

Attitudes of Parents and Children towards Multilingualism in Pakistan

Syed Kazim Shah

Department of Applied Linguistics, Government College University Faisalabad
PO Box 38000, Faisalabad, Pakistan
Email: kazim.shah@iiu.edu.pk

Faiza Anwar

M.Phil Scholar, Department of Applied Linguistics, Government College University Faisalabad
PO Box 38000, Faisalabad, Pakistan

Abstract

This study investigated the attitudes of parents and children towards multilingualism in Faisalabad. In Faisalabad, many languages are spoken but in this study three main widely spoken languages, Urdu (national language), Punjabi (mother tongue) and English (international language) were selected. The attitudes of parents and children greatly vary towards these languages. This research took into account the variable of social status, education, age, gender and family context to probe into the reasons behind different language attitudes. This study aimed to find out how these variables play their role in shaping language attitudes. The data was collected through interview and questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to know parent's attitudes while group interview to know children attitudes about multilingualism. Questionnaire data was analyzed by using SPSS software while interview data was analyzed qualitatively. Results depicted that children are more are conscious about English language and they have same assumptions as their parents have. On the other hand parents want their children to speak only Urdu and English.

1. Introduction

Language is that unique characteristic which distinguishes us from other living species. All most everyone knows one language and there are some people who know two languages they are called bilingual and the person who knows more than two languages is called multilingual. The term multilingualism is related to the term "multicompetence." The definition of multilingualism is emerged from sociolinguistic studies. It is the ability of societies, institutions, groups, and individuals to use more than one language in their everyday communication (Franceschini, Rita, 2011). Pakistan is a multicultural society; there are three main languages in Pakistan. Urdu is used as national language and lingua franca, Punjabi as mother tongue and English as international language. Development of language and multilingualism is a part and parcel of socialization process through which a child becomes a member of society (Parra, 2010).

Children and parents form a society, the current study revealed their true opinion about different languages and their attitudes towards English, Urdu and Punjabi. "Attitude is a disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects. This disposition is often taken to comprise three components: feelings (affective element), thoughts (cognitive element) and, following upon these, predispositions to act in a certain way (behavioral element)." (Edwards, 2013). Attitudes have many important characteristics namely they (1) have an object; (2) have direction, intensity and degree; (3) have structure and (4) are learned. (Rai S. , 2010). According Gardner attitudes are our distinctions, prejudices, threats, feelings and convictions about any topic (Gardner, 1985).

In most of the countries more than one language are used in education due to the global need of the age. The language people use has different majority and minority status in their community and internationally. (Tucker, 1999). Almost seventy two languages are spoken in Pakistan and Punjabi is at the top of the list because of the number of speakers and it is the mother tongue of 45% of total population. Manly it is the language of two large groups: the Sikhs of East Punjab in India and the Punjabis of West Punjab in Pakistan but majority of them cannot read or write Punjabi but their oral communicability is excellent. No one can think that language which has too many native speakers can face negative assumption. But Punjabi is on a downhill slope in Pakistan and many parents are opting to drop Punjabi and teach their children Urdu as their first language and English as their second language and forbid their children to speak Punjabi. (Jhone, 2014)

Urdu is the national language of Pakistan and most widely understood language and it is performing a function of common language that is why it has become major medium of interaction in the urban areas of the country. It is a useful link language between different ethnic groups. Urdu is the native language of most of the Pakistani children nowadays. It is a universal phenomenon that everyone loves its native language and native language is a mark of personal as well as national identity. Moreover it works as a bond that keeps its speakers together as a people. (Rehman, 2006).

English is the most popular language among educated class and elite class in Pakistan. It is the language of education in Pakistan and people think that English medium schools provide good quality education and should remain available for the modernization and development of the country. English is the language of the greatest power in the world. It spread as the language of the colonies of Britain in African and Asian countries. Globalization has increased the power of English now because more jobs are available for those who have knowledge in this language. Multinationals are controlling these jobs which are dominated by the U.S.A. This has increased the demand for English schooling, and parents are more conscious about English teaching to their children and they are investing much for this purpose. Furthermore English in Pakistan is the language of business and trade.

The aim of the study was to uncover the reasons of language attitudes. This study dealt with two major questions:

1. What are the attitudes of parents towards multilingualism?
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Review of Literature

This study was based on the perspective of sociolinguistics. "Sociolinguistics is that part of linguistics which is concerned with language as a social and cultural phenomenon. It investigates the field of language and society and has close connections with the social sciences, especially social psychology, anthropology, human geography and sociology." (Trudgill, (1974: 32). This study focused on how parents and children use language under the influence of social variables. The literature review of this study explained multilingualism, language attitude, parental attitudes, and children attitudes.

Multilingualism

Multilingualism is the ability of using more than one language by a person or within a social group. A multilingual person can switch from one language to another in speech, in writing, or in reading. There are some other terms which describe this phenomenon; bilingualism, polylingualism, plurilingualism, diglossia, and languages-in-contact. Multilingualism has different types personal, social, or intersubjective. (Harshav, Benjamin, 2010) Multilingualism is basically use of different languages by a single individual or community (Llamas, 2007). There are certain reasons behind multilingualism like political movements, migration, imperialism, communication, economical movements, religious movements, cultural and social identity etc. Most of the people in this world are multilingual. (Trudell, 2009). In past, multilingualism was considered as a curse because at that time use of only one language over all the world was considered as the gift of paradise and linguistic diversity was regarded as divine punishment. But now a day it is taken as remarkable and normal necessity for the majority of people. (Ansold, 2010).

Multilingualism: as Dealing with Different Languages

Wang (2008) in his book "Growing up with three Languages" shared the eleven-year observation of two children who were exposed to three languages from birth. Wang tells the story of two parents who were from different cultural, linguistic identity, and ethnic backgrounds but they joined to grow their two children with their heritage languages outside their native countries. He also discusses the children's perspective that how they perceive these three languages, cultures and how did they develop a trilingual identity. He throws light on how parental support helps children's simultaneous acquisition of three languages and where two heritage languages came from the father and mother. Wang observation of the two children during their trilingual acquisition process is really unique. (Wang, 2008)

Ethnography and Multilingualism

"Ethnography is the study of the socio cultural contexts, processes, and meanings within cultural systems" (Whitehead, 2004). Adrian Blackledge and Angela Greese (2010) studied multilingualism from the perspective of ethnography; they were the first who introduced the term ethnography of multilingualism. Multilingualism permits us to see the life condition of people and how they the use of different language affects their terms. The study of ethnography of multilingualism allows us to connect languages practices, social differences and social inequality. (Greese, 2010)

Language and Attitudes

"Attitude is a disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects. This disposition is often taken to comprise three components: feelings (affective element), thoughts (cognitive element) and, following upon these, predispositions to act in a certain way (behavioral element)." (Edwards, 2013). Attitudes have many important characteristics namely they (1) have an object: (2) have direction, intensity and degree; (3) have structure and (4) are learned. (Rai S. , 2010).

People's Attitudes towards Languages

Drange Danbolt (2011) investigated attitude of Bolivian people towards bilingualism. Bolivia is a multilingual society which has 36 different ethnic groups with more or less different languages. The attitude towards bilingualism is based on the experience of history acquired over centuries characterized by a minority ruling the majority. Different educational policies are made to promote bilingual primary education. The ruling elite of Spanish descent have neglected the culture and languages of the indigenous peoples. The article examines the attitudes towards bilingualism and evaluated the impact of the official policy aiming at changing the situation for bilinguals. They address deeper problems of discrimination and inequality and express linguistic, cultural, economic, and political demands including the right to decide how and in what language their children shall be educated. In Bolivia bilingual education has been a main theme for discussion among indigenous peoples since the 1980s (Drange 2011; Howard 2009). But there was a gap between policy and implementation. This article investigates the situation for bilingualism in Bolivia. (Danbolt, 2011)

Robert McKenzie (2010) explored the attitudes of Japanese learners towards standard and non-standard English. In his study he asked more than 500 college students to listen to six varieties of English and to judge them in terms of social attractiveness like is it gentle, pleasant, funny or modest?. He also took the information from Japanese students about their gender, rural or urban background and self-perceived. These variables in students' personality helped to explore the reasons of different attitudes of students towards different varieties of English. The results showed that these Japanese students recognize American English more than the Scottish varieties. In terms of social attractiveness, students prefer heavily accented Japanese English, vernacular and southern American English. Native varieties are given more preferences by female students.. (McKenzie, 2010)

Attitudes of People towards Different Languages in Pakistani Context

Pakistan has six major and over fifty-nine small languages so it is a multilingual country. However English and Urdu are the languages of the domains of power—government, corporate sector, media, education, etc. English is considered most important language in Pakistan and has become a symbol of the upper class, sophistication and power. The less powerful languages of Pakistan are becoming symbol of lower status, less education and culture shame. One reason that English is so powerful than other languages is globalization and the second reason is continuation of colonial language policies by the governments of Pakistan. (Rehman)

In Pakistan the western Punjabi is used to speak. Punjabi is one of the major language in Pakistan but still it does not have high status. A survey research conducted by Marriyum Gillani and Dr. Asim Mahmood (2014) to know young generation attitudes. The results have shown that the Punjabis have not a very positive in Pakistani society attitude towards this language. Punjabi language is losing its place and people are shifting towards English and Urdu. This is an alarming situation in Punjab that Punjabis are illiterate in their own regional and mother tongue language. They cannot read and write Punjabi. (Mahmood, 2014)

In Pakistan English is a highly prestigious, official, and formal and Punjabi is a local vernacular informal and language of illiterate community. Pakistan being a linguistically diverse region and known as multilingual country because more than one languages are spoken by majority of people. These languages are different in status and prestige so they are performing different functions, which entitled them as highly prestigious (H) language and less prestigious language (L) languages. . Aatiqa and Rabia (2011) highlight the economical, educational, social status of Punjabi and English languages in Faisalabad. English which has no native speaker but it is considered a highly prestigious language on the other hand Punjabi with a large number of native speakers is socially neglected. The attitudes towards these languages are not equal; people have more positive attitudes towards English. This is the result of the global power of English. Dominated groups have completely changed their ideological perceptions of life and they have imposed English on the other as well. Although Punjabi is the most prominent language but education department is not giving importance to Punjabi and it is affecting people attitudes towards it. Punjabi is not allowed to be taught at school level and it is forbidden in schools. English language is getting popularity because, it is an international language and in Pakistan it acts like a lingua franca in different provinces and it is the language of law, administration education etc. People of Faisalabad have more positive attitudes towards English than Punjabi language because these languages are different in status, structure, function, and prestige. (Aatika Akram, 2011)

English is lingua franca and it is used to communicate among speakers of different native languages throughout the world. The growing need and importance of English language at the present day has made this language as an important need for today's student. Pakistan has its own no native variety of English but people off Pakistan not accepting this variety. Pakistani young generation is more impressed by American and British variety of English because they are considered more standard varieties in the whole world. The varieties of English which are commonly accepted and considered 'legitimate' or 'standard' for educational purposes all over the world are American and British English. Pakistan is developing its own variety as well and most of the community in Pakistan thinks that British and American variety of English are more prestigious than the English variety of Pakistan. (Parveen D. M., 2013)

Parent-Child Relation

Many studies have indicated that parents play an important role in maintaining their children's language ability. Parents, especially mothers, serve as important language model for making children's behavior about a particular language when they have effective family terms. When children observe their parents and other family members, they attach importance or encouragement to maintain a language attitude, they show favor in it as well. The maintenance of attitudes about proficiency in an ethnic language is principally associated with language practice in the home. (Lio, 2008)

Parental Attitude

Two family variables: behavioral and attitude have significantly link with the bilingual children. The first behavioral variable means that the child will be more proficient in an ethnic language when the parents use in dealing with the child and having a discussion between themselves. The other category, attitude, is related to personal characteristics of the parents. Their birthplace, national identity, educational level, and socioeconomic status (SES) lead to causes of their attitudes and behavior towards a specific language, and the use of it. When parents treat a language in a specific way and prefer to use it, such behavior and attitude also affect their children thinking and language choice. (Tuominen, 2009)

Children Attitude

There is a dynamic relationship between the learner's motivation and his or her specific attitudes to the target language, and its speakers, and the manner in which learners approach and conduct their learning, and hence their ultimate language learning (LL) success. Rhonda Oliver (1998) examined the attitudes of 58 bilingual primary-school children towards their first and second languages, and the attitudes they attribute to parents, teachers and peers in the context of the home, the classroom and the playground. He also examined students' attitudes to language according to the cultural background they belong are moderated by whether or not they were born in Australia, the cultural group to which they belong. Besides this he discussed the variables. The affective variables of language learning (LL) include such things as motivation, learner expectation, personality and sociocultural experience. (Oliver, 1998). Children are strongly influenced by those who are important to them people such as their friends and family. However, children may also be influenced by their school peers, their teachers and the general school environment. (Oliver, 1998).

Material and Method

Type of Research

Qualitative method was used in this study. This method was chosen because the main purpose of the study was to retrieve descriptive profiles and information from participants and the qualitative method was suitable for that.

Sampling and Population

Population of the research was the community of Faisalabad. Altogether sample of six schools from class 6th to 8th was taken and the parents of the same children were selected. Children and their parents were taken from three different school chains. Two schools were selected from government schools, two were selected from private public schools and two schools were taken from Standard English medium schools. Different schools were selected for more accurate results.

Data Collection and Tools

Data from children was collected through group interviews which was semi structured. For this research Kvale's (1996:88) seven stages for interview structure were followed (Louis Cohen, 2005). Data from parents was collected through questionnaire in which likert questions were asked.

Procedure of Research Study

Step I: Interviews. Interviews were recorded from students both male and female and later transcribed. Notes were then made on these transcriptions.

Step II: Questionnaire. Questionnaires were given to the students to get them filed by their parents and then collected from the school. Questionnaires were analyzed through SPSS. Results were presented in table and graphs.

Results

The questionnaire data is analyzed using spss software. The analysis of each question has been done separately but overall attitudes of parents towards different languages is presented via tables .

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their attitudes towards Punjabi.

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Agree | 2 | 2.2 |
| Strongly agree | 31 | 33.3 |
| Neutral | 24 | 25.8 |
| Disagree | 23 | 24.7 |
| Strongly disagree | 13 | 14 |
| Total | 93 | 100 |

Results indicated that most of the respondents are in favor of Punjabi but disagree responses are also 23% which showed that significant number of population have negative assumptions about Punjabi language. Punjabi is one of the prohibited language in Faisalabad so it has to face negative attitudes.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to their attitudes towards Urdu.

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Agree | 23 | 24.7 |
| Strongly agree | 47 | 50.5 |
| Neutral | 18 | 19.4 |
| Disagree | 5 | 5.4 |
| Total | 93 | 100.0 |

Results depicted the fact that Urdu is one of the important languages in Faisalabad. Overall majority of the respondents showed positive attitudes towards Urdu language. Only 5% people who are not in favor of Urdu.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to their attitudes towards English .

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Agree | 7 | 7.5 |
| Strongly agree | 52 | 55.9 |
| Neutral | 24 | 25.8 |
| Disagree | 9 | 9.7 |
| Strongly disagree | 1 | 1.1 |
| Total | 93 | 100.0 |

Results revealed that more than half of the respondents showed positive attitudes towards English as 52% respondents are strongly agree. Attitudes towards English are significant here. The percentage of agree responses is high than Urdu or Punjabi.

Results of the interview data revealed that children are conscious in using a particular language. Children have same attitudes about language as their parents have so it is proved that family context is really important for in developing attitudes. Children speak different language in different situations. They told various reasons that why languages are important. Urdu is important because it is related to their national identity, English is important because helps them to survive in the global world. Most of the children said that Punjabi is not important for them because it is language of lower status and people look uneducated when they speak Punjabi.

Discussion

Findings of the results depicted that parents and children are of the view that Punjabi language shows lower status. It is spoken by uneducated people so is should not be added in syllabus. Parents are in fear that if their children will speak Punjabi they will not be able to speak Urdu and English language properly. On the other hand children think that if they will speak Punjabi the other will say that they are villagers and cannot speak other languages. Children and parents showed negative attitudes towards Punjabi.

As compared to Punjabi attitudes towards Urdu were more positive. According to parents and children Urdu being a national language should be given importance. The knowledge of Urdu is necessary to maintain social status because Urdu is playing a role of lingua franca or common language in Pakistan. Knowledge of Urdu is also necessary for the sake national identity. In addition to this Urdu is considered the language of educated people.

Lastly, the English language which is the international language is taken as most superior language, the language of elite class and the language of education. Furthermore it is a source of proud for the parents when their children speak English. Parents showed their desire of teaching English to their children because it is a

worldwide language. It is also concluded from the study that parents try to speak English with their children and making special effort to improve their English. On the other hand children are also in favor of English language and want to get maximum knowledge in English.

Conclusion

It is concluded from all the data analysis and discussion that there is no equality of attitudes towards multilingualism in Faisalabad. As the study aimed to know the attitudes of parents and children it is emerged from the study that most of the children presented the same views towards English, Urdu and Punjabi as their parents have. Family setting and family context plays an important role in developing attitudes towards any language.

It is emerged from the study that majority of parents and their children proudly dumping their own regional language and have derogatory attitude towards Punjabi. But there are some parents and children who are less in numbers who want to preserve it because it is ancestral, cultural and historical heritage language and it must be transferred to the next generations. Urdu being national language is important for parents and children. There was another important factor in the comparison of the language that although Urdu is important for people but when it is compared with English it is considered less important. Attitudes towards English were most positive than all languages.

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