



## **Role of Sociolinguistics in Shaping Students' Language Use in Multilingual Classrooms**

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### **Abstract**

With an emphasis on how social and cultural elements impact communication, identity, and interaction, this study investigates how sociolinguistics shapes students' language use in multilingual classrooms. Students frequently switch between local, national, and international languages like English in multilingual educational settings, leading to intricate linguistic patterns. Using a qualitative design, the study examined how sociolinguistic dynamics emerge through teacher and student interviews and classroom observations in regular learning interactions. The results show that various factors, including peer pressure, instructors' language preferences, and the sociocultural status of particular languages, influence how students use language. Interviews revealed, for example, that students frequently transition between Indonesian, English, and their native tongues based on the situation and the person speaking to them. Teachers also purposefully employed sociolinguistic techniques like translanguaging to establish connections and guarantee understanding. In addition to facilitating communication, these activities helped students develop their social identities. The findings highlight how crucial sociolinguistic understanding is to creating welcoming classrooms that celebrate linguistic variety. According to findings, incorporating sociolinguistic perspectives into teaching methods can improve language acquisition, advance linguistic equity, and fortify students' multilingual proficiency.

**Keywords:** Students, Sociolinguistics, Multilingual, Classrooms.

### **Introduction**

Language is a social practice that reflects identity, culture, and power dynamics and is a means of communication. Language use becomes essential to social interaction and intellectual success in educational environments, especially schools (Hoerudin, 2022). Due to students' diverse cultural origins, native languages, and dialects, classrooms worldwide are becoming increasingly multilingual (Hennebry-Leung & Xiao, 2023). Researchers and

educators must focus more on how language is used and negotiated in educational settings in light of these multilingual realities (Mantra, 2024a).

Understanding multilingual classrooms is made easier by sociolinguistics, which studies the interaction between language and society (Ovchinnikova et al., 2023). It looks at how language changes depending on social situations and how such changes affect group dynamics, communication, and identity development (Widiastuti et al., 2022). Sociolinguistic classroom behaviors reflect larger social, cultural, and political systems rather than just impromptu exchanges. Therefore, using a sociolinguistic lens, teachers might view linguistic difference as a chance to promote inclusivity and deeper learning rather than as a problem (Mantra et al., 2024).

Language variation, or variations in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and usage among social groups, geographical locations, and circumstances, is one of the main topics of sociolinguistics (Mantra, 2024a). Language variance in schools is evident when students switch to more formal language with teachers while using dialects, slang, or informal registers with their peers (Furman & Aleksandrak, 2023). It's critical to comprehend these differences because standard languages are frequently given preference in schools, thereby marginalizing students who speak non-standard varieties more regularly. Teachers can better value and encourage linguistic diversity by accepting variation as a natural and desirable aspect of language (Huynh & Nguyen, 2025).

Code-switching, or switching between two or more languages during a discussion, is another critical sociolinguistic phenomenon in multilingual classrooms (Albahoth et al., 2024). Students can use code-switching to convey who they are, clarify meaning, or foster peer support. Teachers can also employ code-switching as a teaching tool to help students understand complex ideas or make connections with their language skills (Shaikh et al., 2023). Code-switching reflects students' extensive linguistic resources and flexibility rather than a sign of weakness. By acknowledging this practice, teachers can promote more effective communication and legitimate students' linguistic origins (Maba et al., 2025).

Language attitudes, the opinions and sentiments people have toward other languages or dialects, are another area of study in sociolinguistics (Li & Wei, 2022). Classroom engagement and social inclusion in schools can be impacted by students' views toward the languages of their peers. For instance, although negative attitudes about multilingualism may result in stigma and exclusion, good attitudes can foster helpful environments (Kvasova, 2022). Students' self-confidence and involvement in the learning process are also greatly influenced by the linguistic attitudes of their teachers (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Teachers can encourage more equal and positive learning environments by researching these attitudes.

Language and identity formation are closely related. Students frequently use language as a sign of group affiliation, cultural heritage, or social belonging in multilingual classrooms (Saidah et al., 2025). Students' sense of empowerment and identity may be impacted by how they are forced to use or choose to utilize specific languages. According to a sociolinguistic viewpoint, students' language choices are a means of negotiating their identities in relation to others as well as for communication (Hoi, 2025). Consequently, studying identity through

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language use sheds light on how multilingual classrooms influence students' social and personal growth.

Sociolinguistics highlights how ideology and language policy affect teaching methods. Many schools have formal language policies that prioritize national or international languages like English over regional tongues. These rules influence students' language use in class, which can occasionally reinforce status and power hierarchies. Determining how sociolinguistic elements influence student engagement and educational possibilities requires understanding these interactions.

Notwithstanding the expanding corpus of research, most studies tend to concentrate on specific elements of classroom language practices, like code-switching or policy, rather than examining how many sociolinguistic characteristics interact to influence students' language usage. Furthermore, although there is a substantial body of research on bilingual education, few of these studies adopt a thorough sociolinguistic viewpoint that incorporates diversity, attitudes, identity, and policy into the actual operations of multilingual classrooms.

This study is important from a theoretical and practical standpoint. Theoretically, providing a more thorough framework for examining language use in multilingual classrooms advances sociolinguistic studies. In practice, it guides educators, curriculum developers, and legislators on accepting linguistic variety as a strength rather than a weakness in education. This study supports the creation of educational strategies that promote inclusivity, cultural awareness, and linguistic equity in schools by emphasizing the influence of sociolinguistics on students' language habits.

### **Literature Review**

A theoretical review is an examination of the theories that underpin the research. In this chapter, the researcher should be able to construct research concepts while avoiding misunderstandings effectively. A theory review assists researchers in determining which theories students will use in their research.

### **Education and Sociolinguistics**

With an emphasis on how social elements like class, race, gender, and community influence language use, sociolinguistics investigates the connection between language and society. This viewpoint is essential in educational settings since classrooms serve as venues for social interaction, identity negotiation, and academic learning. Teachers and academics must comprehend how students manage their linguistic repertoires concerning institutional demands because many schools nowadays are bilingual. Multilingual classrooms are dynamic environments where students constantly engage in "translanguaging," utilizing their language resources to create meaning (Verhoeven, 2017).

### **Variations in Language in the Classroom**

Language variation, the regular variations in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation among locales, social groupings, or situations, is a significant focus of sociolinguistics. When

students introduce regional dialects or minority languages into settings where a standard language is valued, language diversity in schools is especially evident. According to research, students who use non-standard varieties may encounter linguistic discrimination, which could impact their academic performance and self-esteem. Teachers should embrace linguistic diversity as a learning tool and avoid deficit viewpoints by acknowledging variation as a natural aspect of language (Stollhans, 2020).

### **Translanguaging and Code-Switching**

Sociolinguistics has long examined code-switching, or switching between languages during a discussion. Students frequently use code-switching in the classroom to manage social identities, convey solidarity, or clarify meaning. To connect with students' native tongues or explain complex ideas, teachers might also purposefully employ code-switching. Translanguaging has surfaced more recently, highlighting that multilingual speakers use an integrated repertoire to communicate rather than merely switching between different language systems. Both models emphasize how educational practices and sociolinguistic reality influence students' language use in multilingual classrooms (Pillay, 2025).

### **Attitudes in Language**

Language attitudes, or people's opinions and sentiments regarding other languages and dialects, are another significant sociolinguistic factor. According to research, attitudes held by teachers and students significantly impact language usage and classroom dynamics. While negative attitudes toward multilingualism might result in language exclusion and discrimination, positive attitudes can promote inclusivity. Linguistic attitudes are not neutral but correlate with identity, power dynamics, and cultural values. Examining language attitudes is crucial in multilingual classrooms to comprehend how students view their own and other people's linguistic resources (Dragojevic et al., 2021).

### **Identity and Language**

Identity construction is closely linked to language use as well. Learning a language involves more than just becoming linguistically proficient; it also entails navigating one's identity and putting oneself in relation to others. Students' language choices in multilingual classrooms frequently convey a sense of cultural heritage, group belonging, or goals. For instance, adopting a local language might demonstrate unity and cultural pride, yet speaking a global language like English may be linked to modernity and mobility (Rostandi & Rohandy, 2024). Thus, sociolinguistic research emphasizes how language use in the classroom is a location for actively negotiating identity and power.

### **Research Method**

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate how sociolinguistic factors influence students' language use in multilingual classrooms. A qualitative design is suitable because it enables detailed descriptions and interpretations of language practices, identities, and attitudes in their authentic classroom setting (Allan, 2020). The emphasis is on

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comprehending meanings, interactions, and the social aspects of language use rather than numerical measurement. Through a case study, the research analyzes one or a few chosen classrooms as microcosms of a larger multilingual education reality.

Teachers and secondary school students in a multilingual educational environment where at least two or more languages are often used for instruction and communication make up the study's participants. Purposeful sampling was used to choose classrooms representing various language origins. Three primary methods used to gather data: document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Natural occurrences of linguistic diversity, code-switching, and interactional patterns were recorded through classroom observations. Teachers' and students' language attitudes, identity conceptions, and experiences with multilingual practices were revealed through interviews. School policy texts were also examined to comprehend the wider linguistic ideologies impacting classroom practices.

Thematic analysis, which entails coding and classifying patterns associated with sociolinguistic phenomena like variation, code-switching, attitudes, and identity, was used to study the data. Observational data were transcribed and compared with interview responses to establish credibility and triangulate conclusions. The study also uses member-checking to increase credibility, in which participants examine and validate interpretations. Strict adherence to ethical principles was maintained, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary involvement. Using this approach, the study hopes to present a thorough and reliable explanation of how sociolinguistic elements influence students' language use in multilingual classrooms.

### **Results**

The results showed that students regularly used various linguistic varieties based on the interaction's context. Students often employed informal registers and local dialects in peer-to-peer talks, but they tended to use the standard or national language in teacher-directed activities. Sociolinguistic ideas of style-shifting and register adaptation are shown in this trend. One student clarified:

"I speak Balinese with my pals because it seems natural to me. However, because it is required of me, I respond in English or Indonesian when the instructor asks me to do so in front of the class. (Student Interview, S3)

This suggests that linguistic diversity is a resource rather than a hindrance because it shows that students could preserve their cultural identity and academic interest through language variation. Observations in the classroom revealed that code-switching was common, especially between English and the national language. Students employed code-switching to convey humor, elucidate meaning, and fortify relationships with their peers. Additionally, teachers strategically used code-switching, particularly when elucidating complicated phrases. One educator observed:

When students cannot understand an English term, I occasionally switch to Indonesian. They simply remain silent if I continue in English. However, they will understand if I explain it in Indonesian first, after which I may switch back to English. (Teacher Interview, T2)

This demonstrates that code-switching is a dynamic communication technique that improves understanding and engagement rather than indicating a language deficit. Mixed but overall positive attitudes regarding multilingualism were found in the interviews. Although they took pride in speaking their own tongue, they believed that English was the most crucial language for success in school. As one student clarified:

"I know that speaking English will help me land a good job in the future, maybe on a cruise ship, but I love speaking Balinese because it's my identity." (Student Interview, S5)

"I encourage students to value their own language, but we must prioritize English and Indonesian because that is what the curriculum focuses on" (Teacher Interview, T1)

These viewpoints highlight a conflict between upholding institutional standards for language use and appreciating regional linguistic variety. The study discovered that language use significantly influenced students' identity construction. Many people associated language switching with more than just communication; it was related to their identity and aspirations. One student said:

Speaking English gives me more self-assurance and makes me feel like I'm preparing for the future. However, I feel more connected to my friends and culture when I speak Balinese. (Student Interview, S2)

This dual stance demonstrates how students negotiate their identities in bilingual classrooms as they balance their local sense of belonging with their global goals. According to an examination of school policy documents, local languages were not formally acknowledged, and English and Indonesian were pushed as the primary languages of instruction. Teachers were aware of this disparity, as one person reflected:

"The policy requires us to speak English as much as possible, but we run the risk of losing contact with students if we completely disregard Balinese or Indonesian." (Teacher Interview, T3)

As students continue to incorporate local languages into their interactions, this shows that even if policy strongly emphasizes global language competency, actual classroom practices are still influenced by sociolinguistic reality.

The study shows that sociolinguistics significantly impacts how students use language in multilingual classrooms. Students' attitudes and language choices demonstrated pride in local identity and aspirations for global mobility, but they also used linguistic diversity and code-switching as adaptive techniques. Despite being constrained by policy, teachers encouraged multilingual activities. These findings emphasize the necessity of instructional strategies that value linguistic diversity by highlighting the intricate interactions among sociolinguistic elements, student behaviors, and institutional frameworks.

## **Discussion**

Based on the interlocutor and situation, students switched between local dialects, Indonesian, and English, confirming that language variation is unavoidable in multilingual classrooms. The theory of language variation highlights the social conditioning of linguistic choices. Students intentionally adopted local dialects in peer exchanges to preserve cultural identity and unity. The respect these languages hold in institutional settings is also reflected in their switch to English or Indonesian in official encounters. This implies that classrooms are linguistic microcosms where students continuously balance formality and informality, authority and identity. It is implied that educators can create more inclusive learning environments if they view this diversity as a strength rather than a weakness (Mantra, 2024b).

The findings also show that code-switching is an effective communication technique for teachers and students. The results of this study support the contention that code-switching serves as a conversational tool to improve clarity, solidarity, and meaning-making, despite some conventional viewpoints viewing it as proof of insufficient linguistic proficiency (Pillay, 2025). For instance, students expressed greater understanding and confidence when teachers translated complex concepts from English to Indonesian. This descriptively demonstrates how code-switching builds a pedagogical bridge that allows students to access difficult information without feeling excluded. Argumentatively, the results refute deficit-based viewpoints and lend credence to the idea that code-switching is a type of linguistic flexibility and creativity crucial to multilingual education (Albahoth et al., 2024).

Between pride and realism, Students' attitudes toward their languages showed realism about chances for the future and pride in local identity. While many saw English as the key to international mobility, they also treasured their native tongue as a sign of belonging. According to the descriptive findings of the interviews, students frequently switched between languages with ease to play various parts and encountered no conflict in this dual positioning. From an argumentation standpoint, however, this dichotomy emphasizes the continuous sociolinguistic difficulty of striking a balance between the demands of globalization and the preservation of regional languages. Students run the risk of internalizing hierarchies that diminish their cultural heritage if schools place an excessive emphasis on global languages while ignoring local ones (Saidah et al., 2025).

The findings also supported the idea that identity construction and language use are inextricably linked (Rostandi & Rohandy, 2024). According to the students' thoughts, speaking English represented confidence and aspirations for global chances, but speaking Balinese promoted cultural connection. This dual identity supports the theory that identity is flexible, hybrid, and negotiated through language, challenging rigid conceptions of student identity. The narratives descriptively demonstrate how multilingual students change identities through their linguistic practices, embodying both local and global selves. This supports the argument that identity work should be recognized in schools since students are learning to be in connection with many linguistic and cultural contexts besides language.

## **Conclusion**

This study has shown that Sociolinguistics significantly influences how students use language in multilingual classrooms. Language choice, code-switching, and cultural identification significantly impact how children interact with their teachers and peers, as demonstrated by observations and interviews conducted in classrooms. According to the results, students frequently use their mother tongue to build comfort and camaraderie while reverting to English or the national language for formal interactions or academic assignments. This illustrates how, in educational settings, sociolinguistic dynamics act as a mediator between individual identity and institutional demands.

Students' awareness of how language use impacts participation and comprehension was brought to light by the interviews. By deliberately switching between languages based on context, audience, and goal, they demonstrated that multilingual students are active negotiators of meaning rather than passive language users. Additionally, teachers were instrumental in directing these language activities, proving that inclusive and communicative classrooms may be improved through supportive pedagogical techniques. The findings also highlight current issues. Although code-switching promotes inclusivity and understanding, it can occasionally result in inconsistent mastery of the target language. These results support the need to value and acknowledge students' linguistic repertoires to foster equity and learning confidence.

## **Declaration of conflicting interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

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