



LANGUAGE AND BELONGING: NAVIGATING THE IDENTITY OF SINDHI ADULT THIRD CULTURE ADULTS GROWING IN LONDON, UK

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Abstract

The language we speak is not only a tool for communication; it is a portable heritage that we carry with ourselves. This study aims to explore what are the linguistic choices of these individuals residing in London, UK and how these multilingual experiences sense of belonging among third culture kids. This research focuses linguistic proficiency and identity negotiation. It also explores that how these ATCKs control their linguistic choices consciously and connect them to emotional attachment, cultural continuity and social positioning. This research used interviews as a qualitative tool to collect data from participants. The findings reveal that the adult third culture kids preferred language is their heritage language ie Sindhi. They use it across many context in their homes and to convey their feeling. They learn English language to hunt for better career opportunities and to communicate with people. These individuals encourage their children to learn their heritage language by setting strict rules at home. When it comes to education they do not have any other choice than to learn English Language. They are of the belief that learning a language will not have any impact on their identity and they will remain attached to their original identity of being a Sindhi. Whereas their children might show an inclination towards British English identity.

Keywords: *Identity, Linguistic Preference, Third Culture Kids, Intercultural Communication, Multilingualism*

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1. Introduction

Third Culture Kids/Adults (TCKs) are defined as children of immigrants who have spent a major part of their developmental years living in, or interacting with two or more cultural environments. The aim of the study would be to explore what are these individuals (TCKs) language preferences and how they would struggle with learning multiple languages and its impact upon their identities. It explores the motivating factors which made them learn and choose the language that they use. This study contributes to the minority group language Sindhi, as the individuals of this group remain underexplored in third culture kids research and heritage language studies. Other studies have explored identity formation among third culture kids, there a limited research on how these adults negotiate daily between their mother tongue and other languages in a global context. This study is significant because there are a lot of international individuals residing in London, UK. They do include Muslim and Hindu Sindhis. However a vast majority of Muslim Sindhis belonged to the pre partition India in 1947. These Sindhi community people are seen to be under explored in terms of their linguistic choices and the impact it has on their identity. The participants of this study will be 6 Sindhi adults in late 20s and 40s Adult Third Culture Kids, who have Sindhi as their first language, and were immersed in a second language environment as a child. This research used interview to collect data from these individuals. The interview was conducted via video call. The data was transcribed using manually and then analyzed using Braun and Clarke thematic analysis. The research strived to look at the use of heritage language, learning target language, decisions of scenarios where to use which language, its impact upon the identity of third culture adults. How they developed hybrid identity development or maintained their own identity.

The Sindhi's residing in London trace their origin from Sindh, which is now located towards the southern part of Pakistan. The members of this community have originally been traders and were actively involved in trade and commerce because of which they migrated to different regions of the world, post partition. These countries included India, Pakistan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Jakarta in Indonesia. (David, 1988) Since then Sindhis have been migrating to London for studies, better job opportunities, and trade. They live in UK and for professional and everyday use it becomes mandatory for them to learn target language ie English. A number of researches have accepted the need for learning target language as it leads to better employment opportunities in market and better socializing chances, one cannot survive like an alien without learning the target language.

2. Literature Review

Increased number of globalization and migration has resulted in a rise in third culture kids population. Several parents along with their children migrate to other countries that have a culture different as compared to their host countries. The children of such families develop a culture that is somewhat a complex one and a mixture of parent, host

expatriate community culture. A term known as third culture kids (TCK) or Adult third culture kids (ATCK) was coined by a sociologist Ruth Useem in the 1950s. (Long, 2020) These kids depict a stronger sense of belonging with other TCKs or international individuals rather than with the host culture or heritage community. Although elements from each culture are being assimilated, TCKs often report a stronger sense of belonging with other TCKs or the international community rather than with either the host or heritage culture. This “third culture” identity is neither fully that of the origin country nor of the host country, leading to unique identity negotiation challenges.

Research in the scope of heritage language or mother tongue has now moved beyond the concept of language proficiency or intergenerational transfer of language to concerns regarding personality, affect, philosophy and authority. (Fishman, 1991). Adopting qualitative research on agency and responsibility regarding heritage language navigation in third culture adults aged 18-29 years. It was noticed that individuals participate and respond to their heritage language in a world shaped by growing power inclinations, inequality and privilege. The data for this research was gathered through integrating participant journals, conducting in depth interviews and observations to explain the participant experiences. (Thompson, 2024)

Previous work on linguistic capital production in Germany depicted that the learner who migrate abroad to earn higher degrees, are at advantage of acquiring foreign language. This may provide them a chance to develop social networks with the people living abroad. If the medium of instruction is a language that is other than the mother tongue. It may lead the individuals to feel excluded from their own social circles. It may cause them contend multiple difficulties as a result they may face challenges related to study and comprehension. Therefore acquiring a language for the sake of capital has its own advantages and disadvantages. (Bilecen, 2023)

According to Pierre Bourdieu our society is just like a market that works on the principle that people in a market may have different positions depending upon their skills or resources that they exhibit. He classifies language into 3 kinds of capitals i.e economic capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital. When a language becomes official, it holds the power. People who speak it have a priority over the non-speakers in fields like education, jobs and social respect. Consequently the official language enjoys the pride of linguistic capital, as a result this gives symbolic power to those who control or master it. Speaking the right language in a foreign country helps people gain rewards related to jobs, education and social respect. (Benjamins, 2000)

A research article that examined the relationship between limited use of and no use of heritage language and its effect on ethnic and cultural identity of Sindhi language speakers, residing in Malaysia. These minority ethnic group belonged to Sindh, Pakistan. This study aimed to examine the link between the target First language and their own

Sindhi cultural norms. This was a mixed method study that involved observation, recordings and 73 item questionnaire. The results of this study concluded that Malaysian Sindhi's do not need a language based identity. Their identity is based on their own religion, beliefs, customs and traditions. For Sindhis speakers based in Malaysia the importance attached to language is not necessarily tied to ethnicity. (David, 1988)

Linguistic choice for third culture Adults is not only a matter of functional activity, it is intensely rooted with identity, social positioning and belonging. Consequently these learners depending upon their aspirations and motivations have agency and capacity to invest themselves in acquiring a language. Therefore this study uses the lens of Nortons identity and investment framework which occurs at the intersection of identity, ideology and capital. (Norton, 2015) Scaffolded by Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital 1991.

An ever developing paradigm of sociolinguistic research indicates that a strong sense of belonging to ones heritage language is more than linguistic proficiency. Sense of belonging is deeply connected personal identity, cultural continuity and community association. For instance, various researches published in Language and Education journal depicted that linguistic identity develops through social interaction across home, school, community and workplace context where language users actively position themselves over the passage of time , negotiating identity and agency in relation to mother tongue usage and belonging (Zhou, 2022). Furthermore, a substantial body of research on language practices or choices depicts that the members connect themselves to a particular community or ethnic group through maintaining and using their mother tongue. These researches are suggestive that linguistic belonging may be seen as a socio emotional and identity related entity. When there's a persistent use of heritage language, it can rejuvenate connections to family legacy, shared cultural norms and collective memory. (Hammond, 2025)

2.1. Research Questions

1. How do Sindhi third culture kids in their adulthood negotiate their language preferences between their heritage language and the target language?
2. How does learning and using multiple languages influence Sindhi TCKs' sense of belonging across different cultural contexts?

2.2. Research Objectives

1. To explore the language use patterns and preferences of Sindhi TCKs who were exposed to multiple linguistic environments during their developmental years.
2. To examine how multilingual experiences shape the sense of belonging among Sindhi TCKs.

3. Methodology

In order to answer the aforementioned research questions qualitative data was collected through semi structured interviews from 5 participants who were adult third

culture kids who migrated to London, UK with their families 10 plus years back. They migrated for different purposes including study, better career opportunities, business, etc. The participants for this study were selected through convenience sampling. An informed consent was collected from all the participants. The interviews were conducted through video calls and WhatsApp voice notes depending upon the participants' convenience. The responses were then subjected to thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's six stage analysis model that involved: Familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes and writing up results (Braun V., 2006). The themes were then further discussed keeping in view the findings of the research.

3.1. Results and Discussion

The first research question aimed to explore that what are the linguistic choices of Sindhi TCKs. It found out that there are a number of factors that influence the linguistics choices of TCKs.

3.1. Linguistic Preference as a Context Dependent Choice

When interviewees were asked regarding their preferred language. They made clear choices depending upon the context and situation they were facing. Furthermore these choices were not static but these remained dynamic and these keep on changing depending upon the situation and emotional boundaries that the adults inclined towards.

(R1) The language that I use heavily depends on the context that I'm in. if I'm in school or college, I prefer to use English with my friends and teachers. Incase I'm at home I speak sindhi.

(R2) I speak Sindhi with my cousins back in Umerkot as I feel a strong sense of belonging and attachment when someone speaks in my own language with me. Also back home my aunts are not able to understand English as they are very simple people. Sindhi is what connects me to my relatives.

(R3) I use English at every place where I have to accomplish some professional task but when it come home or when my sindhi community is around I speak sindhi.

(R6) Here in Uk we use English every where there are just one to two shops in Camdon Street where they have staff speaking in Sindhi. Rest normally people speak in Urdu and Punjabi more as compared to Sindhi but English is spoken and understood by all.

These individuals were noticed to use English at their schools, colleges and work places. They were more comfortable to use English at their home and with close friends and cousins. Their parents encouraged them to speak Sindhi at home and with their cousins.

3.2. Code Switching as Communicative Strategy

Moreover it was also noticed that these individuals at few situations used code mixing as used words of English Language with sindhi but they never used sindhi words with English. Which raises concerns of their sindhi proficiency. They were not much proficient in their heritage language.

(R2) At times I feel that I'm so habitual of speaking in English that I speak words of Sindhi +language with English.

(R3) When Sindhi community youngsters are around we speak either in English or we may use English and Sindhi both. When we want to share secrets we speak sindhi. But then there are times when I m not sure of how to articulate an idea or a word in Sindhi, I end up speaking in English.

These individuals also viewed their heritage language when they wanted to link with someone emotionally this is what Pullock says heart language. English is used by these individuals as a professional language as it is widely spoken and understood in diverse job markets, schools and in various social settings.

3.3. Heritage Language Maintenance and Shift

In order to maintain the mother tongue these individuals spoke mother tongue at home while in dining room, mosques or when calling back home. They were confined towards the use of mother language only in their inner circle ie with family members, relatives, and very close friends. They very rarely used it in outer circle. The Sindhi individuals acknowledged that with the passage of time they have spent at their host country.

(R2) Initially, I spoke English Language only at school when I was studying at Karachi, but as I moved to UK I had to speak in English every timA I went out or I called someone because people here in London rarely speak Sindhi or Urdu. Urdu is only used at Pakistani and Indian restaurants or Ilford Lane, but we go there rarely only when we want to shop for Pakistani grocery items.

(R5) In order to maintain my mother tongue I go and meet the Sindhi community at London. I was once offered a job as well at the Sindhi radio station but because they weren't paying me much and the workplace was very far from my home therefore I wasn't able to manage working there. I feel at home when someone speaks in Sindhi. Also I could resist myself to socialize with people speaking in sindhi

(R6) I remember as a kid whenever I spoke in English language my mother never replied me because she wanted me to learn more and more of my own language and use it proficiently.. whereas when it comes to my daughter who is just 5 years old she understands sindhi very well but just speaks in English. Sometimes she may use a word or two in Sindhi.

They have shifted from using their heritage language and to host country's language because this helps them to accomplish career related goals. Also they are not able

to socialize with people in the host country without using their own language. This is similar to Pierre Bourdieu, as he clearly is of the opinion that, language is a form of capital and fluency in English is the key to economic and social advantages (Bourdieu, 1992)

(R2) So English learning was not a choice but a matter of survival for us.

(R4) After staying in London for 3 years when I went back home I unintentionally spoke English as I was so habitual to it. I felt like my own language Sindhi also had an influence of British English.

The Sindhi speakers were seen to acquire British like accent and speaking habits when they lived in a host country for a longer period of time. They were seen to speak a language that wasn't purely Sindhi or English but then somewhere between the two or a third hybrid language.

3.4. Identity Negotiation and Hybrid Identity

It was noticed that under this theme that the adults who were interviewed they did not have any hybrid identity. In terms of linguistic choices as they spoke multiple languages. If we peep into the younger generation their kids were more interested in speaking only English and they had a hybrid identity because they spoke mainly English with little words of Sindhi. Consequently they exhibit a hybrid identity and it was seen more inclined towards English language. This did worry parents a bit but because they were busy earning and making both the ends meet so they did not think it was a big problem for them.

(R5) My kids neither understand nor speak Sindhi as they do not need it for communication here in London.

(R6) My daughter who is just 5 years old she understands Sindhi very well but just speaks in English. Sometimes she may use a word or two in Sindhi.

3.5. Sense of Belonging

When these participants were inquired regarding the sense of belonging they said that they were happy when they had an opportunity to socialize or network with the people of their own culture. They had an emotional connection with anyone who spoke to them in their own language. They reported positive attitudes towards their own community.

(R1) Whenever I'm in a flight to Pakistan. I feel as connected as there are a lot of people around me who speak Sindhi. Which makes me feel at home. It is the language of my heart.

(R2) I remember I was on a trip to London zoo, where I met people from Larkana. I met them for the first time but listening Sindhi language made me feel that I'm somehow related to them. We then had a chitchat and tea together I got a chance to spend quality time with them.

(R3) my husband says whenever I'm extremely happy or extremely sad. I start speaking in sindhi. This gives him a clue that I'm extremely happy or disappointed at someone.

(R4) Sometimes in official meetings when I need confidence and recognition I call my mother it gives me tremendous confidence.

(R6) She said that the sindhis in uk wanted themselves to be called as Sindhi and she further Quoted a book named Jaan Jaan Hui Jeyari an autobiography by Fahmida Memon A prominent writer that when her sister was getting married to an urdu speaking person. She said "Jameela tun pehnjay murs saan urdu main kean romance kandian". (Translation how can you be romantic in urdu?)

Sense of belonging and linguistic choices seem to be strongly interconnected in adult third culture kids informal at home environments. It functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a linguistic identity marker. ATCKs use language to affirm, negotiate and sometimes to show their belonging or detachment from a particular community. The qout by respondent number 6 shows that the sindhi use sindhi for emotional attachment and affection and they cannot think to survive without being a Sindhi.

4. Conclusion

Language and Linguistic choices do have an impact upon the Sindhi Adult third culture kids identity. Adult third culture kids make linguistic choices depending on their context. They are mostly seen to be bilingual or multilingual in almost all cases. They use language as per the requirement of context they may in certain circumstances obtain for code switching to communicate emotional feeling. They feel comfortable with their own language but they acquire a foreign language for capitol benefits. They are happy with their mother tongue and they proudly call themselves Sindhi's. Pertaining to their identity they are very clear that they are sindhis and belong to sindhi community. Learning English is a matter of survival for them and they do not have their personal choice over it. They do like acquiring English language but if we ask them about language of their heart it's always going to be Sindhi Language. If we speak of the children of these adult third culture kids they exhibit a hybrid identity that is a mixture of Sindhi and English speaking people.

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