



RESEARCH PAPER**Language Choices in Varying Sociocultural Contexts: Understanding How EFL Learner Agency Shapes Language Preferences in Pakistan**

¹Niaz Hussain Soomro* and ²Saira Niaz

1. Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, GC University Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author | soomroniaz9@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines how sociocultural factors and individual agency shape language choices among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Pakistan. In a multilingual and multicultural society, EFL learners face distinct challenges, encountering diverse language expectations in various social settings. The research investigates how learners' language choices are influenced by regional linguistic diversity, cultural norms, and personal goals, spanning formal, professional, casual, and domestic interactions. Using a mixed-methods approach with surveys and semi-structured interviews, the study captures perspectives from learners with linguistic backgrounds including Urdu, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, and Brahui. Findings reveal that learners exercise significant agency, adapting their language use based on context, societal expectations, and peer influence. The study recommends that language education policies in Pakistan recognize learner autonomy and sociocultural contexts to enhance multilingual competence. Such policies can better support EFL learners' ability to navigate Pakistan's complex linguistic landscape effectively.

KEYWORDS

English as a Foreign Language Learners, Intelligibility, Language Choice, Language Preferences, Learner Agency

Introduction

Human agency is a capability of individuals in which they may act independently and make their own choices. According to Bandura (2006), in the role of an agent an individual can "influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances ... People are self-organising, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting" (p. 164). From human agency perspective, individuals are not simply the passive product of their behaviour but they contribute, in a variety of ways, towards their own life circumstances with their approaches (Deters, 2011; LoCastro, 2001). This notion also relates to making choices in language learning and use wherein the individuals as learners can make decisions regarding which language to learn including when and where to use/avoid it (Chen, Broucher and Kraus, 2011). Bandura (2006, p. 164) further discusses four properties of human agency:

(a) Intentionality: According to this intentionality, individuals can form their intentions to devise action plans to realise their pursuits.

(b) Forethought: This category of agency includes the 'future-directed plans' by which individuals can set their goals and may work towards achieving the likely outcomes. Thus, they become motivated to achieve their goals.

(c) Self-reactiveness: In addition to intending and fore-thinking, the individuals as agents can also regulate their own course of actions and regulate their behaviour.

(d) Self-reflectiveness: According to this property of agency, individuals can also examine their self-efficacy as well as functioning.

Therefore, relating the four properties of human agency to foreign language learning and use, individuals can intend and plan to learn English. If motivated for some achievement, they can execute such learning as well as refine and improve their language skills with their own effort. Furthermore, they can make the choices of language use based on the situation in a language socialisation. Bandura (2006) also suggests that, despite having agency, people may not remain fully autonomous in their actions. Rather, their functioning remains socially situated in which they also reciprocate in social interactions. Thus, if learners view other people around them benefitting from learning and use of English and if such behaviour is not perceived as a threat, they would likely be motivated for learning and speaking English (Dörnyei, 2005; Trudell, 2005). As opposed to Phillipson's (1992) notion of linguistic imperialism in which learning a foreign language is viewed as imposed by foreign powers, the notion of learner agency highlights the importance of learner choices. Holliday (2009) suggested that learner as non-native speakers in the periphery may also want to use English as a Lingua Franca. Therefore, this study draws upon the language choices of participants from a learner agency perspective. As the linguistic profile of Pakistan shows, English language is associated with power and prestige and because of the status attached to it, English is also considered a passport to privilege in the country.

Literature Review

While Pakistan has long been rich in terms of having multilingual landscape, where Urdu, English, and regional languages coexist and often compete in educational, professional, and social spheres. Language choices in the sociocultural context of Pakistan, particularly from the perspective of learner agency, would involve examining how learners in Pakistan navigate, negotiate, and exercise control over their language choices within diverse cultural, social, and educational settings. Having a complex sociolinguistic environment shaped by historical, cultural, and political forces, English, Urdu, and regional languages hold different social statuses, impacting learners' language choices and experiences.

Historically, the English language came through the British rule in India and has continued to be an important language since the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Researchers take the view that English has become the need of the day in Pakistan now. English has also been used as a mark of fashion for rich educated classes of people (Schiffman, 2003; Talaat, 2003). They do not like to use their mother tongues in formal gatherings. They like watching English movies and reading English newspapers such as the *DAWN*, *The Times*, and *The Nation* and listening to English music, wearing coat and neck tie, wearing trousers and shirts instead of local *Shalwar and Kameez* (the cultural dress of Pakistanis), is the fashion of the day (Rahman, 1995a, 1996, 2007, 2008). English is used as the medium of instruction at college and university level education. Although English is not taught at the primary level in state schools, there are a number of private English medium schools which provide education from grade 1, with children aged 5, in urban areas of Pakistan. The state schools teach English as a subject from grade 6 (children aged 11) onwards in high schools grade 6 to 10 (children aged 11-15). After 10 years of education, English becomes the medium of instruction in all the educational institutes regardless of whether they are in the state or private sector.

As Rahman (1995b, 2001) noted, English is also the preferred language in education because science books and research are published in English and the linguists of Urdu or the regional language cannot translate and coin all the terms of science in their own language and translate all the books and journals which otherwise are easily available in English. Even when, in the 1950s, there was a plan to introduce a policy for education in 'Urdu Only', the government could not find a better substitute for resources in English (Rahman, 2005). The report of the National Commission of Education Reforms published in 1959 states:

Living as we do in a highly competitive age, where the pace of advance in scientific knowledge, discovery and invention is so rapid as to it impossible for any nation to be self-sufficient, Pakistan cannot shut itself up in isolation and must provide for the study of a well-developed foreign language in its education system' (Moss, 1964, p. 64)

With limited sources of linguistic terms and facilities for the linguists, it never seemed possible to translate all the previous and current contributions of knowledge and research into Urdu or any regional language of Pakistan to replace English. Even the constitution of Pakistan is written in English. English is used for official purposes from basic to high levels in written documentation. It is used in the civil administration and the bureaucracy, which includes both the federal and the four provincial governments (Rahman, 1997a, 1997b, 2002, 2005, 2008; Rasool and Mansoor, 2007). In trade and commerce, English is used together with Urdu in a bilingual context keeping the rural and urban traders in mind. Local companies use Urdu, whereas multinational enterprises use English. In advertising, too, both languages are used in posters, sign boards, pamphlets, newspapers, and electronic media (Siddiqui, 2012). English is also the source of official interaction in the armed forces, banks, business, and the courts although the sessions courts of all the provinces are bilingual, or sometimes trilingual because of the political influence of the regional languages. However, the courts at the upper level, the High Courts of the four provinces and the Supreme Court of Pakistan, use English for all the proceedings.

It is noteworthy that English is not a common language of communication in villages or small towns in which even senior officials speak either the vernacular or Urdu for communication with the general public. In order to educate their own children, such officials send them to the major cities for education or to the regional state public English medium schools. So, while English has played a dynamic role in some development of the country, it has also played the role of reinforcing class differences among the people of the nation. To date, English has remained restricted to a particular class of people who have access to or links with it in some way and through higher education, high profile official jobs or business. Thus, English has a significant role with regard to power and prestige (Ferguson, 1996; Lee, 2009; Tollefson, 1995; Yates, 2011) and is a source of survival in jobs for many people (Mahboob, 2002; Rahman, 2007). Additionally, English is expanding in Pakistan as electronic media, with satellite channels, mobile phones, the internet, and growing rural-urban contact seem to be playing a supportive role in the spread of English to larger numbers of people in Pakistan, compared with the last fifty years of the twentieth century. Looking at the growing role of English language in the educational and social domains of contact, it seems that such a role may be influential on the attitudes of people towards English. However, this development has not been free of controversies and political differences in the country also, ultimately, affecting language choice connected with learner agency. Learner agency refers to individuals' ability to make decisions and take control over their learning environments, including language choices. In Pakistan, learners exercise agency by selecting languages based on context, such as choosing English in academic or professional settings while using Urdu or a regional language for personal or community interactions.

Shamim (2010) explored how Pakistani students make strategic language choices in schools and universities, influenced by socioeconomic backgrounds and future aspirations. Learners often adapt to English-dominated academic environments while maintaining native languages to connect with family and community. Language is closely tied to identity, and learners in Pakistan frequently navigate complex identities by choosing different languages in different settings. They may adopt English to align with globalized, modern identities or use regional languages to affirm cultural heritage. Rahman (2004) analyzed how language choice in Pakistan is a form of identity negotiation, particularly for young learners who are caught between the pressures of globalization and cultural preservation. These studies show that language choice is often a conscious exercise of agency to balance personal and societal expectations.

Pakistan's language policies significantly affect learners' agency. English-medium education is prioritized in urban areas, while regional or Urdu-medium institutions are more common in rural areas, leading to disparities in language proficiency and opportunities. Thereby, the effects of these educational policies on language choice and learner agency. They suggest that policy-driven language hierarchies limit learners' agency by pushing them toward English, sometimes at the expense of their native languages. A critical approach examines how power dynamics shape language choice and agency in Pakistan, where English often holds an elitist status. Learners' agency may be restricted by social pressures to conform to English-dominant norms in academia and professional fields. Talat (2003) earlier offered a critical lens on how language hierarchies constrain or empower learners. This body of work highlights the ways in which learners resist or conform to these dynamics through their language choices. In such a scenario, it is pertinent to understand with empirical evidence pertaining to lived experiences of tertiary students how they perceive and practice language choices in different domains of language use from learner agency perspectives.

Material and Methods

This study adopted a largely qualitative approach to mixed methods design in the current study by combining questionnaire and interview data. This approach has not been common in mixed methods design especially in language attitude studies. Hesse-Biber (2010), in the preface of her book, titled "Mixed methods research: Merging theory with practice", argues that the majority of mixed methods designs generally follow a positivist standpoint with more focus on 'evidence-based' research. In such a scenario, "qualitative approaches to mixed methods remain marginalised in mainstream books and articles on the topic" (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. vi). However, if a perspective seemingly remains ignored in a research practice, it does not mean that it does not have the potential to be implemented. Emphasising the importance and possibility of a qualitative approach to mixed methods research, Hesse-Biber (2010) suggests that such an approach is compatible with many theoretical traditions of qualitative research.

Individuals are important as as the meaning-makers without seeking to ignore the complexity of the beliefs and preference they report with reference to social variables such as their identity, culture, mother tongue, and religion (Deters, 2011; Jenkins, 2007; Spears, 2011; Trudell, 2005). Recognising it, though the findings of this study may be generalised to a limited extent, at least to pose questions, my aim is not to generalise the outcomes of this study to the population at the national level in Pakistan. In my research, the quantitative method of data collection and analysis mainly serves the purpose of understanding if the reported attitudes varied with reference to various social and psychological factors.

This study, considering the importance of questionnaires and interviews combined, mainly remains an “interview study facilitated by preceding questionnaire survey – quan → QUAL” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 172). In the ‘quan → QUAL’ relationship, the capital letters indicate that the qualitative dominates the quantitative. The arrow indicates the sequence that interview data collection follows questionnaire data in the data collection process. The main role of the initial questionnaire survey was, as Dörnyei (2007, p. 172) suggests, ‘to help select the participants for the subsequent qualitative phase systematically’. The purpose was to analyse and discuss the data both numerically and verbally and to be open and flexible in order to “to account for the subtle nuances of meaning uncovered during the process of investigation” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 26) as compared to being strictly confined to numerical discussion.

Participants

Following a purposive sampling method (Creswell, 2009, 2010, 2012), undergraduate students of social sciences were selected from the two universities who were between 18 and 21 years of age and in their first to third year of studies. Prior to collecting data through questionnaires, the potential participants were informed about the nature, aims, and objectives of this study. At the end of questionnaire completion, the participants of the first phase were further asked whether or not they were willing to be contacted for the semi-structured interview stage of my study. 180 questionnaires were distributed among the participants from the University of Sindh. From them, 154 (84%) returned the filled in questionnaires out of which 148 were complete and 4 incomplete. In addition, 2 more students completed the questionnaire, thus the total number of completed questionnaires from the University of Sindh was 150. The same procedure was repeated at the University of Balochistan too. From 180 questionnaires, 154 (85%) participants returned the filled in questionnaires. But 146 were complete and 8 were incomplete. 4 more were completed after a follow-up request, thus making it 150 from the University of Balochistan. In total, the number of completed questionnaires was intentionally rounded to 300. However, for interview phase, 10 participants from each university were selected.

Research instruments

Questionnaire

Questionnaires constitute an important and popular technique that is widely used to study the attitudes, opinions, perceptions and preferences in the field of educational research (Muijs, 2004, p. 45). Oppenheim (1992, p. 100) describes a questionnaire as ‘an important instrument of research, a tool for data collection... a set of questions arranged in a certain order and constructed according to specially selected rules’. Using a questionnaire in the study offers a number of benefits. For example, the questions are the same for all participants, anonymity is respected, it is a relatively economical method in terms of both cost and time, and it allows time to carefully check the content of the questions that are likely to yield accurate information (Walliman, 2005). An adapted Likert Scale questionnaire was used. It consists of a series of statements, all of which are related to a particular target (an individual person, group of people, an institution or concept) with participants asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with these items by marking one of the responses ranging, often, from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’ (Reid, 2006). After the scale has been administered, each response option is assigned a number for scoring purposes (Creswell, 2012). Some researchers prefer to use an even number of response options because of the concern that certain participants might use the middle category (neither agree nor disagree, not sure, or neutral) to avoid making a real

choice (Creswell, 2009). Accordingly, a 4-point adapted Likert Scale was chosen, against a 5-point or 7-point Scale, as commonly used.

Semi-structured interviews

For the purpose of collecting qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of twenty students from both universities, ten from each, for an 'enriched understanding' of the complex issue of attitudes. Bailey (2007, p. 100) explains a semi-structured interview as:

In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer uses an interview guide with specific questions that are organised by topics but are not necessarily asked in a specific order. The flow of the interview, rather than order in a guide, determines when and how a question is asked.

The choice of semi-structured interviews allowed to prepare an interview protocol with questions related to *a priori* (known in advance, not emerging) themes (Gillham, 2000; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008). This format also allowed me to ask a question earlier, where needed, even if on the interview protocol it came later. Semi-structured interviews also allowed to ask follow up questions and prompts during the interviews in order to clarify participants' responses.

Data analysis

Keeping in view the nature of the triangulation to support qualitative analysis, descriptive statistics - specifically percentage, was utilized to analyse questionnaire data. Whereas, qualitative content analysis was used to analyse interview data. For the questionnaire data, an SPSS file was prepared to enter the responses of 300 participants for descriptive analysis. As the SPSS required numerical values (Field, 2009), the questionnaire data was coded with numerical values for the responses and labelled the theme-wise statements for data entry, part A consisting of participants' profile and part B of attitude items. In order to code the 4-point Likert Scale responses to attitude items, numbers 4 and 3 indicated positive attitudes, whereas numbers 2 and 1 indicated negative attitudes. Accordingly, for the favourable statements wherein strongly agree and agree indicated positive attitudes, the responses were coded from 4 through 1 (strongly agree=4, agree=3, disagree=2, strongly disagree=1). However, for the unfavourable statements, wherein agreeing with the statements indicated negative attitudes contrary to the coding for favourable statements, the responses were reverse coded as 1 through 4 (strongly agree=1, agree=2, disagree=3, strongly disagree=4). As the purpose of using questionnaire was not to seek causal relationships, descriptive analysis was used only to obtain percentages and frequencies for the individual items (Dörnyei, 2007). The additional participant views, however, were discussed in more depth in the interviews following the questionnaire data collection.

Results and Discussion

Questionnaire responses regarding choice of speaking English

Apart from questions about choice of learning English, the participants also responded to questions concerning choice of speaking English. Table 1 and Table 2, illustrate questionnaire data about choice of speaking English with favourable and unfavourable statements about domains of use for speaking English: the use of English for expressing thoughts clearly, talking about academic work at the university, using English

as a neutral language rather than the mother tongue, using it with people other than family, and using it in front of family.

Table 1
Choice of speaking English (favourable statements)

Q.	Questionnaire item	Sindh Uni (N=150)				Balochistan Uni (N=150)			
		DS %	D %	A %	AS %	DS %	D %	A %	AS %
15	I like speaking English.	0.0	0.0	32.0	68.0	0.7	2.0	22.7	74.7
30	Mixing English words with first language helps express thoughts clearly.	4.0	22.0	50.0	24.0	12.7	31.3	40.0	15.3
40	I encourage my friends to use English for communication with me on academic topics.	3.3	14.0	54.0	28.7	4.0	15.3	48.7	32.0
49	English is a neutral language in multilingual context of Pakistan.	2.7	16.7	55.3	24.0	7.3	18.7	53.3	20.7
51	I prefer to speak English with people other than my family.	4.0	30.7	51.3	14.0	5.3	36.0	46.7	12.0
53	I prefer speaking English rather than mother tongue while I am at the university.	4.7	28.0	45.3	22.0	8.0	26.0	42.7	23.3
71	My family does not feel awkward when I speak English in front of them.	8.7	22.7	39.3	29.3	15.3	25.3	41.3	18.0

Tables 1 shows that majority of the participants responded in agreement with all favourable statements representing their positive attitudes towards speaking English. For statement Q15, 100% of participants from Sindh University (32.0% + 68.0%) agree and strongly agree that they like learning English. In the same way, 97% of participants from Balochistan University (22.7% + 74.7%) too agree with the statement. Regarding code mixing on statement Q30, the participants give some mixed responses. For example, 74% of Sindh University participants (50.0% + 24.0%) believe that mixing English words with their first language helps them express their thoughts clearly. However, 55% of the participants from Balochistan University with a comparatively lower majority consider the same.

This is further supported by the views of participants to encourage others to use English for communication with them, as on statement Q40. Here, 83% of Sindh University participants (54.0% + 28.7%) agree and 81% of Balochistan University participants (48.7% + 32.0%) report that they encourage others to use English when communicating on academic topics. In the multilingual scenario of Pakistan where language controversies and competing discourses regarding status of local languages has long been observed, responding to statement Q49 about viewing English as a neutral language, 79% of Sindh University participants (55.3% + 24.0%) agree with the view. A majority of Balochistan University participants 74% (53.3% + 20.7%) too consider that English is a neutral language in the multilingual context of Pakistan.

Further to considering the neutral role of English, on statement Q51 regarding preference of using English with people other than family members, 65% of the participants from Sindh University (51.3% + 14.0%) and 59% of Balochistan University participants (46.7% + 12.0%) agreed with the statement showing that they preferred to use English with people from outer group rather than with those from their inner group (family). Moreover, on statement Q53 regarding the use of English while they are at the university, 67% of the participants from Sindh University and 66% of the participants from Balochistan University report that they prefer speaking English rather than mother tongue at the university. Additionally, majority of the participants from both sites, 69% of Sindh University participants (39.3% + 29.3%) and 59% of Balochistan University participants

(41.3% + 18.0%), report that their families do not feel awkward when they speak English in front of them.

Table 2 portrays the responses to the unfavourable statements regarding choice of speaking English related to code mixing, English and the family, English vs mother tongue in the classroom for academic purposes.

Table 2
Choice of speaking English (unfavourable statements)

Q.	Questionnaire item	Sindh Uni (N=150)				Balochistan Uni (N=150)			
		DS %	D %	A %	AS %	DS %	D %	A %	AS %
19.	I do not like mixing English words or sentences when speaking my mother tongue.	20.0	38.0	28.0	14.0	13.3	30.0	30.7	26.0
25.	My family discourages from speaking English.	50.7	38.0	5.3	6.0	47.3	37.3	9.3	6.0
63.	We need to develop our mother tongue rather than speaking English. *	8.0	45.3	31.3	14.7	9.3	43.3	30.0	17.3
69.	I do not speak English out of the classroom because people dislike English.	21.3	54.7	21.3	2.7	23.3	50.0	23.3	3.3

Table 2 shows some mixed responses from the two sites. For statement Q19, 58% of Sindh University participants (20.0% + 38.0%) strongly disagree or disagree that they do not like mixing English words or sentences when speaking their mother tongue. On the contrary, 57% of Balochistan University participants (30.7% + 26.0%) agree or strongly agree with the statement. However, for statement Q25 regarding their family discouragement from speaking English, responses from both the sites are identical, that is, 89% of Sindh University participants (50.7% + 38.0%) as well as 85% of Balochistan University participants (47.3% + 37.3%) strong disagree or disagree with the statement.

This shows that although there are varying attitudes of the participants from the two universities regarding their liking for mixing English words/sentences in their own mother tongue. Families of the participants of both sites do not discourage them, rather, the families are almost equally positive about speaking English. For statement Q63 regarding a need to develop mother tongue rather than speaking English, responses from both the sites are similar and slightly more positive towards speaking English, that is, 53% of Sindh University participants (8.0% + 45.3%) and equally 53% of Balochistan University participants (9.3% + 43.3%) view that they should not leave speaking English in order to develop their mother tongue. Moreover, for statement Q69, 76% of Sindh University participants (21.3% + 54.7%) and 73% of Balochistan University participants (23.3% + 50.0%) strongly disagree or disagree that they do not speak English out the classroom because some people dislike English. This shows that the participants also avoid speaking English in public domains where they believe people do not prefer the use of English.

Key interview responses regarding choice of speaking English

Further to the questionnaire responses regarding the choice of speaking English at the two sites, the interview participants enthusiastically talked about their preference for or avoidance of speaking English keeping mainly the contexts in their view. With reference to domain of language use, how they make choices between preference and avoidance of speaking English when with parents, siblings and friends, relatives and other social groups, in academic environments, cultural and religious events, and at public places came into discussion. The interview participants also gave their views about reciprocation (equal response from others) and indelibility (understanding) of the English language while

making choices including code mixing and desire/willingness to speak English. Moreover, they reported social acceptance/resistance, and parental encouragement including encouragement from siblings and friends, in the in-group, and relatives and other people, in the out-group.

Preference for or avoidance of speaking English with parents and relatives

Relating to the questions in the questionnaire discussed above, when with parents, it was not commonly reported that the participants spoke English. However, some participants reported that they sometimes were positive about speaking English with (or in front of) their parents, indicating their positive attitudes. For instance, "I very [much] like to speak English in front of parents. I like to speak, especially in front of my father" (B1M) from Balochistan University illustrate that either the participants consider it important to speak English in front of parents because the parents have been supporting the participants to learn English or the participants consider English as an important entity for themselves.

Belonging to an educated family was also reported as one of the reasons to speak English with/in front of parents. Speaking English in front of parents is considered as an honour for them. However, as compared to speaking English in front of parents, the participants reported that they avoid speaking English in front of their other relatives. Participant B5M from Balochistan University and participant S10F from Sindh University explain, "Not so much because we are not so close to relatives. And all my relatives are Sindhi. So, we speak in Sindhi in front of them", providing a good reason why some avoid speaking English in front of their relatives.

This shows a general liking for speaking English in front of parents and/or relatives. The general responses showed that, while a majority of the interview participants preferred speaking English in front of their parents, many reported to avoid using English in front of their relatives. For specific references to the consideration of reciprocation and intelligibility in the choice of using English.

Preference for or avoidance of speaking English in social and religious events

Regarding making choices of using English in social and religious events, the participants from both the sites gave mixed responses. For example, participants B2F from Balochistan University reported that she avoided using English in socio-religious events for the reasons as illustrated in the following excerpt. This shows a great awareness of selecting appropriately. From Sindh University too the participants expressed mixed views regarding making choices of preference/avoidance of using English in social and cultural occasions. Participant S5F would make different choices for different occasions which would be event specific.

No, I want to speak my own language, local language, in my ceremonies - ceremonies, parties, that Eid. *Matlab agar shadi wagaira ho, iss type ki situation mein* (I mean if there is a wedding type of situation, in such type of situations), I don't want to speak [English]. (B2F)

I always prefer, but when very deeply cultural occasions are there - as you said that Eid and other Islamic occasions - so I also use Urdu there. 'Eid Mubarak!' - I can wish it in English also... 'Happy Eid Day!' etc., 'Congratulations!' - but I use 'Eid Mubarak!' because some words are in my language - or that's we can never neglect them and we can never forget. (S5F)

This shows sensitivity to how they apply their knowledge. Participant S7M would consider the factor from what locations the participants of events are coming. The extracts above show that the participants make choice of speaking English mainly as a lingua franca when the audience in the social and religious events comes from different linguistic backgrounds. It also implies that these participants would not use English in such events if they were to communicate with the people from linguistic background of their own, they would prefer to use their indigenous language.

Preference for or avoidance of speaking English in general public places

We can see a hint of patterns of national use as the participants draw upon their experiences regarding making choices of using English, or not, based on the overall environment of locations/cities of the public places. If the public places were large metropolitan cities such as Karachi, Islamabad, or Lahore, they would prefer to speak English. In other places, with populations from a tribal background, these participants would avoid using English.

... there is no environment of speaking English, sir. If we have an environment like Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, sir - everywhere you can see, sir, all people, you can say, are speaking English. Here, you can just speak English with your friends, or your family members - not with your shopkeepers like - like that, sir. (B5M)

As compared to the above statement, two of the participants of Sindh University view their choice of using English at public places differently. Participant S1F in narrating, "Nowadays, it is most important language. So, I always - usually have a conversation with the - all the people in that language", for example, considers academic environments too as public spaces when out of the classroom, and would prefer to use English there. Regarding attitudes of others, participant S6M also reports claiming "It is my habit - basically, it is my habit... I always prefer English more than my own language, Sindhi" which depicts that he always prefers speaking English at public places including the markets.

The participants from Balochistan University too report some conservative views, as compared to the participants from Sindh University, regarding preference for speaking English in public places. This also indicates that the participants from Balochistan University have less exposure/opportunity of speaking English in general public while the participants from Sindh University consider using English in public spaces as a normal activity.

Preference for or avoidance of speaking English based on reciprocation

A great majority of participants from both the sites thought that their agentive decisions to make choices of preference for or avoidance of speaking English was for the most part based on the reciprocal response of the people in conversation, situation or event. If someone wanted to speak English, the participants would also speak English. But, if others would avoid English, participants too would avoid it regardless of the place or occasion. From an agentive perspective, it also includes personal choices of the speakers in communication rather than an imposition on either side. Following extracts show the language choices based on reciprocation.

That also depends upon society or the people you are talking to. I think when I am talking to my local - means Baloch, *to* (in that case) I love to use my own [language]. But when I am, you can say, in the class I have the choice of two languages, Urdu or English.

So there the response - or the person if the - if you ask a question in English *to* (in that case) I response in English. And that was better - that was good. (B6M)

Participant B1M from Balochistan University reciprocates in terms of language choice, but participant B6M believes that he would be proactively choosing Balochi when talking to his local people, sharing his mother tongue. But in the classroom environment, if he is asked a question in English, he would respond in English. In the following excerpt, participant B8M says that if others in the communication do not use English, making choice of speaking English in front of them would make him feel awkward.

If environment is there - means if other people are speaking English, why shouldn't I? But if I am the single person speaking English in a gathering of relatives, they will speak our - means language - mother tongue or something like that. So, it will be odd speaking English in front of them. If - as you are speaking English to me, I will answer you in English, why not! (B8M)

Apart from respect for religion, others take the view that while being in a community, one should also be speaking the language of that community and such reciprocal choice of language should not be considered a bad thing or a discouragement from speaking English.

It's not like a discouragement but when, you see, the gathering is like people - community in which you are sitting over there, you know - if they are speaking Sindhi language, all the people - and you 'the only one' speaking English language - what they will think about you? So, of course, you have to speak the same language. (S1F)

Another participant from Sindh University believes that although he is willing to speak English everywhere, there is also chance of building a bad image by speaking English if others are not willing to reciprocate by speaking English. Speaking English in such conditions may mean that someone is just "showing off!"

I would like to speak but the environment is not on the such standard. Means the people do not like that. I would like to speak with those people who would like to speak with me. If I would like to speak with each and every one, he would think I am showing myself! (S2M)

Reciprocation also takes place when the people of a location prefer to speak a particular language. In that case too, speaking in any language other than the local one(s) may bring a feeling of awkwardness for the speaker. Considering the sense of respect for the elderly people, one may prefer to speak the local language in front of them. Moreover, it also brings about a feeling of "joy" when speaking in the same language as others do and especially when it is also a shared language, such as mother tongue. In that case too, avoiding the use of English also remains meaningful for the people in communication who are sharing the same language and cultural background. In social situations, the language for relating is not English.

Well, where my grandparents are, there - my relatives and my primary school fellows, yea. The local language is the, you know, most enjoyable thing for me there - if I am there, yea. (S3F)

There is no any situation which I feel that I wouldn't speak English. It depends on the situation, if I am with the elders - grandfather or the grandmother, I cannot speak English with them because if I... My same age person, I can speak English. (S6M)

The participants' language choices vary between their communication with elders and peers. For participant S7M, it also does not make sense that when all others are speaking a local language, why he should be speaking English in front of them! However, speaking English when with people from various language backgrounds makes a sense.

... it depends on the occasion when - where there are the multiple people from the multiple regions of the world, so there I prefer to speak English because - so that everyone can understand. (S7M)

Matching with the views regarding making choice of speaking English in social and religious events, participants prefer to use English as a Lingua Franca with reference to reciprocation too. This means that these participants would prefer to speak English depending if others too would also be willing to use English in conversation with them. If others did not like to use English, even if they knew the language, the participants would avoid speaking English with them.

Preference for or avoidance of speaking English based on its intelligibility

In this section, there will be some overlaps with the themes of reciprocation and making language choices when communicating with parents, friends, and relatives as discussed above. However, here it is important to discuss the language preferences from intelligibility perspective. As English is not a common language of communication in Pakistan, and remains restricted to the elite class of the society for everyday use, not all can understand and use it with an ease. Majority of the participants from Balochistan University and Sindh University reported that they make choices of preference and avoidance of speaking English based on the consideration whether the person they are speaking to understands English. Because of perceived lack of intelligibility of the English language, these participants avoid the use of English. For example, participants B1M and B2F from Balochistan University know English but they do not prefer to speak English with family members because the family members would not understand it.

Well, as we are local of Quetta, we can't speak in front of my father or mother because we speak Pashto. (B1M)

In home - there must be some problem, nobody can understand in my parents, my grandfather. They didn't understand. So, I like that I speak English in only educational system. (B2F)

Some participants reported that, in some cases, liking for English also gets influenced whether the person knows English. The disliking may appear even from friends if they do not know English. In such cases too, avoidance of using English becomes a considered and prudent choice. The following two extracts present the issue of intelligibility, hence the avoidance.

It also depends on the - on the friends that if they know English, they like it - like to listen. If they don't know sir, of course, they will say that - they will say, "No, we don't want to listen from you." Because, the one factor is, they don't understand it. (B4F)

Sir, that happen when [I] go to rural area. There I meet my relatives or my cousins, sir, who is not good at English, sir. So, whenever I talk to - start to speak in English, sir, they initially tolerate me or, you can say, stop me, "Yaar (dear) please don't speak English." The reason is that they people didn't know English. (B5M)

According to participant B6M, when due to an intelligibility issue one avoids speaking English, it does not mean that s/he does not know English or has got a negative attitudes towards using English. It remains purely the matter of practicality of the language to those who are supposed to be in conversation.

[...] because we can say, a wise person or the one who understands, he must speak the language where someone understands the language. (B6M)

When there is no understanding of a language in the communication process, the use of that language becomes meaningless and undesired for as for participant B10F in the situations where understanding is not mutually achieved.

No sir, I don't use English because my parents are not that much educated that they get my knowledge and my questions. Some of my relatives - they are educated. In front of them, I can speak. But some of them are not... If I will speak English, they will not get. (B10F)

Similarly, participants from Sindh University also report that they avoid speaking English in situations where they believe understanding it is not possible. Especially in front of parents or the elderly, the participants feel awkward to speak English.

Well, I know that the second person is uneducated or can't understand me, so I don't want to show my - myself very educationally to him. It may be possible that he may be on complex - so don't wanna have anyone being in complex in front of me. So, I don't think... (S5F)

When the people are not understanding the English, it would be useless to speaking [English] in front of them. All those who are speaking Sindhi and - speaking English in front of them that seems somewhat awkward! (S8M)

As the extracts in the five sub-sections related to preference for or avoidance of speaking English indicate, these participants play the role of active agents in order to make choices based on considerable thoughts. These evaluative responses also employ that, whether or not they prefer to speak English in different situations, these participants do not report negative attitudes towards the English language.

Conclusion

Drawing upon Bandura's (2006) concept of human agency, it was important to understand language choice from a 'learner agency' perspective. The findings, as discussed in detail in indicate that the participants of this study favour multilingualism over monolingualism. In other words, they preferred to learn and speak other languages, such as English, in addition to their mother tongue/local language. However, they make different choices about language use based upon the domains in which they interact with others at specific times and the following discussion reflects on how these participants make such choices.

From the questionnaire data, the vast majority, that is 99% of the participants from each of the two sites, responded that they liked to learn English and had a positive general attitude towards the English language. The majority (60%) also agreed with the statement that they would feel sorry for the people who do not learn English, and said they would learn English even if it were not a compulsory subject. The findings also show that these participants did not believe that they were learning English because their parents forced them to do so, suggesting, instead, that it was their own choice. They also reported that

they would continue learning English even after they finished their university courses. This indicates that these participants were not learning English only because it was a compulsory subject to study nor did they learn English only to pass the subject at university. However, regarding the demand to make English the only medium of instruction from school to university level, the mixed responses indicate that the participants were almost equally divided for and against the proposition.

Regarding the choice of learning English, interview data also indicated, as suggested above, that the participants believed that they preferred to learn English for reasons of their own and not because they were compelled to do so. The keywords used in the open responses were 'not compelled', 'looks good', 'prefer', 'improve', 'continue', 'wanna learn', 'my personal interest', and 'my choice', indicating that the participants did not resist learning English. These responses negate the view that they might have been learning English against their own will or because it was imposed by some external forces.

The questionnaire data about choices to speak English also reflects the participants' positive attitudes. The majority of the participants reported that they liked speaking English, that they mixed English words when speaking their own language(s), they encouraged their friends to speak English with them in academic settings, and they considered English as a neutral language. In interviews, more interesting and detailed responses came forward regarding the choice to speak English and the participants clearly expressed in what types of situations/domains they preferred and/or avoided the use of English. Whether preferring to or avoiding the use of English, the choice was, again, their own and was also based on considered decisions. This relates to the concept of 'learner agency' according to which the learners are active agents, rather than being passive actors, in making choices of speaking English in this case.

The interview participants favoured speaking English generally in all domains of language use including speaking with their parents, siblings and friends, relatives, and with people from other external social groups. Regarding events and contexts too, including academic environments, cultural and religious events, and public places, these participants had a clear idea of making language choices. The main reason for the avoidance of English participants expressed, however, was either the lack of reciprocation or the lack of intelligibility of English for the persons with whom they were interacting. Regarding speaking English with parents, interview participants from both the sites suggested that they would prefer to speak English with their parents in those cases where both or one of the parents were educated and able to communicate in English with them. In other cases, the participants reported that they like to speak English 'in front of' their parents as this brought their parents a sense that their child was intelligent. However, for speaking English with or in front of relatives, some participants reported avoiding using English as they did not feel encouraged by relatives as much as by their parents to speak English. In this regard, parental encouragement may also become an important factor which plays a role of positive reinforcement/endorsement for these participants to make the choice to use English in front of them.

In making language choices during cultural and religious events, the majority of the interview participants reported preferring their mother tongue or local language. In wedding ceremonies or on Eid days, they felt it more joyful to speak their own language, hence a preference for local languages. However, they would be ready to speak English if the participants were from various locations and backgrounds, for instance, thus using English as a *Lingua Franca* in some cultural and religious events. Regarding their choice of speaking English in public places, the participants responded that they would prefer to use English in large cities of Pakistan but they would avoid using English in small towns or

rural/tribal areas. The participants believed that people in urban populations were more 'modern' whereas the people in rural areas and small towns were more traditional. Therefore, the reported language preferences varied depending on the linguistic exposure of the people of specific locations. In addition to considering the linguistic environment of the locality/surrounding, the majority of the participants also expressed the view that they would prefer to speak in the same language as the others in conversation with them, as a matter of reciprocity and respect for others. One would feel strange and awkward speaking English if their interlocutors preferred the local language, and vice versa. Hence, reciprocation and respect for others also influenced the language choices of the participants in specific situations.

Similar to reciprocation was the consideration of intelligibility of a language in making choices. As English is not the language of everyday use, the majority of people do not understand it. Therefore, in making a choice to use or avoid English, the participants said that they would see if the other person in conversation also understood the English language. The matter of intelligibility would apply to all sorts of people with whom they came into contact, regardless of the relationship and context. For instance, if a grandparent does not understand English, they would avoid using English with him/her. Similarly, if they are communicating with friends, relatives, or people in public who do not understand English, they would not choose English as a language of communication. These considerations indicate that these participants make socially intelligent decisions in order to make language choices in different domains of language use.

Regarding code mixing, however, the participants suggested that this happened almost unconsciously for them and it was not always a deliberate choice. The majority viewed code mixing with their mother tongue or local language as a normal thing under general conditions. One participant from Balochistan University also suggested that code mixing did not seem good when one was in conversation with people in a setting where speaking the pure local language (without mixing English words) would be preferable.

Given the considerations of making language choices as discussed herein above, the participants did not report any negative attitudes towards speaking English. Even choosing not to use English in particular situations/domains arose from participants' considered/prudent decisions rather than because of negative attitudes or any attitudinal resistance on the part of these participants. The attitudes, as emerging from the responses of the participants of this study, not necessarily favouring speaking English in all situations and with everyone, remain positive towards speaking English in general.

References

- Bailey, C. A. (2007). *A guide to qualitative field research* (2nd ed.). New York: SAGE Publications.
- Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1(2), 164-180.
- Bell, J. (2010). *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers in education and social sciences* (5th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bohner, G., & Wanke, M. (2002). *Attitudes and attitude change*. Hove: Psychology Press.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chen, S., Boucher, H., & Kraus, M. W. (2011). The relational self. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. L. Vignoles (Eds.), *Handbook of identity theory and research* (Vol. 1, pp. 149-176). New York: Springer.
- Connolly, P. (2007). *Quantitative data analysis in education: A critical introduction using SPSS*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2010). Mapping the developing landscape of mixed methods research. In A. Tashakkori, & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Sage handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research* (2nd ed., pp. 45-68). London: SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
- Deters, P. (2011). *Identity, agency and the acquisition of professional language and culture*. London: Continuum.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ferguson, C. A. (1996). English in South Asia: Imperialist legacy and regional asset. In R. J. Baumgardner (Ed.), *South Asian English: Structure, use, and users* (pp. 29-39). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Field, A. (2009). *Discovering statistics using SPSS*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985a). *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning*. London: E. Arnold.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985b). *The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery. Technical Report*. Ontario: University of Western Ontario.

- Garrett, P. (2010). *Attitudes to language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibson, W. J., & Brown, A. (2009). *Working with qualitative data*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Giles, H., & Billings, A. C. (2004). Assessing language attitudes: Speaker evaluation studies. In A. Davies, & C. Elder (Eds.), *The handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 187-209). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Publishing .
- Gillham, B. (2000). *The research interview*. London: Continuum.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2010). *Mixed methods research: merging theory with practice*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Holliday, A. (2009). English as a Lingua Franca, 'non-native speakers' and cosmopolitan realities. In F. Sharifian (Ed.), *English as an international language: Perspectives and pedagogical issues* (pp. 21-33). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a lingua franca: Attitude and identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14-26.
- Johnson, R. B., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Turner, L. A. (2007). Toward a definition of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(2), 112-133.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2008). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. California: SAGE Publications.
- Lee, T. S. (2009). Language, identity, and power: Navajo and Pueblo young adults' perspectives and experiences with competing language ideologies. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 8(5), 307-320.
- LoCastro, V. (2001). Individual differences in second language acquisition: Attitudes, learner subjectivity, and L2 pragmatic norms. *System*, 29, 69-89.
- Mahboob, A. (2002). No English, no future: Language policy in Pakistan. In S. Obeng, & B. Hartford (Eds.), *Political independence with linguistic servitude: The politics about languages in the developing world*. New York: NOVA Science.
- Moss, W. E. (1964). English in the Commonwealth: 7. Pakistan. *ELT Journal*, 18, 63-69.
- Nelson, C. L. (2011). *Intelligibility in world Englishes: theory and application*. New York: Routledge.
- Oppenheim, A. N. (1992). *Questionnaire design, interviewing and attitude measurement*. London: Continuum.
- Pennycook, A. (2010). Popular culture, popular languages, and global identities. In N. Coupland (Ed.), *The handbook of language and globalization* (pp. 592-607). Singapore: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Rahman, T. (1995a). Language and politics in a Pakistan province: The Sindhi language movement. *Asian Survey*, 35(11), 1005-1016.
- Rahman, T. (1995b). *Language planning and politics in Pakistan*. Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute.
- Rahman, T. (1996). *Language and politics in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, T. (1997a). Language and ethnicity in Pakistan. *Asian Survey*, 37(9), 833-839.
- Rahman, T. (1997b). The medium of instruction controversy in Pakistan. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 18(2), 145-154.
- Rahman, T. (2001). English-teaching institutions in Pakistan. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 22(3), 242-261.
- Rahman, T. (2002). *Language, ideology and power: Language-learning among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, T. (2005). Passport to privilege: The English-medium schools in Pakistan. *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, 1(1), 24-44.
- Rahman, T. (2007). Linguistic controversies in Pakistan. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 36(3), 67-75.
- Rahman, T. (2008). Language policy and education in Pakistan. In S. May, & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education* (2nd ed., Vol. 1, pp. 383-392). Springer Science.
- Rasool, N., & Mansoor, S. (2007). Contemporary issues in language, education and development in Pakistan. In N. Rasool (Ed.), *Global issues in language, education and development: Perspectives from postcolonial countries* (pp. 126-154). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters .
- Richard, M. (1993). Attitudes in context. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 16(2), 123-148.
- Rooij, R. V. (2006). *Attitudes and changing contexts*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Schiffman, H. F. (2003). Bilingualism in South Asia: Friend or foe? 'The persistence of English in post-colonial societies: Structural reasons vs. neocolonial 'hegemony' or linguistic 'imperialism''. *Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism*.
- Shamim, F. (2010). English as the language for development in Pakistan: Issues, challenges and possible solutions. In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Dreams and realities: Developing countries and the English language* (pp. 291-310). Islamabad: The British Council.
- Siddiqui, S. (2012). *Education, inequalities, and freedom: A sociopolitical critique*. Lahore: Narratives Pvt.
- Spears, R. (2011). Group identities: The social identity perspective. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. L. Vignoles (Eds.), *Handbook of identity theory and research* (Vol. 1, pp. 201-224). New York: Springer.
- Talat, M. (2003). Pakistani English: A sociolinguistic variety. *Journal of Research*, 4, 17-30.

- Tollefson, J. W. (1995). Language policy, power, and inequality. In J. W. Tollefson (Ed.), *Power and inequality in language education* (pp. 1-8). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trudell, B. (2005). Language choice, education and community identity. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 25, 237-251.
- Walliman, N. (2005). *Your research project: A step-by-step guide for the first-time researcher* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
- Wesely, P. M. (2012). Learner attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs in language learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, 45(1), 98-117.
- Yates, L. (2011). Interaction, language learning and social inclusion in early settlement. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14(4), 457-471