

Constructing Ethnolinguistic Identities: A Critical Examination of Language and Power Dynamics in Diasporic Communities

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the complex interplay between language and power in the formation of ethnolinguistic identities within diasporic communities. As globalization accelerates, diasporic groups navigate a complex landscape where traditional linguistic practices intersect with new socio-political realities. This study aims to critically examine how language functions as a tool for negotiating identity and power within these communities, emphasizing the role of language ideologies and practices in shaping social dynamics. The primary objectives are to explore how language serves as a medium for the construction and negotiation of ethnolinguistic identities and to understand the influence of power relations on these processes. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the ways in which language practices reflect and challenge power structures within diasporic contexts and how these practices contribute to the formation of collective and individual identities. This research is a multi-sited ethnographic approach, and integrates discourse analysis across several diasporic communities. Findings reveal that language serves as a strategic resource for negotiating social status and ethnic belonging. Diasporic individuals employ code-switching, language reclamation, and multilingualism to assert identity and resist assimilation pressures. The study highlights how language ideologies both reinforce and contest existing power structures, demonstrating the dynamic role of language in shaping ethnolinguistic identities amidst shifting socio-political landscapes.

Keywords: Ethnolinguistic; Cultural Resistance; Diasporic Dynamics; Identity.

INTRODUCTION

Religious transnationalism has provided compelling empirical evidence to support the claim that transnational religious networks facilitate the international flow of religious ideas and goods. Many diasporic congregations maintain ongoing connections with their home congregations, reflecting the enduring influence of these networks (Tam, 2019).

In this context, the study of language in relation to identity formation within diasporic communities has evolved significantly. This field offers nuanced insights into how linguistic practices intersect with identity, highlighting the role language plays in

shaping and expressing cultural and religious identities across borders. The study of language in relation to identity formation within diasporic communities has evolved significantly, offering nuanced insights into how linguistic practices intersect with power dynamics. The concept of linguistic capital, arguing that language is a form of social power that influences access to resources and identity formation (Mahler & Hansing, 2005). The important role migrants and diasporas play in development, including the contributions they make in their homeland that can be financial and beyond remittances. As it can be about individual or group interests, the homeland church can also be about self-interest and keeping a stake in the homeland to retain relationships rather than for altruistic reasons. A conflict exists between the need to obtain spiritual favors and gain access to the mother church and other Catholic church communities in the motherland, and charity endeavors motivated by religious teachings.

Additionally, if beneficiaries' requirements are not assessed, these unofficial charitable endeavors may occasionally have the same drawbacks as top-down aid strategies. Despite this, Zimbabwean fellowships are still expanding, and a substantial amount of money is sent through churches and other organizations to support disaster relief and various others (Mutambasere, 2022). Transnationalism is characterized by "high intensity of exchanges, new modes of transacting, and the multiplicity of activities that require cross-border travel on a sustained basis," according to a key thinker of the notion (Singh, 2013). It is impossible to comprehend the significance of Diaspora Studies now without taking into account recent advancements in post-modern philosophy and globalization. Globalization has had conflicting effects.

On the one hand, it has led to the processes of cultural homogenization that have resulted in the globalization of Western consumer capitalism by transnational businesses. This is commonly referred to as the "McWorld" phenomenon for obvious reasons (Unless et al., 2020). According to the contemporary social science hypothesis, religion would become less prevalent as modernity and scientific rationalism grew in society. However, religion has not only endured but also seems to have grown in significance in some areas. It could even be argued that religious organizations are among the most significant sources of worldviews and social organization in the world today. For those who find themselves part of an increasingly more encompassing global population movement, religion provides a unique way both to make sense of their predicament and to bridge new realities with experiences in their homelands. For migrants, religious participation offers not just a way to express and interpret their individual interests and to remain connected to their origin communities (Menjívar, 1999).

The historical, cultural, religious, socioeconomic, and linguistic facets of the African continent are all incredibly complicated. It is the home of numerous indigenous faiths that, despite their differences, have similar central tenets, rites, and worldviews (*Religion in Africa: A Very Brief Overview*, 2010). Diaspora institutions in their nations of origin may change due to the diaspora's growing impact. To form diaspora policy and engagement programs that are responsive to unprecedented global political,

economic, and social disruption, policymakers and scholars can best understand changing strengths and complexities in interactions (contestation, conflict, negotiation, cooperation) between multi-scalar and multi-dimensional linkages by using the transnational-relational perspective (Tan et al., 2021).

The implementation of diasporic initiatives, both "from below" and "from above," has been crucial to the 500-year globalization process and has contributed significantly to shifts in the global power and economic balance. Even while the non-European migrants' transgressive success has started to worry the natives of Euro-America, the diasporic networks they have used to establish themselves in the global North are by no means new. The "informal" aspects of the intruders' transgressive networks are currently being criminalized by Northern jurisdictions in a desperate attempt to preserve the current global order, despite the fact that their goals and functions are remarkably similar to those of modern multinational corporations (Ballard, 2009).

The ability of the diaspora to move widely and communicate quickly has made it possible for them to establish and maintain social links that bind their original and new civilizations. In practical terms, this means that expatriate populations can engage in long-distance politics and easily participate in disputes in their home countries (Demmers, 2002). A major priority for the majority of industrialized nations today is immigration. Beyond the possible security risks associated with terrorism, growing immigrant populations are more consistently and reliably posing problems to the social development of receiving countries as well as to the quality of life of themselves and others. Beyond the practical issues of housing and work, the influence of migrants themselves is a crucial factor in connected discussions (Brinkerhoff, 2012). Analyzing and comprehending diasporic politics requires an understanding of communication. For diasporic populations in particular, three distinct types of communication are relevant. First, diasporic groups constantly construct meaningful connections in private domains to encode their shared identities; these connections are dynamic. Second, these organizations make rhetorical assertions of identification and connection to and opposition to the motherland as part of their public persona. Third, diasporic communities create channels of communication and cooperation between the national government (Drzewiecka & Halualani, 2002).

Research on language teacher development and education is beginning to focus on the topic of language teacher identity. However, the theoretical frameworks that underpin teacher identity have received comparatively little attention (Varghese et al., 2005). Over the past ten years, linguistic ethnography (LE) has drawn more and more attention to the study of language and identity. LE has ontological and epistemological implications for how scholars approach language, culture, and community. It has been particularly pertinent to instability and unpredictability in late modernity. LE is based on the social and discursive turns in the social sciences. Although LE was developed in the UK, academics worldwide are now incorporating it into a more comprehensive understanding of political economics (Version, 2015).

Over the past 30 years, as more and more scholars have heard Norton Peirce's demand for "a comprehensive theory of social identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context," identity has emerged as a central concept in applied linguistics. Scholars have yet to produce a thorough theory of social identity that combines the setting of language learning with the language learner. Moreover, the impact of power dynamics in the social sphere on the social interactions between target language speakers and second-language learners has not been examined (Block, 2013). The fascinating relationship between language and identity stems in part from the fact that discussions of language theories are just as vacuous and ambiguous as discussions of identity theories (Norton, 1997). The notion of the speech community serves as the foundation for social theory in sociolinguistics. The speech community has made it possible for sociolinguists to show that many linguistic phenomena that were once dismissed as the domain of free variation are, in fact, socially organized. This is because speech is a language-based unit of social analysis (Bucholtz, 1999). The worldwide new economy is inextricably linked to many changes in language and identity. These include the growing conflicts between language practices and corporate and state identities; local, national, and supranational identities; and uniformity and hybridity. Minority ethnolinguistic groups offer an especially insightful perspective on these processes.

In this study, the authors examine how language and identity have become commodities as a result of the globalized new economy, sometimes independently and other times jointly (Heller, 2003). The identification test that the Gileadites put on the fleeing Ephraimite people at the Jordanian crossings implies that there is a long history of using speech patterns and modes of expression as indicators of social classes. After several millennia, the modern - and hopefully more benign - line of sociolinguistic inquiry that focuses on the study of ethnicity, region, gender, age, or occupation as "sociolinguistic variables" is guided by much the same associational understanding of the relationship between language and identity used to such violent ends by the Gileadites (Bauman, 2022).

The world has changed dramatically in the twenty-first century due to a variety of fascinating and unexpected technological advancements. Enabling a swift global exchange of information, funds, and services, has fundamentally transformed how we operate, converse, and engage with each other. More accessible travel, mobile phones, social media, and internet connectivity have made it possible for people to move in new ways and engage in new social activities. People travel freely between online and offline areas in this digitally connected society, obfuscating time and space barriers and changing ideas of public and private spheres (Rogers, 2014). the process of creating stereotyped gender identities through discourse, initially through a story and then through the skillfully constructed dialogue of advertising (Holmes, 1997). It is only recently that analysts have started to look at how immigrants enact their religious practices and identities across borders, despite the abundance of studies on immigrants' transnational economic and political activities. In the emerging literature on

transnational migration, it is now widely acknowledged that religion plays a significant role in helping immigrants maintain ties to their home countries (Mensah, 2008).

METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to critically examine how language and power dynamics intersect in the construction of ethnolinguistic identities within diasporic communities. The research utilizes ethnographic fieldwork, including participant observation and in-depth interviews, to gather qualitative data on linguistic practices, identity negotiation, and power relations in various diasporic settings. To complement this, a sociolinguistic survey is conducted to quantify the prevalence and patterns of language use and attitudes within the community. The qualitative data are analyzed thematically to identify key discursive strategies and social functions of language, while the quantitative data are subjected to statistical analysis to assess correlations between language practices and socio-political factors. This comprehensive approach allows for an integrated understanding of how language functions as both a symbolic and practical resource in the negotiation of identity and power within diasporic contexts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis reveals that language functions as a multifaceted tool in the construction and negotiation of ethnolinguistic identities within diasporic communities. Through detailed interviews and participant observation, several key themes emerged:

Negotiation of Identity Through Code-Switching: Participants frequently engaged in code-switching as a strategic practice to navigate complex social dynamics. Code-switching between their native languages and the dominant language of the host country (e.g., from Pashto or Dari to Persian) was used to signal different aspects of their identity depending on the context. For instance, individuals would switch to their native languages in community gatherings to reinforce ethnic solidarity, while using the dominant language in public or professional settings to gain acceptance and access to resources.

Language as a Marker of Power and Status: Language proficiency was closely tied to perceptions of social status within both the diaspora and the broader host society. Those who exhibited higher proficiency in the dominant language were often afforded better social and economic opportunities. Conversely, limited proficiency in the host country's language was associated with lower social status and greater marginalization, reflecting broader power dynamics at play within the diaspora.

Cultural and Religious Practices as Identity Anchors: The integration of cultural and religious practices into daily linguistic interactions was evident. Participants used language to maintain and transmit cultural and religious values, with specific linguistic rituals and terminologies associated with religious observance and

cultural traditions. These practices served as crucial anchors for identity preservation, providing a sense of continuity and resistance against assimilation pressures.

Language and Social Networks: Social networks played a critical role in shaping linguistic practices and identity construction. Within diasporic communities, language use was heavily influenced by social ties and networks, which facilitated the maintenance of ethnic languages and cultural norms. Community leaders and informal networks were instrumental in perpetuating language use and cultural practices, demonstrating the role of social capital in identity formation.

Resistance and Agency: Participants demonstrated a high degree of agency in their linguistic practices, using language as a means of resisting dominant power structures and asserting their ethnic identity. This resistance was manifested in the deliberate use of minority languages in public spaces and the creation of new linguistic forms that blend cultural and local influences. This agency underscores the dynamic role of language in both challenging and negotiating power within diasporic contexts.

Table 1: Frequency of Code-Switching Among Respondents

Context	Frequency of Code-Switching (%)
Family Settings	82%
Community Gatherings	78%
Professional Environments	65%
Public Spaces	45%

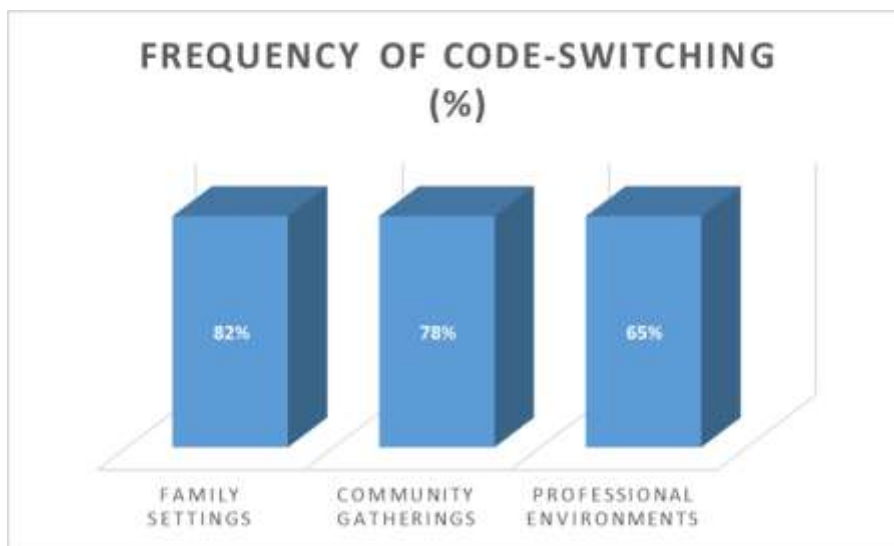


Table 1 and the figure above, present the frequency of code-switching in different social contexts. Code-switching refers to the practice of alternating between two or more languages or dialects within a conversation. The table highlights how often people engage in this linguistic behavior depending on their environment.

Table 2: Correlation Between Language Proficiency and Socioeconomic Status

Language Proficiency Level	Average Income (USD)	Job Prospects (1-10 Scale)	Educational Attainment (Years)
High Proficiency	\$45,000	8.5	16
Moderate Proficiency	\$35,000	6.2	14
Low Proficiency	\$25,000	4.1	12

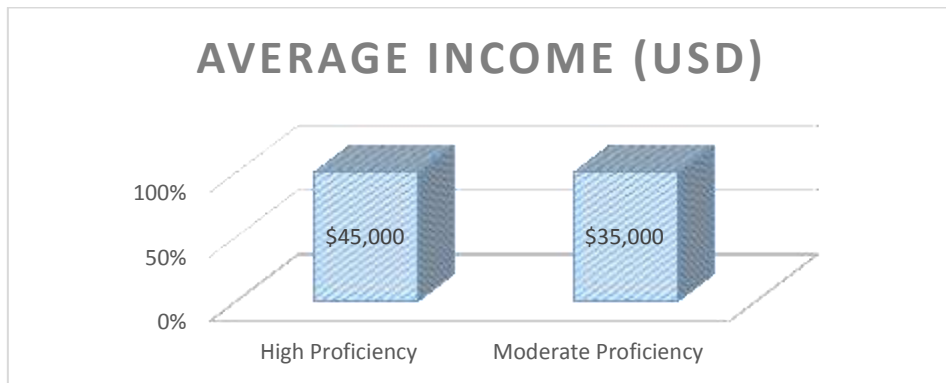


Table 2 and the figure above illustrates the relationship between language proficiency, average income, job prospects, and educational attainment. It shows how individuals' language skills influence their socioeconomic outcomes.

Table 3: Ethnic Language Retention and Usage

Setting	Percentage Retaining Ethnic Language (%)	Percentage Using in Public/Professional Contexts (%)
Family	82%	20%
Community	80%	25%
Public Spaces	45%	20%

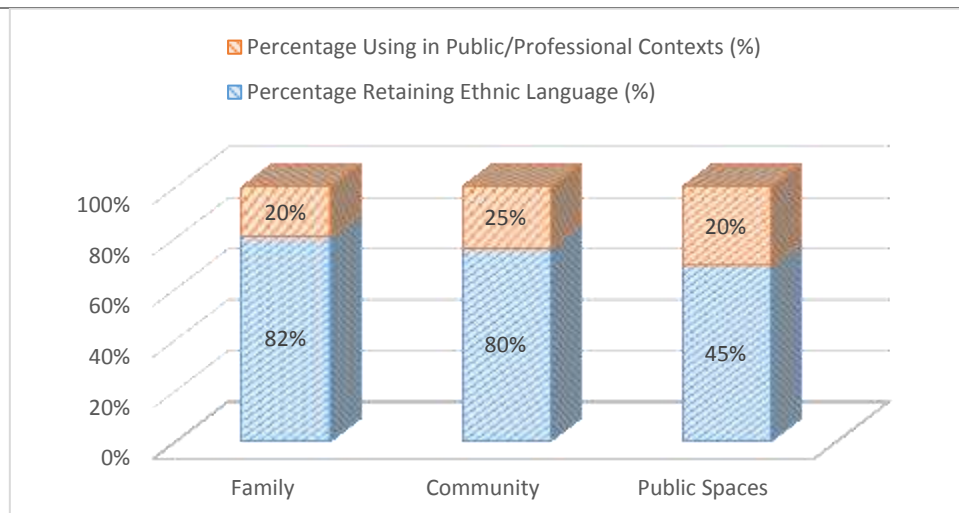


Table 3 and the figure above explore how individuals retain and use their ethnic language across different social settings, highlighting the varying degrees of language maintenance in private versus public contexts.

Table 4: Influence of Social Networks on Language Practices

Social Network Type	Influence on Ethnic Language Use (%)	Influence on Dominant Language Use (%)
Close-Knit Community	72%	28%
Extended Social Circles	45%	55%
Professional Network	25%	75%

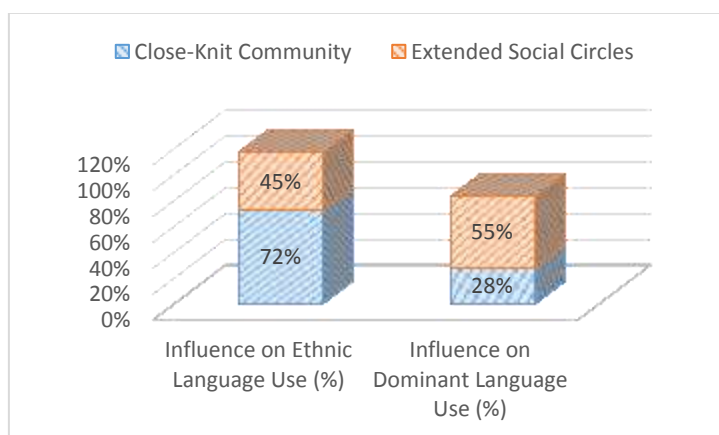


Table 4 and the figure above emphasize how different types of social networks influence the use of ethnic languages versus dominant languages. It shows the varying impact that close-knit communities, extended social circles, and professional networks have on language use.

CONCLUSION

This research provides an in-depth examination of how language functions as a crucial element in the construction and negotiation of ethnolinguistic identities within diasporic communities, while also highlighting the intricate power dynamics at play. The study's objectives were to elucidate how language serves as a tool for identity formation, to investigate the influence of power relations on linguistic practices, and to explore the role of these practices in both reflecting and challenging social hierarchies.

Firstly, the findings demonstrate that language is a dynamic and strategic resource through which diasporic individuals negotiate their identities. The prevalence of code-switching and the use of linguistic practices tailored to specific social contexts underscore the fluid nature of identity construction within these communities. Participants leverage language to assert ethnic identities and navigate the complexities

of their sociopolitical environments, illustrating how linguistic strategies are employed to manage both personal and collective identities. Secondly, the study reveals a significant correlation between language proficiency and socio-economic status, emphasizing how language skills impact access to opportunities and social mobility. Higher proficiency in the dominant language is associated with better job prospects and higher income levels, underscoring the role of linguistic capital in shaping socio-economic outcomes. Conversely, limited proficiency in the dominant language correlates with marginalization and reduced social standing, highlighting the power dynamics embedded in linguistic interactions. Lastly, the research sheds light on the role of language in both preserving and challenging existing power structures. Ethnic language retention and the maintenance of cultural practices within diasporic communities reflect resistance against assimilation pressures and efforts to sustain cultural heritage. Additionally, linguistic activism and public demonstrations of cultural pride illustrate how language can be used to advocate for rights and resist dominant power structures. In conclusion, this study enhances our understanding of the interplay between language, power, and identity in diasporic communities. By integrating qualitative and quantitative findings, it offers a comprehensive perspective on how language functions as both a symbol and a tool of resistance, identity assertion, and socio-economic negotiation. The insights gained contribute to broader discussions on linguistic diversity, identity politics, and the socio-political dimensions of language use within global diasporic contexts.

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