higher class.	.275	.600
I want Urdu to become an international language.	10.5	.001
I am enthusiastic to live in my own country.	.050	.823
I believe all the languages are equally important.	.193	.661
I always translate the lectures in Urdu to understand the concepts.	1.051	.307
I frequently mix words of English language when I speak in Urdu language.	.421	.517
I feel myself a civilized and cultured citizen when I express my feelings and ideas in Urdu language.	.178	.673

The F value in the analysis remained 0.022 as the lowest value and 10.499 as the highest value in the table. On the other hand, the significance value in the table remained 0.001 the lowest value and 0.823 the highest value in the column of significance.

6. Discussion

Social status and social identity of the learners is linked to each other. The learners with high social status want to keep their social high place in the society by equipping themselves with everything that is considered a symbol of high status. English language in Pakistan is a believed to be the language of elite and high class. Therefore, the learners with high social status are inclined to learn English language. This study explores the same phenomenon of learning English language in the learners of comparatively low social status. Psychologically, the inclination of the people living in a society moves towards acquiring the knowledge which is thought to show high status. In this regard, the learners of high and low social status have got equal inclination to learn English language because of the importance and status of English language.

It is natural to have respect for national and mother languages. This study has explored this fact that, although, the learners want to acquire English language but their respect and love for their national language is far superior.

7. Conclusion

Social status and social identity are directly proportional each other. The higher the social status of a learner is, the higher is his/her tendency to acquire English language to maintain high value in the society. Psychologically, the learners with low social status, are inclined to their mother tongue and the learners with higher social status are reluctant to use their national language. The social and psychological factors collectively influence the performance of the second language learners by developing their identities.

Further studies will elaborate the approach of the second language learners towards their identities, cultures and languages. A lot of research is required to make a general hypothesis about the impact of identity on second language learning in less developed areas.

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