



RESEARCH PAPER**Language Attitudes in a Multilingual Context: Attitudes of University Students in Balochistan**

Maria Khosa

Lecturer, Department of English, Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences (BUIITEMS) Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author**

maria.khosa@buitms.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The objective of research is to examine the attitudes of university students towards the phenomenon of plurilingualism in the Balochistan region of Pakistan, a region known for its linguistic diversity. However, the linguistic ideology prevalent in the region favors the use of a single language or a “pure” form of a language. The research focuses on the question of whether young multilingual language users perceive the practice of plurilingualism as a strength or weakness. A mixed-methods approach has been adopted to collect data from 100 university students. The results show that the students hold a very positive attitude towards the practice of plurilingualism. The majority of the students do not perceive the practice of plurilingualism as a weakness or a sign of incompetence. This study contributes to sociolinguistic debates on multilingualism by highlighting South Asian youth perspectives that challenge traditional linguistic purism and affirm plurilingualism as an adaptive communicative competence.

KEYWORDS Plurilingualism, Language Attitudes, Multilingualism, Sociolinguistics, Linguistic Identity, Balochistan

Introduction

Balochistan is home to a rich mosaic of languages, including Urdu, Balochi, Pashto, Brahvi, Sindhi, Punjabi, Persian, Seraiki, and English (Panezai et al., 2022). In such multilingual ecologies, speakers commonly draw on multiple linguistic resources within the same interaction—a practice described as *plurilingualism*. Plurilingual communication involves fluid movement between languages according to context, interlocutor, and purpose (Canagrajah, 2009). Plurilingual speakers do not have a priori knowledge of a language rather the language emerges within the communication by the use of interactional strategies (Lüdi & Py, 2009). What defines a plurilingual competence is that it is not a result of a simple addition of two (or more) monolingual competences in several languages but permits combinations and alternations of different kinds. It is possible to switch codes during a message, and to resort to bilingual forms of speech. A single, richer repertoire of language varieties and available options thus allows choices based on this inter-linguistic variation when circumstances permit (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 1997).

Yet despite the prevalence of these practices, linguistic ideologies in Pakistan often emphasize monolingualism, discourage code mixing, and stress “purity” in language use. In fact, the older generations and the educational system often stigmatize mixed language use as improper or as a sign of poor competence Jeoffrion et al. (2014).

Balochistan is one of the most linguistically diverse regions of Pakistan, where several languages such as Balochi, Brahui, Pashto, Sindhi, and Urdu coexist within social,

educational, and cultural domains. Despite this linguistic richness, dominant language ideologies in Pakistan often favor monolingualism or the use of a standardized “pure” language, particularly in formal education and institutional settings. Such ideologies can influence how multilingual speakers perceive their own linguistic practices and identities.

University students in Balochistan frequently grow up using multiple languages in their homes, communities, and academic environments. However, the extent to which these young multilingual speakers perceive plurilingual practices as an asset or a disadvantage remains underexplored. Their attitudes toward different languages may be shaped by factors such as social prestige, educational policy, identity construction, and employment opportunities. Understanding these attitudes is crucial because language perceptions can influence language maintenance, language shift, and educational outcomes in multilingual societies.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the attitudes of university students in Balochistan toward plurilingualism and the use of multiple languages in their daily and academic lives. By examining their perceptions, the study aims to understand whether multilingual practices are viewed as a strength, a challenge, or both, and how these attitudes reflect broader sociolinguistic dynamics in the region.

Literature Review

With the advent and transformation of the world into a global region and the influx of refugees and mass movement of communities, groups have come into contact with each other, and hence the advent of multilingual societies. South Asia and Pakistan, in particular, have a wide range of ethnic communities speaking different languages. Due to the close proximity of ethnic communities, the process of borrowings, codeswitching, and mixing becomes extensively rampant (Amjad & Rehman, 2020).

According to Jeoffrion et al. (2014), students who know more than two languages face reprimand when they make use of their plurilingual communication skills within the educational setting. They are made to use the “double monolingualism norm”. As per the concept provided, the individual who has the command over two languages must use one of the languages within the given context and the style employed must not vary from the style employed by a monolingual to use the language (Jorgensen & Holmen, 1997).

Perceptions toward Language Mixing

Past research has revealed that attitudes to plurilingualism have a considerable impact on language practice within the context of education. Various investigations have revealed that learners and teachers who have positive beliefs about multilingual communication are more likely to incorporate the use of multiple languages within the learning and communication process. For example, Caruana and Fiorenza (2025) discovered that teachers’ language repertoire significantly influences their attitudes towards plurilingual education, while Fahmimroah et al. (2017) discovered a positive correlation between students’ beliefs about plurilingualism and their academic achievement.

Attitudes to language mixing also vary from culture to culture. Dhaouadi (2006) reported that Arab parents disapprove of language mixing since they think it impairs linguistic purity. However, for younger speakers in a globalized world, mixed forms can be seen as modern, expressive, and affirming of identity. According to Griva & Chostelidou (2011), being multilingual is helpful for language learning, not the other way round. Henni

(2017) found positive attitudes towards code mixing among students in Algerian classrooms, where code mixing is considered a learning aid.

A study of Yusiatic & Wijaya (2024) on teenagers in Jakarta found that the more the informants were familiar with the vocabulary of the foreign languages or the more used to the use of foreign languages in their daily lives, the more language mixing occurred.

Additionally, they use the mixture of language because they are trend followers, and they can blend two different languages into one sentence without altering the main language's sentence structure. By using the mixture of language, there is a feeling of comfort for the informant, thus creating a feeling of community, as the person sending the message and the person receiving the message understand the vocabulary.

Manar & Purwaningrum (2021) investigated students' language attitude towards lecturers' code mixing and found that 74% of students have a positive attitude towards this language phenomenon. Positive attitudes were expressed through material, mental, relational, and existential processes.

Fahmimroah et al. (2017) studied students' beliefs toward plurilingualism and its influence on academic achievement and learning styles. It was noted that students with more positive beliefs about plurilingualism tend to exhibit better academic achievement and learning styles. While Caruana & Fiorenza (2025) investigated the opinions and attitudes of trainee teachers towards plurilingualism. They found that individuals who speak more languages tend to show more positive attitudes toward plurilingualism.

Daryai-Hansen and Drachmann (2024) studied the students' attitudes toward plurilingual education. They concluded that most learners show positive attitudes toward plurilingual education because it encourages language awareness and intercultural understanding.

In a study on learners' perspectives on plurilingual education, it was found that the vast majority of students had a positive attitude towards linguistic diversity and multilingual learning environments. Empirical research has shown that learners tend to have a positive orientation towards plurilingual education when they become aware of the cognitive and intercultural advantages of their multilingual competence. (Daryai-Hansen & Drachmann, 2024).

Plurilingualism as Competence

Plurilingualism, as a theoretical framework, views language use as an integrated repertoire, rather than separate systems, as conceptualized by Coste et al. (1997) and Canagarajah (2007).

According to García (2009), the use of the word "deficiency" for the use of mixed languages is based on the failure to understand the natural behavior of multilinguals. Plurilingual behavior is more of an adaptive, creative, and efficient use of language

Plurilingualism in Pakistan

Pakistan's sociolinguistic context is multilingual by its very nature (Rahman, 2003). However, the dominant ideology of monolingualism exists. There is a lack of research on the attitude towards plurilingualism, especially in the context of the diverse ethnic groups of the province of Balochistan.

Research has indicated that the local linguistic repertoire of Pakistan is intrinsically plurilingual (Canagarajah & Ashraf, 2013). It has been argued that new forms of globalization have ensured that English forms part of the linguistic repertoire of Pakistan (Canagarajah, 2009; Canagarajah & Ashraf, 2013). In Pakistan, English as the official language and Urdu as the national language/lingua franca are dominant languages.(Ashraf et al., 2016).

Translanguaging promotes meaningful communication in classes. A study on teachers opined that they could easily communicate their ideas when they are taught by using translanguaging as a strategy. They also believed that practicing translanguaging in class helped in the development of students' interest in lectures as well (Panzai et al., 2022).

Teachers implicate that translanguaging pedagogies can stimulate the potential for communication, metalinguistics, inclusiveness among peers, and the acceptance of other cultures (Mushtaq, 2023). This gap is what this study aims to address, aiming to explore the students' perceptions of their own multilingual practices.

A review of the literature reveals that the attitude towards plurilingualism also significantly influences the language practice within a multilingual context. Previous research findings have demonstrated that the perception of speakers towards language mixing depends on the social, cultural, and educational ideologies. Some speakers view the practice of language mixing as an indicator of linguistic flexibility and competence, while for others it reflects a linguistic deficiency or a lack of proficiency.

Research carried out within the context of an educational setting suggests that both students and teaching staff often possess ambiguous attitudes towards the practice of plurilingualism. On the one hand, the possession of positive attitudes towards the practice of plurilingualism is seen to be correlated with the development of greater openness towards linguistic diversity, as well as the cultivation of greater intercultural understanding and the ability to effectively communicate with speakers of other languages.

Moreover, modern sociolinguistic theories also underscore the fact that plurilingual communication represents a natural and effective means of communication in a linguistically diverse world. These theories also challenge the conventional view that languages need to be kept distinct or that language mixing represents a form of linguistic deficiency.

However, despite the increasing number of studies on the concept of plurilingualism, little attention has been paid to students' attitudes towards the practice of plurilingualism within the unique context of Balochistan. Taking into consideration the linguistic diversity of the region and the multilingual nature of the educational context, an examination of students' perceptions and evaluation of the practice of plurilingual communication may reveal valuable data. The present study aims to investigate students' attitudes towards the practice of plurilingualism and whether students associate language mixing with deficit or competence.

Material and Methods

A mixed-methods research design was used for the study. This method combines the results of quantitative attitudes measurement and qualitative results. A total of 100 students from Balochistan University of information technology, engineering and management sciences (BUITEMS) and Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University Quetta

(SBKWU) from various disciplines participated in the study. The participants came from different linguistic backgrounds, including Urdu, Pashto, Balochi, Brahvi, Sindhi, and English. A structured questionnaire based on Rose (2006) was used for data collection. It had 15 Likert-scale measures for attitudes and open-ended questions that asked students about their reasons for code-switching, their feelings about it, and whether it was a strength or a weakness for them.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages) employing the SPSS software version 31. Qualitative responses were analyzed thematically using the Braun and Clarke (2006) framework.

Results and Discussion

Perceptions toward Plurilingualism

From the analysis of the data obtained through the questionnaire, it is evident that there is a positive attitude towards the use of plurilingual practices among Balochistan's university students. A vast majority of students agreed on the communicative value of the use of multiple languages during interaction. To be specific, 91% of the students agreed that the use of plurilingualism makes it possible for users of this language variety to communicate easily among themselves despite their linguistic differences. In addition, 88% of the students agreed that the use of plurilingual practices helps them in language learning, indicating that they believe that the use of multiple languages helps them understand language structures better. In addition, 82% of the students agreed that the mixture of two or more languages makes communication more comfortable, indicating that they believe that this language variety is very useful in communication among themselves.

Rejection of Negative Beliefs

In addition to reporting positive attitudes, the respondents were also found to disagree with the negative presumptions linked to language mixing. About 70% of the participants disagreed with the view that speaking more than one language is a sign of poor linguistic ability, while 67% disagreed with the view that speaking more than one language is socially unacceptable.

These findings indicate that the majority of the students dissociate themselves from linguistic purism and instead accept the phenomenon of language mixing as a normal practice of communication in multilingual societies. Thus, instead of seeing the practice of plurilingualism as a symptom of incompetence, the participants perceive it as a flexible communication strategy.

Qualitative Findings

Plurilingualism as Natural and Effortless

Language mixing is an unconscious and instinctive behavior as expressed by a participant: "I don't even notice when I switch. It feels normal."

It was noted that speakers tend to use other language words as a habitual behavior when they speak English as their main language, and the same is true when they code-switch and speak Urdu as their main language and incorporate English words like conjunctions and other words into their speech. The habitual behavior is seen when

speakers tend to use the word 'but' as it is translated into another word called 'laikin' in Urdu language. It is not only seen that speakers tend to incorporate English words as a habitual behavior but also tend to incorporate Urdu words as a conjunction in an English sentence like the word 'bas' means 'hence' in Urdu language.

Examples of conjunctions in 'Urdu' or 'English' language are seen in the conversations, for example : the word 'toh' means 'then' in English language. Participants tend to start an English sentence with the word 'toh' showing their habitual behavior of using Urdu words while speaking other languages.

Communication Efficiency

Another important theme that emerged from the data is the issue of the communicative efficiency of plurilingual practices. Students stressed the fact that the use of different languages enables them to communicate more efficiently and precisely. As one of the students explained, "Sometimes a word in Urdu fits better, sometimes in English."

The participants explained that the use of language mixing helps them to overcome the lack of vocabulary during the process of communication. As the participants explained, if the speakers fail to find the right word to use during the process of communication, they may use the other language to communicate.

Identity and Cultural Pride

Some participants linked plurilingual communication with their regional and cultural identity. Many respondents expressed their positive attitude towards linguistic diversity in Balochistan and considered multilingualism an integral part of their social surroundings. As one respondent pointed out, "Our identity is multilingual. It shows who we are."

Results from questionnaires showed mixed opinions regarding language influence on identity; however, some students admitted that plurilingual communication could help build stronger links among people of different ethnic backgrounds. In this scenario, language mixing functions not only as a communicative strategy but also as a cultural symbol.

Social Connection

At the same time, participants emphasized the importance of plurilingual practices in establishing social relationships. To give an illustration, it was established that using mixed languages could be helpful in creating a "friendly and comfortable environment" in communication with other people. To cite a participant's words, "It creates a friendly and comfortable environment."

From the data obtained in the study, it can be concluded that students engage in language mixing voluntarily, not under external pressure. To give an illustration, a majority of participants, namely 64% in total, agreed that bringing different languages into contact could be helpful in creating "respectful and civilized dialogue."

Rejection of Linguistic Stigma

Finally, some of the participants actively refuted the stigma attached to language mixing. The students refuted the idea that languages ought to be kept distinct from one another; rather, they expressed the idea that modern communication necessarily involves

the interplay of multiple linguistic resources, as one respondent said, "People who dislike mixing languages don't understand modern communication."

In general, the qualitative data appears to indicate that the students have overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards plurilingual practice.

Discussion

The findings of the study suggest that the students of Balochistan have a positive perception of plurilingualism as a communicative resource rather than a marker of linguistic incompetence. This positive perception of plurilingualism is not aligned with the conventional linguistic ideologies that regard the use of mixed languages as a marker of incompetence (Ifechelobi, 2015). Instead, the students have a positive perception of the capacity to switch between languages as a skill to facilitate effective communication in a multilingual setting. This positive perception of the capacity to switch between languages can be regarded as a change in the conception of language in modern academic circles.

The findings of the study suggest a change in the attitudes of the generations as suggested by Alshihry (2023). The previous generations may have stigmatized the use of mixed languages as impure or a marker of poor educational standards. However, the findings suggest that the current generations have a positive perception of the use of mixed languages as a demonstration of flexibility, which is in line with the views of García & Wei (2014). This suggests the fact that the current generations are more comfortable with the complexities of a multilingual society. Another important theme that is also reflected in this data is related to the link between plurilingual practices and identity construction. What is reflected in this attitude of the students is that they have a strong sense of pride related to their linguistic diversity in Balochistan (Khan et al., 2020). The use of their plurilingual competence is not just related to communication needs, but also to the expression of their identities as members of a multilingual social group. The expression of their identities through various linguistic forms is related to social identities in terms of regional/national/global affiliations. The participants also highlighted the pragmatic value of the use of several languages for communication. Plurilingual practice was seen to be beneficial for the expression of subtle meanings, the strengthening of interpersonal relations, and the creation of mutual understanding between speakers with different linguistic backgrounds which is in line with Canagarajah's (2013) position on the phenomenon. With regard to the university campus setting, where university students come from various geographical areas, the ability to mix languages facilitates easier communication and helps to avoid any potential barriers to participation.

The findings of the current study align with the findings of past studies conducted in the field of sociolinguistics that emphasize the dynamic nature of language use in a multilingual society. For instance, Canagarajah (2013) explains that the linguistic repertoire of a multilingual individual is used strategically as a whole rather than compartmentalized as individual languages. García(2009) explains that speakers use their linguistic resources as a whole to negotiate meaning effectively. The attitudes of the students as reported in the current study affirm the fact that their linguistic repertoire is used as a whole as opposed to individual language competencies.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that university students in Balochistan hold strongly positive attitudes toward plurilingualism. They perceive it as: natural, identity-affirming, socially unifying and communicatively effective. They do not accept the idea of language

mixing as a demonstration of low language proficiency. Instead, they see it as an adaptable and creative language capacity appropriate to a multilingual community. These findings emphasize the importance of ensuring that educational practices and language policies in Pakistan are aligned with the natural plurilingual practice. The concept of prejudice most commonly associated with the people of Balochistan is proven to be incorrect by this study. It is proved by the results that they want to get integrated into the other communities they are staying among. This is shown by their desire to learn the languages they are using.

The results suggest that students perceive plurilingualism as an important communicative resource that enhances their ability to interact across diverse linguistic and cultural communities. In a region such as Balochistan, where multiple languages coexist within social, educational, and cultural spaces, the ability to navigate between languages is seen as an adaptive skill that facilitates communication and social integration. The participants' responses demonstrate that plurilingualism contributes positively to their sense of identity, enabling them to maintain connections with their local linguistic heritage while also engaging with broader linguistic communities.

Another significant finding of the study is that young multilingual speakers challenge traditional notions of linguistic purism. The prevailing ideology that values a single standardized language often overlooks the complex linguistic realities of multilingual societies. However, the attitudes expressed by the students reveal a more flexible and inclusive understanding of language use. For these participants, plurilingual practices are not viewed as linguistic impurity but rather as an effective communicative strategy that reflects the dynamic nature of language in multicultural environments.

Furthermore, the study highlights the role of youth perspectives in reshaping sociolinguistic debates on multilingualism in South Asia. The positive attitudes expressed by the participants indicate a shift away from rigid linguistic hierarchies toward a more pragmatic understanding of language as a social resource. This perspective aligns with contemporary sociolinguistic theories that conceptualize plurilingualism as a form of communicative competence rather than as a deviation from linguistic norms.

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