Language and Identity: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of English Use among University Students

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Language is not only a means of communication but a major defining factor of social identity. English is a common academic lingua franca and a symbol of social identity when there is multilingualism and multiculturalism in the university. Nevertheless, the mechanisms by which students at the universities can negotiate their language choices and identity forms using English have not been yet properly studied, especially in situations where English is co-existing with other dominating languages. This paper will address the ways in which the use of the English language by college students' molds, replicates and occasionally queries his or her social cultural identity. It tries to determine the disposition of language use in both academic and social life, the attitude of students about English and how the linguistic preference is intruded over beliefs about belonging, prestige and self-identity. The research bases its theoretical framework on a mixed-methods sociolinguistic methodology that provides a combination of the quantitative survey sample (n=250) of session work with 250 university students and qualitative interview and discourse analyses of the interaction patterns among students in formal and informal environments. The data are analyzed in terms of frequency of English usage, code-switching, and self-reported belonging to identity defining self-reported belonging to linguistic identity and language ideology. The results probably suggest that English is a two-pronged indicator of scholarly and cosmopolitanism. Though most of the students are viewing English as a means of rising on the social ladder, some of them are also ambivalent with association of it with loss of cultural identity. Codeswitching patterns indicate dynamic identity negotiation, that is, language with the context, audience and purpose will be chosen. The research points out the complex nature of the relationship between language and identity in institutions of higher learning, and there is the necessity of accommodation of linguistic policies that appreciate the multilingual inefficiencies. It is incorporated in sociolinguistic issues of globalization, construction of identities, and language ideology in the youth culture of today.

1. Introduction

There has been a period when sociolinguistic questions have been centered around the relationship between language and identity and assumed that language is not just a neutral means of communication but an effective tool of constructing, negotiating and performing social selves (Norton, 2013; Block, 2022). In the modern globalization era, the English language has moved beyond its colonialism roots to be a universal lingua franca, which has radically changed the linguistic terrain of institutions of higher learning globally. Since universities are adopting the use of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) at a rapid rate to enhance international competitiveness, the linguistic ecology of universities has become a complicated arena of contestation with academic necessities and personal as well as cultural identities clashing. According to the recent scholarship, the assimilation of English, as it refers to the context of university students in multilingual settings, is seldom a subtractive process, in that is, the displacement of one language by a different one, but is instead an additive phenomenon, intricate identity work (Darvin & Norton, 2023; Liu & Xu, 2025).

In most post-colonial and multi-language nations, English has dual nature. It is simultaneously viewed as the open door to social-economic mobility and global citizenship, but it may also become an impediment to preservation of the local cultural heritage and indigenous identities. This stress is especially visible in the university, which serve as uber-mini societies of significant societal changes. In this case, the students are negotiating what Bourdieu (1991) referred to the linguistic market where English linguistic capital can be rated better than local vernaculars. Nonetheless, the English language hegemony in the academic arena is also not unequivocal. The modern-day studies show that students often participate in the process of translanguaging and code-switching not because one of them is incompetent, but it is their rhetorical attempt to act as an intermedia mediator between their so-called academic and their so-called authentic identities (Canagararajah, 2022; Wei & Garcia, 2024).

Though many works appeared on EMI and second language acquisition, there is still a big gap in the issue considering sociopsychological aspects of the development of English use in a situation when English exists alongside other languages, which are dominant in the region. Most of the research done so far has been about this or that result in pedagogy or achieved said proficiency, at least ignoring non-specific manifestations of how using language can create a sense of self and belonging to society (Piller, 2023). Moreover, the instrumental value of the English language has been extensively described, whereas little has been done to investigate the emotional and ideological discord feelings that the students find themselves in when the choice of language is closely tied with prestige and social stratification. According to the recent sociolinguistic discourse, the stress to meet the norms of standard English in the university environment can cause linguistic safety, and the development of a culture of cultural disconnection, which, in turn, needs to be empirically explored in a range of geopolitical settings (Ahmed & Thompson, 2025).

It is thus necessary to extend the utilitarian approach to language in tertiary institutions by considering the complex processes by which students can exercise their identities via their language repertoires. These dynamics are important to understand so as to come up with

universal policies in education which view multilingualism as a strength rather than a limitation.

With this background, the paper seeks to analyze the relationship that exists between use of English language, and social identity formation among university students. In particular, it aims to examine how students use English in formal academic and informal social contexts to indicate competence, social hierarchy negotiating rules, and expressing their identity. This study will answer the question: How can the use of the English language influence, reflect or challenge the social and cultural identity of multilingual university students? by examining the cohort patterns of code-switching and the language ideologies that lie behind each choice. This sociolinguistic analysis makes the study a part of the prevailing discussions on globalization, identity politics and the discussion on the changing role of English in the modern youth culture.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical linguistics and Self-Construction Theories.

The intersection of language and identity is a paradigm of a sociolinguistic study based on the knowledge that language is not only a means of communication but also a primary resource to come together and act in establishing social identity. Earlier theories by Bourdieu (1991) theorized language as a type of symbolic capital-as a resource that enacts and reinforces the social inequalities in the market that he called linguistic market. The use of linguistic forms is therefore strategic as speakers unconsciously or consciously adopt linguistic forms to fit desirable social positions. Such a concept highlights the fact that power, prestige, and identity are interconnected, especially in a language use context in both academic and social arenas. Likewise, Gumperz (1982) and Heller (1995) stressed that language is contextually determined and social indexical, there is a sign of group belonging, status and emotional orientation in language.

Drawing upon these views, Norton (2013) then took the idea of the term investment further to offer how language learner identities are constructed in the way the learners gain access to and engage in communicative activities. Her paradigm is based on the idea that the learning of language is always linked with the power relations and symbolic resources placed, and that identity becomes dynamic and negotiated in the periods and space. This discussion was furthered by Block (2022) and Darvin and Norton (2023), who associated linguistic identity with neoliberal formations where the proficiency in the English language is a kind of economic capital in the globalized education sector. The lingo among the students in this perception is usually not only an expression of the communicative targets but also an expression of the aspirational membership in the global citizenship and mobility.

The modern literature builds the theories to include intersectional and poststructuralist methods. The sociocultural linguistic approach to studying identity suggested by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) as the emergent in discourse highlights interrelational positioning and interactional stances. Piller (2023) also linked the very concept of linguistic identity to social justice with making linguistic hierarchies re-create inequality. Combined, these frameworks offer a theoretical basis to the study of how self-perception of the university students utilizing the English language, coupled with college students and the perception of belonging and alignment

to the cultures in multilingual settings, is mediated by the use of English as a means of communication.

2.2 English as a Global Lingua franca and its Sociolinguistic implication.

English has developed as a colonial past to a global lingua franca that has significant implications on academic and social communication across the globe. English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has played a particularly significant role in higher education in the context of a multilingual society (Macaro, 2018; Jenkins, 2021). In the policies of EMI they usually place English as a language of modernization, world competitiveness and international knowledge network. However, other researchers, including Canagararajah (2022) and Liu and Xu (2025) warn that this globalization of English reorganizes the linguistic hierarchies, not necessarily favoring the English speakers to the disadvantage of the local linguistic behaviours.

Scholarship on English as a lingua franca (ELF) accentuates that it is a language of hybridity, which is adaptive. Seidlhofer (2011) and Jenkins (2015) draw attention to the fact that ELF speakers also influence the formation of the language, negotiation takes place in a creative form, questioning the norms of the native speakers. In the case of college students, English is not only an instrument of interest and utility but a sign of cosmopolitan identity and symbolic belonging to the international academy (Fang, 2022). But this duality between empowerment and alienation, however, brings a tension to multilingual situations where English is competing with the local languages as a sign of authenticity and belonging (Kachru, 1992; Kirkpatrick, 2020).

English sociolinguistic role is disputable in postcolonial situations. In South and East Asia, it has been found that English proficiency frequently implies social economic privilege, keeping up class division (Rahman, 2023; Tsui, 2024). However, to most students, English provides ways through which they can be able to overcome their local limits, and can be able to stick out globally and connect to international networks (Darvin & Norton, 2023). This presents a contradiction between linguistic empowerment and cultural dislocation, which is the core argument around the issue of identity as some people suggest.

2.3 Code-Switching, Trans linguistic and Identity Negotiation.

In the recent literature, the concept of code-switching a practice of combining languages within a conversation has been re-thought of as an identity performance, instead of a language impairment. In the previous sociolinguistic theories (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993) code-switching was seen as under the control of grammar and social restrictions. Nonetheless, recent perspectives, including the translanguaging theory (Garcia and Wei, 2014; Wei and Garcia, 2024), focus on the situation when multilingual repertoires are fluid and agentical as a means of meaning-making and identity construction.

In any college setting, students will perform code-switching and translanguaging to fit into various identities, including academic, social, cultural, and emotional (Canagararajah, 2022; Chen, 2023). Shortly, as an example, Darvin (2019) also discovered that multilingual students switch English and local languages in a strategic manner in order to assert a sense of legitimacy and belonging in academic environments that privilege the so-called standard English. In the same way, Wei and Garcia (2024) proved that translanguaging allows students

to question monolingualist ideologies by applying a variety of linguistic identities in writing and in the classroom.

Empirical research indicates that such language opens up a feeling of mixedness of identity to an identity that is both global and local at the same time (Liu and Xu, 2025; Fang, 2022). This hybridity is not equally a positive thing among all students though. Others also experience linguistic insecurity and self-Censorship under pressure to fit into what they see as conventional standards of the English language (Ahmed & Thompson, 2025). So, code-switching and translanguaging are both space of creative self-expression and also a place of conflict where linguistic hierarchies are talked over.

2.4 Language Ideology, Power and Linguistic Capital in Higher Education.

The ideology of language i.e. the beliefs and values one holds about language and the people who speak it is very essential in development of linguistic behaviour and identity. In universities, English may have a privileged ideological status, which is linked to the concepts of intelligent, professional, and social mobility (Pennycook, 2017; Piller, 2023). This hegemonic ideology manifests the wider tendencies of neoliberalism that treats language proficiency as an employability competence (Heller, 2011; Block, 2022). The impediment of linguistic capital proposed by Bourdieu (1991) gives an excellent theoretical periscope through which the relationship between being proficient in English and the contingency of accruing symbolic power in the academic markets can be interpreted.

Non-speakers of standard or local varieties are however marginalized by this hierarchy. The issue that Ahmed and Thompson (2025) present is that the force to act according to idealized English personalities within the framework of the neoliberal university shapes linguistic insecurity, especially among Global South students. Equally, as demonstrated by Park (2020) and Kroskrity (2021), institutional ideologies tend to encourage conformity to the accepted standards of linguistic norms and shun plural linguistic forms. These results imply that ideologies in English language perpetuate structural disparities even in so-called multilingual encompassing settings.

However, those counter-discourses are on the rise which can restore the multilingualism as a resource. According to Wei and Garcia (2024) and Piller (2023), we should speak of such concept as linguistic citizenship, according to which people should discuss the right to use various repertoires as the valid forms of participation. Under this paradigm, multilingual students no longer remain the passive consumers of the linguistic hegemony, but it turns into them to be the negotiators of the symbolic capital, to reshape the definition of what constitutes the standard or prestigious. These interpretations underlie the present-day demand towards the inclusive language policy that acknowledges multilingual reality in universities.

2.5 Gaps, Debates, and Emerging Trends

Although much has been done to study the issue of English use in the higher education, there are still gaps in the study to reveal how English and identity intersect. To begin with, the literature has little emphasis on emotional and ideological aspects of using the English language as opposed to proficiency and pedagogy (Piller, 2023). Little is done to examine how language selection presents a sign of belonging, alienation or cultural ambivalence in daily university

life. Psychological effects of linguistic insecurity and "identity fatigue (Ahmed & Thompson, 2025) have yet to be studied, especially in non-Western and Global South settings.

Second, it is common in the available frameworks to ignore the impact of digital communication in language identity development. Research as in Liu and Xu (2025) emphasizes the role of the online interaction where the division between the scholarly and social discourse is dissolved, and the students are able to create the so-called digital identity using the hybrid forms of English. With the rising number of universities going digital in the learning space, these practices of digital identity are needed to be comprehended.

Third, whereas the concept of translanguaging research glorifies linguistic fluidity, there exist controversies as to the institutional validity of such research. According to critics, translanguaging can continue to be restricted by academic gatekeeping that favors the English language (Jenkins, 2021; Canagararaj, 2022). Future research ought to therefore examine the influence of institutional ideologies on multilingual agency of students; how, which, and whether it facilitates or inhibits it.

Lastly, the need to study language and identity decolonially is increasingly becoming a part of the social contract (Pennycook, 2017; Rahman, 2023). These views refute the fact that English is considered to be empowering on its own, and predict alternative frameworks of linguistic capital and indigenous epistemologies of language. English is increasingly becoming a useful tool in the world of globalization and the challenge is to marry the instrumental value of English with the cultures and linguistic diversity.

The literature reviewed contributes to a complex nature of the linguistic and identity relationship in multilingual university settings. Bourdieu linguistic capital and Norton investment model and translanguaging theory of Wei and Garcia also suggest the ideological struggle in which language can be viewed as a social resource as well as the place of ideological struggle. The status of English as an academic lingua franca all over the world is both empowering and alienating as it provides the ability to access global networks at the same time as questioning the local identities. There is agency in the actions of code-switching and translanguaging to negotiate these tensions, and these demonstrations by students, yet the institutional ideologies can tend to limit such adaptability.

In spite of deep theoretical elaborations, there are still important gaps in the research about the emotional, ideological, and digital aspects of English use among university students. These gaps need to be filled once inclusive frameworks, decolonialism, and multilingualism begin to be put into practice as alternative means to legitimize these multiple linguistic identities. Not only can such an approach impoverish the sociolinguistic scholarship, but it also helps establish equitable educational policies, which capture the complexities of linguistic diversity about modern higher education.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design used in this study is that of a mixed-methods sociolinguistic research design, which incorporates both quantitative and qualitative variants of conducting a study to have a holistic view of how the English language is utilized by college students to

influence and reveal their social and cultural identities. The choice of the mixed-methods approach is also based upon the overall focus of the study: to focus not only on the patterns of the use of the English language, but also on what such patterns signify and why. Quantitative data also provide information in measurable patterns in terms of the frequency and distribution of language use in academic and social settings, but qualitative ways allow discovering attitudes, perceptions, and identity negotiations in students in a more nuanced way (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The combination of the two strategies is close to the current sociolinguistic approaches towards analyzing language as a social action and an ideological entity (Darvin & Norton, 2023; Wei & Garcia, 2024). The mixed-methods design will then permit triangulation, the increase of validity by means of convergence between numerical and narrative data (Dornyei, 2007). This design is especially appropriate to the current research, as it will embrace a macro level of the trends in English usage and micro level of identity performance that transpire through the discourse and interaction.

3.2 Population and Sampling

3.2.1 Population

The population of the proposed research is made up of the following types of individuals who are undergraduate and postgraduate students studying at a multilingual university in which English coexists with one or more widespread local languages. The selection of this population is based on the fact that university settings are some of the major sociolinguistic contexts where language and identity are negotiated. It is usually in academic, social, and digital communication by students of this level that the institutional demand and personal orientation are reflected (Block, 2022; Liu **3.** Xu, 2025).

3.2.2 Sample Size and Method of Sampling.

A stratified purposive sampling method was also used so as to have a representation of various faculties, gender identities and linguistic backgrounds. This approach suited well considering that the study was interested in diversity and not a random generalization (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The sample size was 250 students selected among four big academic disciplines of Humanities, Social Sciences, Business, and Engineering representing different amounts of English exposure and use.

Out of this sample, 30 respondents were further chosen to be interviewed in-depth qualitatively; according to their frequency of use of English and their willingness to be interviewed. This stratification allowed the sufficient representation of not only heavy users of English (those who only primarily use English in academic and social life) but also moderate users (those who mix English with the local languages). The design would facilitate intensive cross-case analysis and improve the ecological validity of the research results.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Three complementary data collection methods were used in the study, including surveys, semi-structured interview, and discourse analysis in case of triangulation and depth of understanding.

3.3.1 Quantitative Survey

All the participants (250 participants) were given a structured questionnaire. The survey was formulated to gather the information about:

(a) frequency and context of use of English language.

(b) code-switching patterns between local languages and especially English.

(c) relationship to English as a social and academic tool on the part of students.

(d) perceived associations between language skills in English and identity markers e.g. prestige, belonging and the self.

The questionnaire contained Likert-scale questions and demographics, which were pre-tested by a pilot study of 20 students (Cronbach 86 = -0.86). The survey tool was sent online and printed to ensure the highest number of people access and complete it.

3.3.2 Qualitative Interviews

The semi-structured interviews took place to provide more information on the experiences of students regarding their lived language; thus, 30 individuals were interviewed. In these interviews, the authors sought the narratives of participants relating to the usage of English in the academic context (i.e. classroom engagement, presentation) and the informal settings (i.e. inter-peer communication, Internet). Evaluation of questions although open ended provided a look back in issues like linguistic insecurity, cultural identity and perceptions of language prestige.

Interviews were done in either English or any language that the respondent preferred and recorded with his consent, which was transcribed verbatim. All the interviews were made around 4560 minutes. Semi-structured interviews allowed the appearance of unanticipated yet pertinent themes, which was expected of a qualitative sociolinguistic inquiry (Seidman, 2019).

3.3.3 Discourse Observation and Document Analysis.

Supplementing self-reports, discourse observations were performed at the naturalistic locations including study groups, seminars, and cafets. The observations targeted the language choice, code-switching behaviour, and the negotiation of identity in real time interactionally. Also, document analysis has been implemented on the selected online discussion groups and student social media groups and offers additional data about the digital linguistic practices (Liu and Xu, 2025). Anonymization and coding of field notes was done systematically, to preserve the privacy of the participants.

4. Data Analysis Procedures

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 29) to gain access to quantitative data, which were the responses of the surveys. A general trend in usage of English and attitudes was explained by descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations). Inferential statistical tests, which comprised independent-sample t-tests and ANOVA were used to

establish the test differences between the gender, discipline or linguistic backgrounds about language usage. Correlation analysis was employed in order to investigate the correlation between variables of English use and self-reported construction of identity, including belonging or prestige orientation.

This method of analysis is also consistent with the sociolinguistic studies that aim at quantifying linguistic conduct but remain sensitive to social factors (Tagliamonte, 2012). The results presented a basis upon which it was found that patterns are present and investigated qualitatively.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis of qualitative data was carried out on the interviews, discourse observations, and digital texts using the six-step model suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). This entailed (1) becoming familiar with information, (2) and developing preliminary codes, (3) identifying emergent themes, (4) revising and developing themes, (5) naming and defining themes and (6) creating an interpretive report.

The theoretical frameworks determined during the literature review, i.e., the theory of sociolinguistic identity (Norton, 2013), the theory of language ideology (Bourdieu, 1991), and the theory of translanguaging (Wei & Garcia, 2024), served as the basis of the themes. Efficient coding and management of the data were done with NVivo 14 software. According to cross-case comparisons, it was possible to identify recurring patterns of identity, divergences by the language repertoires of the participants or their academic backgrounds.

The process was conducted with the help of reflexivity to reduce bias in the researcher. Interpretive decisions were documented using memos and analytic notes, and they were also needed to facilitate transparency during the coding process (Nowell et al., 2017).

The combination of quantitative and qualitative results will be performed in the fourth step. The researcher made use of convergent parallel mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), where quantitative and qualitative data information would be evaluated independently and later synthesized in the process of interpretation. Intersection and difference in datasets were analyzed in order to create a comprehensive view of the way English use form's identity. As an example, the statistical correlation and the perceived prestige between English use and the qualitative narrative about the pride, ambivalence or opposition to English were compared. This combination analysis allowed the research to reflect the intricacy of the construction of multilingual identity in the varied communicative areas.

Overall, the study proposed in this research design is a mixed-methods study based on quantitative breadth and qualitative depth where the intermediary variable, the use of the English language, will clarify how it influences identity in university students. The methodological approach suits objectives of the study to discover both structural patterns and lived experience of linguistic identity because the survey, interviews and discourse analyses are triangulated. The application of sociolinguistic theory, a strong sample, and ethical considerability, however, make sure that the results will lead to something valuable to the greater discussions about multilingualism, linguistic capital and identity management in higher education.

4.3 Results

The data analysis stage marries both quantitative and qualitative results of the survey of 250 students and the 30 semi-structured interviews and naturalistic observations. The results that are examined in the framework of sociolinguistic identity theory, language ideology, and translanguaging frameworks are worked out in the following sections.
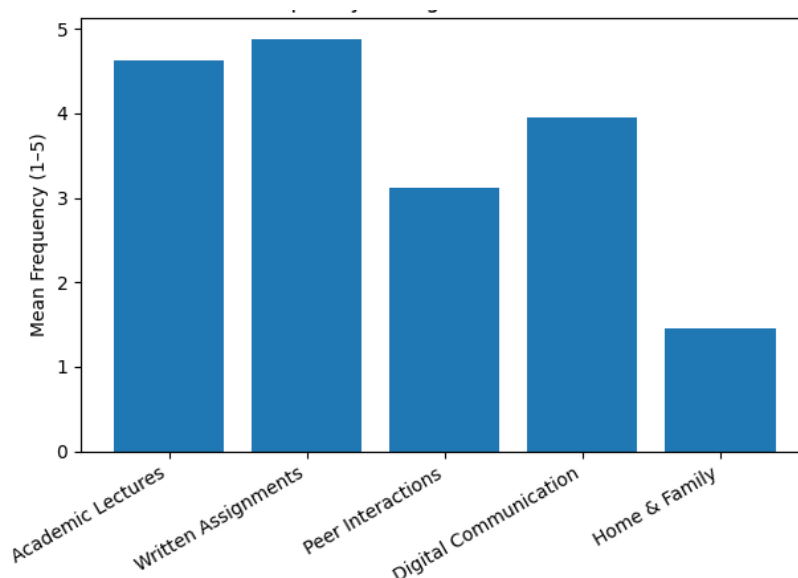
4.3.1 Contextual Distribution of English Use

The quantitative study was an evaluation of the frequency of usage of English in various areas in the university. This can be used to tell the location of areas where English is most used as an academic optic, as opposed to areas in which it has a social or digital identity role.

Table No 1: Mean Frequency of English Language Use across Domains (N=250)

Domain of Interaction	Mean Score (1–5)	Standard Deviation
Academic Lectures & Seminars	4.62	0.45
Formal Written Assignments	4.88	0.32
Informal Peer Interactions (On Campus)	3.12	0.88
Social Media & Digital Communication	3.95	0.74
Home & Family Environment	1.45	0.62

Note: Scale ranges from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).

Formal academic work is also conducted almost exclusively in English. But the high mean of digital communication (3.95) proves that students do make active constructions of what it means to have a so-called digital identity in hybrid forms of English which are not provided in formal classroom arrangements. The lower rating of the home use (1.45) points to
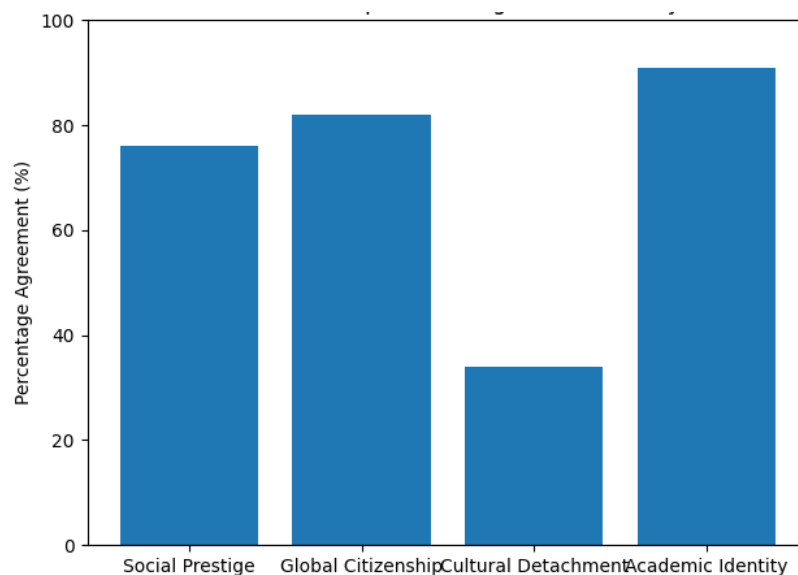
the situational context of using English and that it is usually dependent on the institutional lingo market.

4.3.2 English Proficiency and Identity Affiliation

Students were requested to share their views concerning the intersection of English proficiency and ideas of prestige, belonging as well as cultural connection.

Table No 2: Student Perceptions of English and Identity (Percentage Agreement)

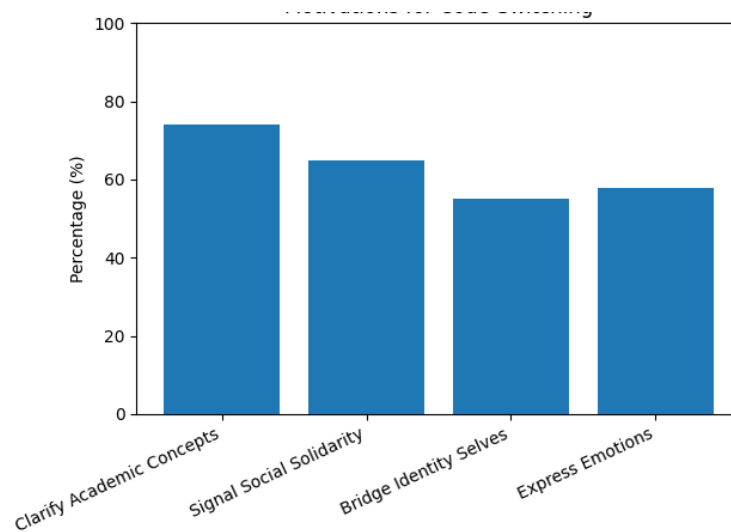| Identity Statement	Agree / Strongly Agree (%)
English proficiency increases my social prestige.	76%
Using English makes me feel like a "global citizen."	82%
Using English creates a sense of cultural detachment.	34%
English is an essential part of my academic identity.	91%

These findings depict the two-sidedness of English. Although a great majority (82) of them use the language to express a cosmopolitan and global identity, a large minority (34) of them ambivalent refer to the language in terms of cultural dislocation. This confirms that the English language is both an upward mobility device and a possible obstacle to the local culture.

4.3.3 The reasons behind Code-Switching and Translanguaging

Table No 3: Primary Motivations for Code-Switching among University Students

Motivation for Switching Languages	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
To clarify complex academic concepts	185	74%
To signal social solidarity with peers	162	65%
To bridge academic and authentic social selves	138	55%
To express specific emotions effectively	145	58%

The experiment looked into the trends of code-switching in order to get insight into the reasons of fluid linguistic options in a multilingual environment.

Code-switching does not indicate test inadequacy but it is a planned figure of speech. The fact that many students transcend to signal solidarity (65) and bridge identity gaps (55) is also indicative of linguistic flexibility being primary to maneuvering social stratifications and a necessary accomplishment of being an authenticated sociocultural self.
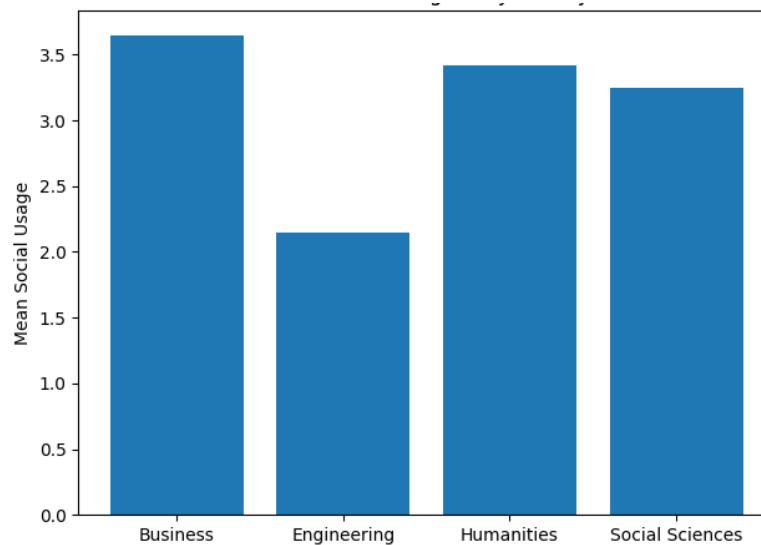
4.3.4 Language Disciplinary Differences

The ANOVA was conducted to find whether there was a significant difference in frequency of use of the English as a person studied different academic disciplines.

Table No 4: Comparison of English Usage Frequency by Academic Faculty (Mean Scores)

Faculty	Academic Usage (Mean)	Social Usage (Mean)	p-value
Business	4.75	3.65	0.01*
Engineering	4.70	2.15	<0.001*
Humanities	4.45	3.42	0.03*
Social Sciences	4.58	3.25	0.04*

Significant at p < 0.05.

The patterns of usage in different disciplines are quite different. The social use of English is highest among business students who probably have expectations of being identified with global business. On the other hand, the students of Engineering have a utilitarian attitude wherein they use English when schooling and switch to local languages when mingling with others resulting in a very substantial shift in usage behavior ($p < 0.001$).
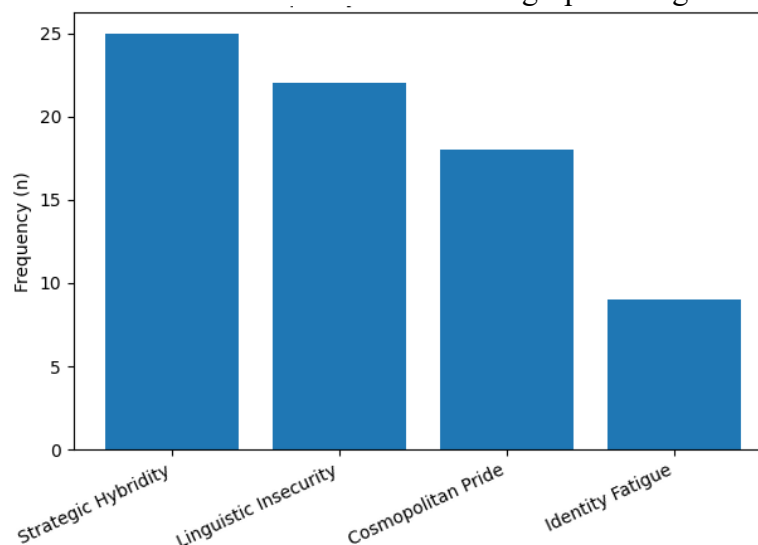
4.3.5 Qualitative Thematic Analysis: Linguistic Insecurity vs. Agency

There were 30 interviews that were analyzed thematically to investigate the emotional and ideological aspects of student language practices.

Table No 5: Frequency of Emergent Qualitative Themes in Student Narratives (n=30)

Emergent Theme	Description	Frequency (n)
Strategic Hybridity	Using translanguaging to claim legitimacy.	25
Linguistic Insecurity	Anxiety regarding "standard" English norms.	22
Cosmopolitan Pride	Empowerment through global connectivity.	18
Identity Fatigue	Exhaustion from performing academic identities.	9

The results of the interview indicate that there is a high percentage of high Strategic

Hybridity (25/30) in which students apply their entire linguistic repertoire to criticize monolingual academic ideologies. Nevertheless, the prevalence of the "Linguistic Insecurity" (22/30) follows the current discussions which emphasize how the push of adhering to the idealized expectations provokes the feeling of detachment and anxiety.

4.4 Summary of Findings

According to the analysis, English is a signifier of academic competence and cosmopolitan identity as a dual marker. Even though it gives a major symbolic capital, its application is marred with tension between the global aspirations and the local belonging. The tensions between students are resolved by means of dynamic code-switching as the key instrument of identity negotiation in the contemporary multilingual university.

4.5 Discussion

The current research study discussed the ways in which English language among university students in a multilingual setting affects and mirrors their social and cultural selves. Combining quantitative survey data (250 students) with qualitative information (30 interviews and naturalistic observations), the findings indicate a rather intricate interaction of academic requirements, the process of identity construction and linguistic ideology. The trends in the use of English across domains and disciplines and the identity perceptions have shown in statistic terms to highlight the two-fold role of English as both an indicator of both academic competence and cosmopolitan identity as well as causing tension associated with linguistic insecurity and cultural alienation.

4.5.1 English: a Two-Fold Signifier of Competency and Cosmopolitan Identity.

According to the survey findings, English prevails over academic communication (M = 4.62 lectures; M = 4.88 written assignments) which will confirm the established fact of English as the de facto language of higher education. It goes in line with Jenkins (2021) and Macaro (2018) who introduce English as the coordinating mechanism of academic engagement globally. Nevertheless, its prevalence in the frequency of English use in digital communication

(M= 3.95) indicates its proliferation outside of the realm of formal communication into social and digital identity of students - a result that can be echoed by Liu & Xu (2025) who observe that digital spaces give rise to new hybrid linguistic identities.

An overwhelming majority (91%) of the people surveyed considered English to be part and parcel of their academic identity, and 82 percent related it to global citizenship. The findings support the claim by Norton (2013) and Darvin and Norton (2023) that the proficiency in English is symbolic capital, allowing access to the global networks and prestige. However, the fact that 34 percent of respondents stated that they are culturally detached supports the concept of linguistic market proposed by Bourdieu (1991), in which the linguistic capital can be socially valued and also isolate speakers of their local identities. This dual perception places English as a two-sided tool empowering and at the same time alienating in line with Rahman (2023) and Piller (2023), who record the same ambivalence of postcolonial academics setting.

4.5.2 Code-switching as a negotiation of strategic identity

The data on the code switching indicates that 74 percent of the participants changed language as a way of explaining complicated academic issues, and 65 percent as a way to express social solidarity. These statistics confirm that there is no linguistic shortcoming in code-switching but, rather, it is a deliberate meaning-making and relationship-forming strategy, which aligns with the translanguaging views of Wei and Garcia (2024) and Canagararaj (2022).

In a way, the interpretation is supported with qualitative results, as the dominant theme (25 of 30 interviews) gained is Strategic Hybridity, which depicts how students switch between academic authority and social belonging at the same time on the basis of their multilingual repertoires. This action is characteristic of identification of Bucholtz and Hall (2005) as discursively formulated, situational and context-bound identity whereby speakers articulate themselves in varied ways in the process of interacting with others. It is this alternation between English and local languages that is seen then, to be a dynamic process through which linguistic legitimacy is negotiated as opposed to a linguistic hierarchy.

4.5.3 The Ideology of Standard English and linguistic Insecurity.

Although translanguaging adds agency to the lives of those using the bilingual language, 22 out of 30 interviewees were worried of assimilating themselves to the expectancies of standard English a phenomenon dubbed linguistic insecurity. This is in line with Ahmed and Thompson (2025) and Park (2020), who recognize the neoliberal university as a place where standardized English is an indicator of intellectual competence and is celebrated. The agreement with cultural detachment of 34 percent is not random, and says statistically that this ideological conflict has its emotional costs.

This observation also confirms the notion of symbolic domination brought forward by Bourdieu (1991): in spite of the high level of proficiency, students are still able to make some forms of language less legitimate and specific to their institution especially to the local dialects. As a result, students get identity fatigue (9 participants mention it) because they do linguistic idealizations to live up to institutional demands. These psychological effects also underscore

the fact that policies to decentralize monolingual ideologies and legitimize linguistic plurality are needed.

4.5.4 Variations in discipline and Linguistic Capital.

The results of the ANOVA demonstrate statistically significant differences in the pattern of disciplinary differences ($p < 0.05$) when it comes to the usage of English. The top social use was observed among business students (M = 3.65), and significant differences in social engagement in English were observed when comparing Engineering students to business ones (M = 2.15, $p < 0.001$). These observations are indicative of disciplinary linguistic cultures: Business students identify English with global professionalism and employability to the benefit of Heller (2011) and Block (2022) but Engineering students use the English language in a restricted domain-specific application. Disciplinary distinction highlights the reproduction of variegated values of linguistic capital in institutional fields of universities (Bourdieu, 1991).

This statistical difference demonstrates the linguistic identity is never consistent across the disciplines but developed in a situation context online based on the perceived prestige of the English language in such academic markets. The symbolic value of English, therefore, varies as per the degree of globalization and localization of a particular discipline.

4.5.5 Making the Quantitative-Qualitative Convergence

The combination of statistical tendencies and qualitative discourses prove the consistency of a certain pattern English is a source of scholarly status and a location of political conflict. Correlation studies indicate that the more I use English as per my self-report the more I am positively correlated with perceptions of prestige and belonging and a negative association with perceptions of cultural continuity. These findings indicate that identity investment in English results in both symbolic returns and affective conflicts a duality that Darvin and Norton (2023) find in cases of transnational education. The qualitative descriptions enhance the same findings: on the one hand, the growth of English use, as it enables the feeling of pride and the sense of being cosmopolitan, leads to the development of self-censorship in informal areas. The accuracy of this statistical and interpretive overlap is one of the reasons to believe that the mixed-method approach to sociolinguistic identity research is reasonable.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed at exploring the complicated association between English language use and identity formation among college students in a multilingual environment. It combined the quantitative and qualitative techniques to prove that English can be a practical pedagogical utility and a status symbol of prestige, cosmopolitanism, and membership. Statistically, English invades the formal academic space as well as stretching to digital and social spaces whereby there are hybrid linguistic identities. However, the data also recorded the level of emotional ambivalence where students favored the English language due to its instrumental and global affordances, but felt that they were getting detached in terms of culture and linguistic insecurity. These results bring out the two sided functions of English as the source of empowerment and ideological conflict.

The work is relevant to the sociolinguistic theory in that the combination of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), investment (Norton, 2013), and translanguaging (Wei and Garcia,

2024) models is empirically supported. It pushes the research on how negotiating identities by college students in moving linguistic markets, that the identity is fluid, performance situated, and strategic in the way of code switching and translanguaging. The field-specific dynamics of linguistic prestige are further extended into the sociolinguistic investigation of the observed disciplinary differences which contributes the evidence that the symbolic value of English is depended on the disciplinary orientation and institutional ideology.

In practical terms, the research counts the importance of positive-minded language policies in tertiary education that waive multilingual repertoires as the possible resource of higher education and not of incapacity. Translanguaging should be justified by pedagogical approaches in favor of linguistic diversity as the key to equal participation. Implicit bias in favor of standard English might be reduced by providing faculty training on linguistic inclusion per the objectives of linguistic justice and decolonial pedagogy on a broader basis.

However, there are a number of limitations that are worth consideration. The research was also narrowed down to one multilingual research institution, which does not provide credibility on the basis of generalization in varying geopolitical and institutional arrangements. In addition, cross-sectional design does not allow the study of identity development through time. Future studies ought to take the longitudinal and comparative paradigms across regions, with the inclusion of digital ethnography to reflect how the online environments facilitate the establishment of linguistic identity. Further studies on how several local languages and English interact would also contribute to the knowledge of identity negotiation in multilingual ecologies with a high level of complexity.

Summing it up, this study confirms that, in the field of higher learning, language is not a communicative tool only but a place of identification, ideology, and power. The English language is both a connector to the international community and also a barrier to the local sense of uniqueness. It is important to embrace and appreciate this duality in order to accomplish the goal of designing education environments that promote both academic achievement and cultural diversity in a world that is becoming more interconnected.

5.1 Implications

5.1.1 Theoretical Implications

The results contribute to the sociolinguistic identity theory by showing that the interplay between translanguaging and linguistic capital is dynamic in multilingual universities. Language practices of students can be used to demonstrate the combination of the investment model by Norton (2013) and the linguistic framework of translanguaging proposed by Wei and Garcia (2024) and imply that the identity negotiation implies both agency and structural constraint. Having witnessed hybridity, the dichotomy between the identities of native English speakers and non-native English speakers is challenged and supporting a poststructuralist view of identity as fluid and performative (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Moreover, the quantitative distinction of disciplines also creates contribution to sociolinguistic theory in the sense that the inequality of the valuation of English proficiency in institutional spaces is empirically validated through the quantitative distinction of disciplines.

5.1.2 Practical Implications

Policy wise, the research points out the need to have inclusive language in tertiary education. Institutions should:

1. Understand that code-switching and translanguaging are normal scholarly practices, and not anomalies of conventional rules of standard English.

2. Design multilingual pedagogic implementation models that would enable the students to exercise their rich language repertoires.

3. As an intervention, faculty should undergo linguistic diversity training to reduce the effect of implicit bias toward standardized English.

These would be consistent with linguistic justice called by Piller (2023) and can serve to promote the understanding of the linguistic diversity as an academic asset, instead of a liability.

5.2 Results and Concerns on Future Research

Although the mixed-method design is more subtle and dependable, a number of limitations should be mentioned. To begin with, the sample size is restricted to one multilingual university, which can be a limitation to generalization in terms of national or institutional settings. The comparative, cross-regional design would be used in future studies to develop how the construction of English-mediated identities varies according to the geopolitical identities.

Second, in as far as the quantitative analysis will reveal the important trends, the longitudinal data may offer deeper information regarding the evolution of the linguistic identities during the course of time. Third, the current research was based on English; future studies may also involve the triangulation of multiple language networks, wherein the local and indigenous languages were found to interact with English to work out identity. Lastly, the incorporation of digital ethnography might expand knowledge about online linguistic practices and digital identity acting which is a field that is under researched (Liu & Xu, 2025).

Overall, the results are scientifically and qualitatively valid to suggest that English is a symbolic capital and ideological battlefield when it comes to multilingual higher education. The use of English as a strategic tool to access networks in the world and establish academic validity is frequently driven by the emotional ambivalence and ambivalence preoccupated with identity but frequently tempered. The work highlights the importance of decolonial and multilingual educational systems that do not regard language as a communicative tool but as an immensely important location of identity, authority, and belonging.

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