

**STUDYING THE LINGUISTIC JOURNEY AND INDENTITY METAMORPHOSIS OF
BILINGUAL PERSON FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MULTILINGUALISM AND
BICULTURALISM**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the journey of a bilingual individual from Pakistan who navigated the complexities of learning multiple languages, particularly Urdu, English, and German, across diverse cultural contexts. Based on a narrative interview this study explores the difficulties, the coping strategies, and the identity renegotiations related to multilingualism. The present study reconciles personal experiences with academic understandings of bilingualism and biculturality in relation to a sense of belonging by highlighting the cognitive, social, and cultural significance of having two tongues. Results are also used to further explore the internal workings of bilingualism in its support to cultural integration and identity process.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a key element of human communication, which influences way in which people understand and interact with the world. With the modernisation of the world, multilingualism is widely spread, providing the potential for cultural integration, while generating them significant problems. This study examines the linguistic journey of a bilingual adult from Pakistan who, in addition to mastering Urdu and English, learned German upon relocating to Germany. Narrative is used to describe how personal and cultural change occurs together with language learning. By linking this person's story to a context of bilingualism and bicultural identity, the study reveals how language learning relates to the development of identity and to acculturation across cultures.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The similarities and differences in learning additional languages in new cultural environments that are yet to be explored. When bilingualism is associated with cognitive and cultural rewards, the personal stories of bilingual people provide uncommon access to the social, psychological, and cultural nuances of this experience. This research addresses the gap by investigating how learning German as a third language influenced a bilingual adult's identity, focusing on their journey, integration challenges, and the resulting bicultural perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on bilingualism and biculturalism has greatly expanded and produced knowledge regarding the cognitive, cultural, and identity-based aspects of facing multiple languages and cultures. This line of research sheds light on the interrelation between bilingualism and biculturalism in the formation of identity and cognitive functions, and it also points to understudied issues begging to be explored in order to better understand the multidimensionality of bilingualism.

Bilingualism is repeatedly described as a cognitive and cultural link, which enables transfer and adaptation to different environments. Language, as discussed in multiple studies (Bialystok, 2011; Grosjean, 2013; Callahan Gándara, 2014), serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a cultural mediator. It has the function of cognitive structure and cognitive systems, so that bilinguals can move through and reconcile a set of different cultural aspects. Scholars such as Grosjean (2013) and Bialystok (2011) argue that bilingual individuals develop unique linguistic systems that enable them to navigate complex environments effectively. This double cultural membership, promoted by bilingualism, generates a complex, flexible, and adaptive identity. In addition, bilingualism enhances executive functioning, mental flexibility, problem solving skills and multitasking (Valian, 2015). It further strengthens stores of cognitive reserve, a buffer against both neural aging and diseases such as Alzheimer's diseases (Spira, Grossman, Wolff-Bensdorf, 2002). These cognitive advantages underscore the profound impact of bilingualism beyond linguistic proficiency.

But in addition to its cognitive advantages, bilingualism is central to identity formation. Research highlights the difference between bilingualism (linguistic competence) and biculturalism (cultural belonging). However, although linguistic ability is a key to bilingualism, bicultural identity is not built by experience but also by links and a feeling of belonging to more than one culture. (Phinney and Devich-Navarro, 1997) maintain that bicultural identity includes fusion (or compartmentalization of elements) of the cultural in the form of a unified (or differentiated) sense of self. This idea is discussed using the Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) scale, which defines the relationship or clash between cultural identities (Schwartz et al., 2011). Individuals with high BII perceive their cultural identities as congruent and peaceful such that it allows them to smoothly adapt to any cultural context. In contrast, those with low BII perceive their cultural identities as conflicting, leading to compartmentalized or resistant adaptations. This framework is showing the processes adopted by bicultural groups to reconcile and process their bicultural identities, and providing important clues into the psychological and social characteristics of biculturating.

In addition, bicultural agents show frame-switching, a dynamic mechanism by which an agent switches from one of its cultural schemas to another based on environmental cues. This capacity to generalize is mediated by BII level, and those with high BII can smoothly reorganize their behavior in response to situational demands (Fielding Harbon, 2013). This adaptive capability reflects the rich identity complexity of bicultural individuals, who navigate between cultural norms to articulate their voices and mediate their identities. Language additionally enhances this process since bilinguals frequently articulate and discuss the linguistic duality in order to convey and negotiate cultural identities and connections (Licciardello Damigella, 2013).

Bilingualism, moreover, social aspects have a significant implication to identity process. Connection, interaction, and investment are mutually dependent components that play a crucial role in the development of the bilingual/bicultural identities (Benson, 2002). Connection relates to identification with both languages and cultures, with interaction highlighting the importance of engaging in and being supported by bi/multilingual interaction. Investment underscores the combined contribution of individuals and groups to language and cultural identity development. These factors reflect the relational and communal nature of bilingualism, that is, how social contexts inform linguistic and cultural identity (Callahan Gándara, 2014).

In addition, bilingualism and biculturalism promote self-worth and psychological health. Studies suggest a positive relationship between bilingual practices and self-regard, as bilinguals who internalize their

linguistic and cultural identities report a greater sense of fulfillment with their self-concept (Liu, 2017). Native validation of languages and cultural life-ways, and in particular, bilingual education, improves self-esteem and strengthens an ethnic sentiment. Not only such programs endorse biliteracy and academic achievement, they also help offset the home and institutional cultures, develop a culture of pride and belonging.

Although a lot of studies focused on the cognitive and social benefits of bilingualism, the issues of identity conflicts, misunderstanding of cultures, and language are underestimated. These difficulties are frequently exacerbated in environments in which people acquire a second language in very different cultural environments (Schwartz et al., 2011). The psychomotor and social challenges of using multilingualism, such as the effect of prior BL on learning a third tongue, are topics that call for further investigation (Valian, 2015).

Briefly, although the cognitive advantages of bilingualism have been extensively described, the complex trajectories of identity change and cultural bargaining in multilingual speakers remain little studied. This discrepancy can be clearly observed in the case of a person learning a new language in completely different cultural contexts. Through the exploration of linguistic development and identity change of bilinguals from a perspective of multilingualism and biculturalism, future scholarship can offer more nuanced descriptions about the effects of language, culture and identity on each other.

Research Questions

1. How does learning a third language (German) influence the identity transformation of a bilingual individual from Pakistan?
2. What strategies and difficulties do bilinguals implement and face in dealing with multilingual and multicultural environments?

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the impact of multilingualism on the personal and cultural identity of a bilingual individual.
2. To investigate the cognitive, social, and emotional strategies that bilinguals use when learning a third language and acculturating into a new cultural culture.

Significance of Research

This study is significant in highlighting how bilingualism extends beyond linguistic abilities to influence cultural identity and social integration. It provides practical insights for educators, policymakers, and individuals navigating multicultural environments. Moreover, it highlights the need to consider what goes beyond abstract theoretical constructs on bilingualism and biculturalism in order to understand personal experiences.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical background for this study is structured around three major concepts which offer a multilevel framework for comprehension of the interviewee's experiences.

Second, the paper builds upon Grosjean's (considered holistic) description of bilingualism which envisages bilinguals as individual language users (rather than a sum of two monolinguals)³. This view emphasizes the very cognitive flexibility present in bilingual populations and contexts in which they can adjust and move through dynamically linguistic and culturally mixed spaces.

Second, Berry's acculturation theory is the key to explaining with which cultural environment the interviewee responded. This framework examines the process by which people will employ—integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization—when confronted by another culture. It provides clues to how the interviewee navigated the tension between staying true to their roots and to adopting the customs of their host society.

Finally, the study integrates Phinney's model of bicultural identity processes (i.e., how individuals make sense of how to reconcile and integrate aspects of two cultures into a coherent construct of self). This model is particularly relevant in exploring the interviewee's reflections on feeling “straddled between two worlds” and their efforts to embrace a dual cultural identity.

In conjunction with one another, these theories interlink to constitute a powerful context in which to study the complexities of language acquisition, acculturation and identity change in bilingualism and multilingualism.

METHODOLOGY

In line with a qualitative narrative strategy, the linguistic experience of a bilingual adult transitioning from Pakistan to Germany was investigated in order to understand the evolution of the linguistic path and the bicultural identity. For this purpose, the method was selected so as to be able to record the participant's personal experiences, language-learning strategies, and identity transformation. Moreover, The data collection centered on an in-depth, semi-structured interview lasting approximately 15 minutes, conducted in a conversational style to encourage the participant to share detailed insights into their journey. As requested by the participant, a phone recorder was employed to record the interview. This enabled the investigator to listen to the audio recordings while transcribing and coding responses to avoid missing out any information and to capture the story in all its details.

As a next step, a thematic analysis was performed on the interview data, which allowed for the derivation of regularities and themes pertaining to bilingualism, language acquisition, and identity negotiation. Then these themes were linked to the existing literature, and this enabled the theoretical framework to be built to contextualize the participant's experience.

Accordingly, this method provided an integrated view of the participant's experience while preserving the wholeness and naturalness of the participant's story. The use of audio recordings and iterative listening enhanced the reliability of the findings, while the narrative format provided rich, nuanced insights into the lived experiences of bilingualism and bicultural identity.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The linguistic trajectory of the interviewee leads to a rich insight into the interaction relating to bilingualism, language acquisition, and developing bicultural identity. Using their accounts, we are able to identify links to fundamental themes in the literature, capturing what may otherwise be considered the cognitive, emotional and cultural aspects of multilingualism.

Initial Exposure to Languages: Foundational Bilingualism

The interviewee's life experience as a bilingual speaker of Urdu and English, that is, an individual who spoke Urdu by a family in the urban context and English by a family in the rural context (the urban context is Urdu by nature, while the rural context is English by nature), created a cognitive and cultural background for subsequent linguistic activities. Research supports the hypothesis that bilinguals become metalinguistically aware, in turn aiding the acquisition of new languages (Cummins, 1979). In this case, the early acquisition of English, a globally dominant language, served as a cognitive and communicative bridge to German.

Although Urdu served as the anchor to the interviewee's cultural self, Hindi served as a window to global communication. The double exposure not only promoted linguistic flexibility but also taught improvement on new linguistic systems. This is consistent with Kroll and Bialystok's (2013) claim that bilinguals are more prepared to handle the challenges of learning a new language, because they are able to shift between linguistic codes.

Challenges in Learning German: The Role of Linguistic Distance

Despite the cognitive benefits of bilingualism, the interviewee faced significant challenges in learning German, particularly its intricate grammatical structures and cultural nuances. German's complex syntax, gendered nouns, and case system posed difficulties, which were compounded by the lack of prior exposure to the language. These difficulties represent the notion of linguistic distance (Chiswick Miller, 2005), that is, the effect of the gap between what is structurally different in a learner's native languages and the target language on acquisition difficulty.

Additionally, the interviewee's difficulties with cultural references emphasize the value of sociolinguistic competence in language acquisition. De Angelis (2007) points out the importance of cross-linguistic influence, in the sense that learners frequently look to their current linguistic repertoire when crossing languages. However, in this case, the interviewee's background in Urdu and English provided limited transferable knowledge for mastering German, necessitating immersive and adaptive learning strategies.

Cultural Integration and Identity Negotiation: Balancing Dual Worlds

The interviewee's narrative of feeling "straddled between two worlds" encapsulates the tension and enrichment inherent in bicultural identity formation. Berry's acculturation theory (1997) is an appealing model for describing this experience by suggesting that those immersed in a multiplicity of cultures undergo processes of assimilation, separation, integration, or marginalization.

In the interviewee's case, integration emerged as the dominant strategy. Adopting many aspects of a German culture, including its valuing of accuracy and individualism, they never dissociated themselves from their Pakistani culture, which gave them security and rootedness. That bicultural identity allowed the interviewee to go through cultural difference with understanding and flexibility in accordance with Grosjean's (2010) results of the dynamic character of bilingual and bicultural identities.

Impact of Multilingualism on Identity: Personal Growth and Empathy

English Language Learners version of the interviewee's multilingual experience transformed its self, resulting in an increased awareness of culture and other's feelings. According to Grosjean (2010), bilingualism is not only a linguistic experience but also a cultural and cognitive phenomenon that embellishes an individual's perception of the world. For the interviewee, the ability to switch between languages and cultural frameworks enhanced their capacity for empathy and cross-cultural communication, skills that are increasingly valuable in today's interconnected world.

This change also corresponds to the idea of "linguistic relativity", where language is claimed to direct thought and perception (Whorf, 1956). By engaging with German, the interviewee gained access to new ways of conceptualizing the world, further broadening their perspective.

Summary of Findings

Interview findings indicated that bilingualism goes beyond facilitating the learning of further languages, but also helps to develop a deep, cultural difference understanding. The person's story describes the importance of linguistic competence for the processes of acclimating into the new cultural world and points at the source of emotional and cognitive difficulties of the new linguistic area.

Implications of the study:

The study has important ramifications for academic research as well as for practical use. Thematically, it feeds its way into the expanding literature on bilingualism and multilingualism by providing a narrative of language acquisition and identity process, covering the cognitive, emotional, and cultural aspects of language development. Focusing on the lived experiences of a bilingual person, the study expands our qualitative insights into the way bilingualism relates to cultural assimilation and identity negotiation, which generates a dense set of qualitative data that can be used together with relatively large quantitative studies. It also highlights the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity in the development of individuals' cognitive and empathic flexibility, and this has implications for theoretical perspectives in linguistics, psychology, and cultural studies. From a practical point of view the research also has implications for the development of educational and social policy in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Educators and language teachers can all utilise the results to inform the teaching approaches which take account of the individual cognitive and cultural constraints of multilingual pupils, especially when learning languages covering significant linguistic distance. The study also emphasizes the role of promoting sociolinguistic competence and enabling immersive, adaptive learning contexts across linguistic and cultural differences. In addition, the results highlight the importance of helping individuals

maintain bicultural identities, and imply that the best integration approach should focus on cultural dynamism and appreciation for people's cultural heritage, rather than on assimilation or marginalization.

Policymakers can assume from the evidence that multicultural societies would benefit from programs promoting linguistic diversity and intercultural comprehension. The interviewee's path illustrates how multilingualism can lead to a positive change in both cognitive and cultural abilities but in addition promotes the development of empathy and overcomes cultural barriers. These findings are especially important during time of great interconnectedness in, and globalization to, multilingualism and biculturalization as much as possible needed for productive communication, collaboration, and social integration.

LIMITATIONS

The constraints of this work are inevitably intrinsic to its qualitative, narrative methodology, which prioritizes depth and the expression of personal insight over breadth and replicability. Because the study is based on the lived experiences of one bilingual person exploring multilingualism, the results are intrinsically subjective and situational. The study accounts for the details of the course of the interviewee but otherwise does not have the capacity to claim the experience of all being bilingual or multilingual, especially being those from diverse cultural or language backgrounds. Furthermore, the use of a narrative interview constrain the possibility of checking or triangulate data with other sources and/or points of view, which can lead to a bias in interpretation. The attention to Urdu, English, and German, at the expense of other languages that might show distinct patterns of interaction or cultural nos, in a multilingual context, limits the linguistic perspective. In addition, this study analyzes the process of language acquisition and identity in a static way, from the perspective of the author's own lived experience, which may overlook longitudinal evolution or external factors such as political, technological, or generational forces that may contribute differently to the formation of a multilingual identity.

CONCLUSION

Bilingualism and bicultural identity are inextricably linked as the interviewee's experience has demonstrated. This article focuses on the transformative impact of language acquisition on identity formation and promoting intercultural communication. Through combining personal experience with theoretical understanding, the study underlines the crucial role in supporting multilingual people in their linguistic and cultural journey. Future studies should consider the longitudinal effects of bilingualism on identity and language learning strategies in multicultural environments.

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