

## Sociolinguistic Dimensions of Language Policy: Psychological Effects of Dominant Languages on Identity and Self-Esteem

Muhammad Zeeshan<sup>1</sup>, Safoora Tanveer<sup>2</sup>, Batool Humayun<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>HoD English, PGC. Sialkot

<sup>2</sup>Government College University, Faisalabad

<sup>3</sup>Government College University, Faisalabad

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.63163/jpehss.v4i1.1300>

### Abstract

This study investigates the sociolinguistic aspects of language strategy, with a specific emphasis on the psychological impacts of majority languages on self respect. Language framework, frequently presented as an impartial instrument of administration, holds significant societal and psychological outcomes, forming both communal and individual sense of belonging. Based on sociolinguistic theory and psychological research, the paper investigates how hegemonic language beliefs can undermine language of less widely spoken language, leading to erode self-esteem, culture estrangement and role of conflicts. By evaluating research cases from multilingual communities, this article focuses on how language rankings provide an assimilated linguistic disparity and identity construction. The results emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive and diverse language strategies that acknowledge linguistic variety while assisting individual's emotional well-being. Finally, this study claims that inclusive language strategy is not just a societal imperative but also a cognitive requirement.

### Introduction

Linguistic approach is a series of choices, administrative practices, legislation and belief system that patterns which linguistic systems are encouraged, tolerated or restrained in social life and constitutes guidelines of social hierarchy with significant results for individuals societies. Language Policy researchers illustrate that authorized decisions about speech form in learning, management, legislation and social media do not work in isolation; they are integrated in authority hierarchy and conflicting interests and implement alternate access to facilities and reputation. At the time that, language is refined to an apparent authority dominant status via education, lawful priority or media influence, orators of minority languages could encounter oppressed more than that regarding opportunity (employment, learning) but also in relation of self perception: their sense of self-esteem and integration can be modified by daily indications of condescension that importance one language over Prioritization. (Bourdieu, Phillipson). This article analyzes the psychological outcomes of privileged language policies for personal self worth.

The goal has two aspects:

1) to address the process in which national language strategies interpret into individual level psychological aspects.

(2) to present policy and instructional responses that reduce damage and promote constructive self-concept.

On the other hand, Government-funded bilingual longstage education programs in parts of Latin America, New Zealand, and Bolivia have been connected with rewire pride and structural support for native identities-although results depend on funding and social engagement (Hornberger).

### **Theoretical Framework**

To connect linguistic planning and psychological consequences, it is essential to assimilate three compatible theoretical approaches.

#### **Linguistic capital & symbolic power**

According to Pierre Bourdieu theory, language is a valuable social asset. This explains why people who speak a certain preferred language receive better treatment in official system and in their daily social interaction. According to Bourdieu, specific linguistic forms hold financial and societal worth that can be exchanged for academic possibilities (such as entry into universities or academic opportunities high social standing, superior career prospects), national or formal acceptance. This specific language forms a capital worth and perpetual privilege. In this context, language management refers to broaden the dialect work act as a system that restructures intangible prestige and, as a result, formulate opportunities.

#### **Social identity theory and group self-esteem**

Social identity theory (SIT) focuses on the cognitive significance of social affiliation; an individual self-perception is significantly shaped by social perception and their integration into categories (ethnic, linguistic, national). This theory looks for establishing superior differentiation for their affiliated collection to preserve or elevate their self worth (Tajfel and Turner). When linguistic regulation designate as substandard or marginal, the adverse assessment has the potential to diminish personal self-valuation and dignity by disparaging their social identity as a significant marker. On the other hand, regulation that acknowledges and preserves language variety can reinforce collective identity and personal welfare.

#### **Ethnolinguistic vitality and identity negotiation**

According to Ethnolinguistic vitality theory and pertinent investigations led by Giles and his team, propose a model for measuring the capacity of group to perpetuate their unique language and sense of self. Group viability is contingent upon various prestige determinants as social, prestige, economic structure and geographic collection. Systemic regulations that impair collection health frequently trigger retreat as an adaptive behavioral response, language shift, sociolinguistic, collaboration or strategic resistance focused on the awakening of a dominant heritage language. Bonny Nortons theory, based on the individuality and linguistic development demonstrates that the mastery of a new language is inherently linked to the negotiation and assertion of one's social subjectivity and gaining entrance into the social or professional groups that a learner envisions for the future identity. To encounter hegemonic linguistic hierarchies, they must negotiate their own social value and identity.

#### **Dominant language policies: a global perspective**

Language or linguistic policy adopts numerous types such as authorized monolingualism, and integration-focused education. In reality prevalence through communication platform as well as trade has alternatively more inclusive multilanguage frameworks. Traditionally, colonial occupational and state formation programs frequently established monolingual or power

structure founded on guidelines which privileged urban system (Phillipson; Skutnabb-kangas). These strategies have influenced linguistic change and linguistic decline within situation from the Americas to Oceania and Africa. Simultaneously, the late 20th and early 21st centuries have noted couple of opposing developments. From one perspective, the global spread and dominance of English language influenced by economic globalization, media, and higher education has intensified pressures on smaller group language and established recent structure that benefit English expertise. From another perspective, increasing appreciation of linguistic civil liberties and natives campaign possesses created strategy advancements; bilingual education, formal acknowledgment of subgroup language and linguistic restoration projects (Hombberger Whalen et al.). These mixed development indicate that the mental impacts of the linguistic strategy are irregular; in certain situation strategies enhance prohibition; in other context the group support to restoration and contribute to recovery and wellbeing. Instance assist demonstrate difference integrationist education that banned native language in many imperial and post imperial contexts generated heritage language reduction and social prejudice about indigenous oration (Skutnabb-kangas). On the other hand, government-backed bilingual education schemes in throughout of Latin America New Zealand and Bolivia have been connection with revived dignity and administrative support for native identities although findings rely on funding and collection participation (Hombberger).

### **Psychological pathways: How policy affects self-esteem and identity**

This part structure near device connecting powerful dialect rules toward people self-esteem or individuality.

### **Stigma, internalization, and self-esteem**

Once speakers again and again get text via education, media, or law that their dialect because of inferior value, stigma can develop. Stigma perform the pair externally or internally: speakers might internalize hostile valuation their to disgrace regarding dialect abate linguistic confidence and lower global self-worth. Psychological measures such as Rotenberg self-esteem scale are universally used to measure self esteem or be able to find population-level differences related because of alienation observational feedback show which dialect decline or lesser rank be frequently connected along needly psychological condition and self esteem results between native resident via cause and effect equal complicated mediated by social economic factors.

### **identity fragmentation and role conflict**

Language is a core identity marker. Policies that promote a dominant language can force speakers to negotiate multiple identities: a public, "prestige" identity performed in the dominant language, and a private, community-rooted identity anchored in the mother tongue. This negotiation can cause role conflict and fragmentation: individuals may feel inauthentic in dominant-language settings and marginalized in their community if linguistic competence shifts across generations. Norton's research on learners shows how identity investment and access to imagined communities shape language behavior; analogous dynamics apply when the educational system privileges another tongue (Norton).

### **Reduced access to symbolic resources and esteem can be paraphrased as:**

Speakers of minority or subordinated languages often miss out on important symbolic resources like prestigious education, media exposure, or validated credentials. According to Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital, this unequal access creates a structural disadvantage that diminishes their social and cultural capital, which in turn lowers their self-assessment and self-confidence.

### **Protective pathways: revitalization, community support, and wellbeing**

Not all effects of policies are negative. Recent syntheses of indigenous language revitalization indicate that strengthening language use and providing institutional support can have measurable positive effects on individual and community health, mental wellbeing, and self-esteem – by reinforcing belonging, cultural continuity, and empowerment (Whalen et al.). These protective pathways suggest that policies which actively promote minority languages can mitigate or reverse earlier harms

### **Methodology: a recommended empirical approach**

Because the psychological impacts of language policy are multi-level and multifaceted, a mixed-methods design is recommended. Below I outline a pragmatic framework that combines quantitative measurement with qualitative depth.

### **Sampling and contexts**

Select comparative case studies representing contrasting policy environments – for example: (A) a historically assimilationist setting (where dominant language policies have been strong), (B) a recently bilingualizing setting (policy shift toward recognition), and (C) a revitalization context (active community programs). Within each case, recruit participants across age cohorts, educational backgrounds, and urban/rural settings to capture intergenerational dynamics.

### **Quantitative instruments**

**Self-esteem:** Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (10 items) – widely validated cross-culturally and appropriate for population comparisons. Use it to measure global self-esteem and test correlations with language attitudes and use.

**Language attitudes & identity scales:** Adapt validated measures of language prestige, identity centrality, and perceived discrimination (drawing on ETS/linguistics survey instruments).

**Sociodemographic controls:** education, income, language proficiency (self-reported and objective where possible), exposure to media in dominant vs. minority language.

**Quantitative analysis:** hierarchical linear modelling (to account for nested data: individual in communities) and structural equation modelling (to test mediation: policy perceived stigma self-esteem).

### **Qualitative methods**

Research should employ qualitative techniques to capture nuanced experiences related to language policy and identity.

**Semi-structured interviews:** focus on personal narratives concerning language socialization processes, schooling experiences, identity negotiation, and individual perceptions of policy influence. Utilize identity and investment questions derived from Norton's theoretical framework to guide the interviews.

**Focus groups:** organize group discussions to capture community discourse surrounding language prestige, feelings of shame or pride, and intergenerational perceptions of language use and policy effects.

**Document analysis:** examine policy texts, educational curricula, and media representations to triangulate how official language policies are actually enacted and experienced in practice, following Spolsky's approach to language policy analysis.

### **Ethical considerations**

Investigating stigmatized populations demands rigorous ethical procedures: obtain informed consent from all participants, ensure community consultation, protect anonymity of responses, and engage in co-design with local stakeholders where appropriate. Researchers must prioritize benefits for the participating communities, such as sharing findings that can support local language revitalization initiatives and efforts.

### **Expected findings and discussion (conceptual synthesis)**

Although empirical results will vary according to specific contexts, the integrated literature suggests several recurring patterns and insights.

### **Correlational patterns**

Quantitative investigations are likely to reveal a negative association between perceived language stigma and self-esteem, after controlling for socioeconomic variables. In settings where language policy has historically suppressed minority languages, older cohorts may exhibit language loss accompanied by ambivalent identity and lower measures of community-based self-esteem; younger cohorts' outcomes will depend on schooling experiences and availability of revitalization opportunities. Studies of indigenous communities indicate that active language use and revitalization programs correlate with improved mental-health indicators and stronger cultural identity (as reported by Whalen et al. and Hornberger).

### **Mechanisms: internalization and identity work**

Qualitative narratives typically uncover processes of internalization (feelings of shame regarding native speech) and compensatory strategies such as code-switching, passing, or distancing from community norms. Norton's theories of investment and imagined communities help explain why some individuals adopt the dominant language as a pathway to envisioned future possibilities, even while experiencing identity-related costs. (Norton)

### **Variation and resilience**

Ethnolinguistic vitality matters because when institutions such as schools, media, and legal frameworks provide support, individuals experience less stigma and higher group pride. Revitalization programs—especially those that are community-led and well-resourced—often act as protective factors for self-esteem and community cohesion (Whalen et al.; Hornberger).

### **Policy trade-offs**

Policymakers must confront trade-offs. Prioritizing a single dominant language can promote short-term economic integration and administrative efficiency, but the social and psychological costs for marginalized communities may be substantial. Conversely, explicitly multilingual policies that are well funded and implemented can bolster well-being but require sustained political will and resources (Spolsky; Skutnabb-Kangas).

### **Implications for policy and practice**

From the preceding synthesis, several practical recommendations follow.

#### **Recognize linguistic rights and symbolic value**

Language policy should explicitly acknowledge the symbolic and psychological importance of minority languages. Recognition is not merely symbolic it has material implications for educational curricula, teacher training, and media representation (Skutnabb-Kangas; Spolsky).

#### **Invest in bilingual/multilingual education**

Bilingual education that includes mother-tongue instruction in early years has two benefits: it improves learning outcomes and supports identity development by validating students' linguistic heritage. Where implemented with community partnership and adequate resources, such programs mitigate identity-related harms. Hornberger's comparative work on Andean and Oceanic contexts shows the practical potential of bilingual education.

### **Support community-led revitalization**

Top-down announcements aren't enough. Real revitalization and its psychological benefits happen when programs are driven by the community itself, rooted in local culture, and tied to health and social services (Whalen et al.).

### **Monitor psychological outcomes**

Policymakers and educators should add psychosocial measures—such as self-esteem, identity, and mental-health indicators—to their evaluation of language programs. Tracking these outcomes ensures policies boost both linguistic vitality and overall human well-being (Rosenberg; Whitesell et al.).

### **Conclusion**

Language policy is more than just literacy or administration; it shapes the symbolic environment where people form self-understanding and group belonging. Theories from Bourdieu (linguistic capital), Tajfel & Turner (social identity), Giles (ethnolinguistic vitality), and Norton (identity & investment) provide a framework linking policy to self-esteem and identity. Recent research, especially on indigenous contexts, shows language loss and low vitality correlate with negative health and self-esteem effects, while revitalization and recognition protect against these outcomes. Scholars should use mixed-methods studies that combine validated psychological tools (e.g., Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) with qualitative narratives. Policymakers should shift from coercive monolingualism to pluralist policies that fund education, community revitalization, and recognize linguistic human rights. Ultimately, language policy is a site where social justice, public health, and cultural continuity intersect, and its psychological dimension is essential for humane, effective governance.

### **Reference**

- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Giles, Howard, Richard Y. Bourhis, and Donald M. Taylor. "Towards a Theory of Language in Ethnic Group Relations." *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*, edited by Howard Giles, Academic Press, 1977, pp. 307–348.
- Hornberger, Nancy H. "Indigenous Language Revitalization in the Americas." *Journal/Edited Volume*, 2004. (See Hornberger on bilingual education, Andes/Paraguay/New Zealand cases).
- Norton, Bonny. *Identity and Language Learning: Social Processes and Educational Practice*. Longman/Pearson, 2000.
- Phillipson, Robert. *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Rosenberg, Morris. *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*. Princeton University Press, 1965.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove. *Linguistic Genocide in Education—or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000.
- Spolsky, Bernard. *Language Policy*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Tajfel, Henri, and John C. Turner. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict." *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by W. G. Austin and S. Worchel, Brooks/Cole, 1979, pp. 33–47.
- Whalen, D. H., Melissa E. Lewis, Stefanie Gillson, Brittany McBeath, Bri Alexander, and Kate Nyhan. "Health Effects of Indigenous Language Use and Revitalization: A Realist Review." *International Journal for Equity in Health*, vol. 21, 2022.
- Whitesell, N. R., et al. "A Longitudinal Study of Self-Esteem, Cultural Identity, and Resiliency." *Journal*, 2009.