Identities at the Borders of Balochistan: An Ethnolinguistic Study of Saraiki Speaking Baloch Tribes

| Mehwish Malghani [*] | Fouzia Rehman Khan [†] | Shumaila Mazher [‡] |

Abstract

Balochistan shares a border with Punjab and Sindh, which makes Balochistan a linguistically diverse province. Within ethnic groups residing in Balochistan, there is a huge variety of languages spoken. This scenario raises the question of the ethno-linguistic identity of people residing at the borders of Balochistan. The present study focuses on the ethnic and linguistic identity of Baloch tribes that speak Saraiki and reside at the Balochistan Punjab border and Balochistan Sindh border. The study explores the role of language in the identity formation of Saraiki speaking Baloch tribes. The data is collected through Semi-Structured interviews of 10 Saraiki speaking Baloch. The findings revealed that the replacement of Balochi language with Saraiki language has little or no influence on their ethnic identity as Baloch. However, there are few factors such as gender, level of education, knowledge of history and the passage of time that contribute to the acceptability of Saraiki speaking as Baloch.

Key Words: Linguistic Identity, Ethnic Identity, Culture and Language.

Introduction

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of land area. The core ethnic groups are the Baloch and the Pashtuns that makeup 52% and 36% of the total population in Balochistan, respectively. However, Balochistan shares borders with Punjab, Sindh, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the Arabian Sea, Afghanistan and Iran, which makes Balochistan a linguistically diverse province. Within the ethnic groups residing in Balochistan, there is a huge variety of languages spoken. Almost all major provincial languages of Pakistan are spoken in this province, with Balochi, Urdu, Pashto, and Brahui being the provincial languages of Balochistan. This scenario raises the question of the ethnic and linguistic identity of the people residing in far-flung areas of Balochistan and sharing borders with other provinces and, as a result having the influence of cultures and languages on their own culture and language. The present study focuses on the ethnic and linguistic identity of Baloch tribes that speak Saraiki and reside at the Balochistan Punjab border and Balochistan Sindh border. The study explores the role of language in the identity formation of Saraiki speaking Baloch tribes.

Literature Review

The word 'identity' as a notion first appeared in 1570 as 'identities. According to Taylor (1989), the identity of an individual is a 'self-interpreting subject'. In the early twentieth century, Freud propagated the idea of the relationship of mind and identity (1927). A person has multiple identities because of being a member of multiple groups or possessing multiple roles. The chances of identity existing in isolation are impossible; the concept of identity can best be understood by means of creating a link between individual and society. Individuals are characterized through identities in accordance with their different positions in society. According to Cooley

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[*] Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University, Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan. Email: mehwishmalghani@gmail.com

[†] Assistant Professor, Department of English,Sardar Bahadur Khan Women University Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.

[‡] Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University, Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.

(1902), society and individual are the two sides of the same coin. Society is shaped through the actions of individuals, although the actions are performed in the context of the social structure (Coleman, 1990). Identities have cognitive and emotional component processes; in addition to this, they also work on conscious and unconscious levels (Burke & Stets, 2009). According to Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), a significant role is played by self-definitions with reference to group membership to allow people in setting their personal identity in the perspective of the expectations of others. Individuals who identify themselves with a group may or may not work to achieve the goals of that group, but there must be a feeling of psychological attachment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The present research also focuses on this concept of Ashforth in order to explore the ethnolinguistic identity of the Bloch tribe under study.

According to Foucault, identities are the product of dominant discourses that are linked to social practices. Howard (2000) presented the 'ideological constitution of the self'. If our identities are hidden in discourses, then the discourses may function to reproduce social inequalities. In this regard, the development of a person turns out to be a process of attaining a particular ideological adaptation of the world, responsible for serving hegemonic goals. Thus identification or identity becomes a force that shapes and directs individuals. Hall (2000) takes 'identity' as the meeting point between discourse and practices on the one hand and the processes which produce subjectivities on the other hand. Thus identities are temporary attachment points that attach to the subject positions, which are constructed for us through discursive practices.

Thus discourse and practices also play a major role in the construction of identity. The present paper also, in some way, encompasses the construction of discourse and practices in the construction of ethnolinguistic identity.

Althusser (1971) gave a theory on how individuals accept the existing social relations and norms. According to him, the subject takes a subordinate position through language, where one individual takes an authoritative position, and the other offers the acceptance of this authority. In this process, the discursive construction of the social subject occurs (Butler, 1997).

It is important to critically engage with Honneth's theory of recognition because it is his theory that got the most attention and endorsement recently. His theory consist of the following fundamental points that influence and impact individuals capacity and commitment to effectively engage with others.

1. Self-confidence: This encompasses the idea of how we position our self within loving relationships of past and present.
2. Self-respect/self-esteem: Individuals genetically and conceptually prioritize love relationships to every other form of recognition. In this context, Honneth draws on Winnicott theory of 'object relation theory' that emphasizes the need for an interactive relationship during the child development stage of maturation (Anderson,1995).

Honneth stresses that his theory is backed up by empirical evidence-based studies of John Bowlby (1907-90), who draws his conclusion on the basis of British psychologist and socialization skills of young children that infants show a willingness to have interpersonal relationships which later form the basis of their bonds of affection (Honneth, 1995). Child, on the other hand, acquires self-confidence by responding with loving concerns to their caregivers (Honneth, 1995). After possessing self-confidence, children will be able to acquire self-respect. Self-respect is acknowledging the status of oneself as being equal in society, while self-esteem is related to the idea of being unique and special (Anderson, 1995). The sense of self must be positive and valuable because a negative sense of self lacks the basis for developing one's own sense of identity (Anderson, 1995).

Yet another theory on identity is social identity theory. According to the social identity and self-categorization theories, individuals can develop two fundamental statuses; a person-self, which envelops unique, distinctive information about them, and a collective self, which envelops information about the group to which they associate themselves (Tajfel, 1974). In peculiar, this collective self, or social identity, leads to information such as the stretch to which an individual feels devoted or attached to a precise group, as well as the relations and characteristics of this group that is dependent on other social categories (Tajfel &Turner, 1979). The social identity theory evolved from Tajfel's work on intergroup operations which targeted the formation of the clash between social groups and the circumstances which control, support or try to change, established social hierarchies (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A few conditions of this approach served as the basis for Turner's "Self-

Categorization Theory" which study and investigate about group behavior in the broader aspect. Because the two theories share the same major beliefs, they are often placed under the broad table of "The Social Identity Approach" or "The Social Identity Tradition". Tajfel's (1978) model, which underlined how intergroup clashes could be embedded in worry over collective identity as well as clashes over material resources, was chiefly suitable to the new social movements that appeared during the 1960s and '70s (Reicher, Spears & Haslam, 2010) and the social psychologists, later on, applied the social identity theory to the women's movement (Williams & Giles, 1978), as well as ethnolinguistic minority group movements (Giles, 1977) later as the social identity theory came to be popularly adopted as a general meta-theoretical-aspect by the social psychologists (Abrams & Hogg, 2004).

Tajfel(1978) basically explained social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which is extracted from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) along with the value and emotional implications attached to that membership. Indeed, one principle belief that constructs the social identity theory is that groups and not individuals are the main backbone of both social clash and social adjustment (Reicher, Spears, Haslam & Reynolds, 2012). The social identity theory came up with an encouraging factor to intergroup behavior by implying that people are generally concerned to maintain, or to accomplish, a positive sense of self and that when they identify with social groups, this revealed itself in need to recognize the groups to which they belonged positively (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Membership of groups commonly acknowledged as superior will deal as a positive social identity, and contrarily membership of groups commonly regarded as inferior will deal as negative or discomforting social identity, which may, under certain situations, encourage the members of those groups to take unified action towards challenging the existing social hierarchy and the inferior status conferred to their group. Of particular importance to political psychology is the notion that the social identity theory presents a model of the ideological context that is not real, in which the identity management strategies and ideas that people embrace to cope up with disappointing social identity may be believed to lead to collective action. The most significant of these situations is no doubt the observed accessibility of group boundaries, that is, the limit to which people view that it is possible for individuals to move between social groups. Socially undervalued groups recognize individual movement to be possible. They may acknowledge their lesser status by trying to "move up" in the social hierarchy. Members of high-status groups also have at their convenience a collection of possible notions which reflect those of the lower status groups; it may be used in an effort to hold their position in the intergroup hierarchy (Wright & Taylor, 1998). The social identity theorists have tried to focus on the way in which power may influence the expedition upon positive social identity, other than focusing on political power as a key factor in its own domain (Sachdev & Bouches, 1991).

The social identity theory recommended that people behave in term of their social identity whenever they look at themselves and others in reference to group membership rather than as particular individuals. This identity-related-phenomena comes into action when people arrange themselves and others as group members. The self-categorization theory elaborates the nature of this precedent and the ramification of this psychological process called self-categorization. The self-categorization theory marks the basic difference between personal and social identity as various levels of self-categorization. It shows how the appearing properties of group processes can be described in terms of a transformation in self-perception from personal to social identity. It also exemplifies how self-categorization is naturally variable, flowing and context-dependent. The self-categorization theory focuses on the relationship between the self and the group (Turner et al., 1987).

A number of studies have been conducted using the theories of identity, ethnicity and language, which bring forth the importance of the topic under discussion.

Davis (2016) explored the semiotic and linguistic strategies within the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma that established an ethnolinguistic definition of Chickasaw community membership. It was demonstrated that non-speakers take up and reinforce ethnolinguistic language ideologies that connect them to the Chickasaw language through discourses of language affiliation.

Epstein and Heizler (2015) presented a basic theoretical framework of ethnic identity. The model explained the emerging empirical literature, which studied the effect of the immigrants' characteristics, such as gender, age, education, age at arrival, religion, stock of immigrants in the host country, on their ethnic identity.

Marino (2020) drew upon a case study of a family originating in Calabria, Italy, and living in Adelaide, South Australia. The research focused on the way in which the three generations perceive their 'being ethnic' across time and space. The first-generation participants were born in Italy and migrated to Australia during the 1950s; the second generation is their children, and the third generation is the children of the second generation. The findings show a widespread intergenerational identification of ethnicity as 'being Italian'.

Thus the review of the literature converge the attention to the importance of the phenomena of identity and its relation to ethnicity and also identifies the gap that no such study has been conducted on Saraki Speaking Baloch Tribe. Therefore the present study focuses on the not much focused ethnolinguistic study of Saraiki Speaking Baloch.

Statement of the Problem

Different languages such as Sindhi, Balochi, Barhawi or Saraiki are used by the Baloch ethnic group in Balochistan. It is revealed by the review of the literature that people may identify themselves similarly or differently from their ethnic group because of the difference in their language. Similarly, other people may also treat these Baloch differently based on the difference between languages. This gave rise to explore the perceptions of Saraiki speaking Baloch tribes living at the borders of Balochistan regarding their ethnolinguistic identity. This study also reveals the perceptions of the same group regarding how the Baloch living at the centre of Balochistan recognizes these Saraiki speaking Baloch.

Significance

The study is significant in terms of comprehending the varied concept of linguistic identity with relation to ethnicity. The study will give an insight into the ethnolinguistic identity of the Saraiki speaking Baloch tribes residing at the borders of Balochistan, along with their perception regarding how they are identified by the Balochi speaking Baloch residing at the centre of Balochistan. The study is also significant in terms of understanding the role of language in the ethnic identity formation of a certain group of people.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the present study is based on Woodward's Identity Theory (1997). According to Woodward, Identity is constructed through the represented symbolic system as well as cultural patterns, which serves as a device to build up an individual's world view and hence provides meaning to their experience. This cultural device is crucial to understand the interaction of the immigrants in their host community. These cultural patterns and symbolic representation produce meanings that aid in making sense of who we are and our experience.

Research Questions

1. How the Saraiki language, locality and other people's perceptions influence the ethnic identity of Saraiki speaking Baloch tribes residing at the borders of Balochistan?
2. What are the factors that contribute to the acceptability of Saraiki speaking as Baloch?
3. What are the ethnolinguistic differences/ similarities between the Saraiki speaking Baloch tribes that reside at the borders of Balochistan and the Balochi speaking Baloch Tribes that reside at the centre of Balochistan.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the influence of language, locality and other people's perceptions on the ethnic identity of Saraiki speaking Baloch tribes residing at the borders of Balochistan.
2. To explore the factors that contribute to the acceptability of Saraiki speaking as Baloch.
3. To investigate the ethnolinguistic differences/ similarities between the Saraiki speaking Baloch tribes that reside at the borders of Balochistan and the Balochi speaking Baloch Tribes that reside at the centre of Balochistan.

Methodology

The qualitative model of inquiry has been used to analyze thematically the data collected by Semi-Structured interviews of purposively selected 10 Saraiki speaking Baloch to know their perceptions regarding how their linguistic identity affects their ethnic identity and how people identify them ethnically through their linguistic identity. The participants were all graduates aged between 30 to 50 years residing at the border of Balochistan.

The Semi-Structured interviews focused on the following main questions:

1. Do you think the Balochi speaking Baloch that resides at the center of Balochistan identify the Saraiki speaking Baloch residing at the boarders of Balochistan as their own ethnic group members?
2. How Does Saraiki language affect your identity as Baloch?
3. How do you see yourself similar to the Balochi Speaking Baloch of Balochistan?
4. How do you find yourself different from the Balochi Speaking Baloch of Balochistan?
5. Do you find yourself in-grouped by the other Saraiki speaking ethnic groups?

Analysis

Theme no. 1: Identity of Saraiki speaking Baloch for Balochi speaking Baloch and factors that influence their acceptability as Baloch

The first theme was based on how Balochi speaking Baloch identify Saraiki speaking Baloch, according to the perceptions of these Saraiki speaking Baloch residing at the boarders of Balochistan. In the following section, the views of the participants are presented along with the analysis to answer the research question.

"In my opinion, I have met both; the first group is that of less educated and bigoted Balochs who only take language as a marker of Baloch identity. Even though they themselves speak barahvi, which is a different language then Saraiki. And then there are the educated and historically aware people who understand the dynamics of geography and see the death of Balochi and the adoption of Saraiki as a matter of either an influence of Punjab's colonization or as a natural and common phenomenon. Nevertheless, in grouping Saraiki, Balochs depends on person to person." (Participant no.1)

According to one of the participant, the identity formation of Saraiki speaking Baloch by the Balochi speaking Baloch is based on the level of education and their historical knowledge. In the views of the participant educated and historically aware Balochi speaking Baloch are more inclined and open towards accepting Saraiki Speaking as the member of the own ethnic community whereas the case in contrary when it comes to the less educated or illiterate Balochi speaking Baloch; they are more conservative and less inclined towards accepting any other language speaking Baloch as a part of the ethnic community.

"As a Siraiki speaking Baloch woman myself, I hardly faced any prejudice or otherization from other Balochi speaking Baloch women. In fact, one Makrani woman shared her belief that all Siraiki speakers are probably Baloch. Nevertheless, the Male gender seems biased against the Siraiki speaking Balochs. They do not openly express it, but they raise eyebrows if we mention our ethnicity. Surprisingly the people who always have issues with the dissonance in my ethnicity and my mother tongue belong to Pashtoon ethnic background. For some reason, it's hard for them to believe that an ethnic group may speak multiple languages." (Participant no.2)

Another participant focused on the difference of perception regarding their Baloch identity based on gender. The participant is of the view that She is openly accepted as a member of the Baloch ethnic group by the female Balochi speaking Baloch but has received implicit if not explicit biasness from male members of the same group. In addition, she also talked about the other ethnic groups regarding the non-acceptability of Saraiki speaking Baloch in the Balochi ethnic community based on the difference of language.

"Some years ago, this concept was not so much strong as it is now. Now A maximum number of Balochi speaking Baloch Identify Saraiki Speaking Baloch as their own ethnic. I can claim that knowledge of history and education has contributed a lot in changing the perceptions of people in a positive way regarding Saraiki speaking as Baloch" (Participant no. 3)

Yet another view came from the participant pointing to the fact that by the passage of time, people, in general, have started accepting the identity of Saraiki speaking as Baloch. Here the participant has also, like few other participants, brought forth the contribution of education and the knowledge of history as an essential factor

in the acceptability of Saraiki speaking as Baloch. This indicates the importance of education in broadening the vision of the people and developing acceptability and tolerance towards other languages in in-grouping people as their own group members.

"I have been criticized so many times by Baloch people why I do not speak balochi and called myself as Baloch. They often call me Sariki Baloch, which I personally don't like it cause its not the real identity i feel. However, this always not the case." (Participant no. 7)

Contrary to the views of the previous participant, this participant is of the opinion that people often do not accept the Baloch ethnic identity of Saraiki speaking Baloch on the bases of the difference of language. According to the participant, it is often too depressing and heartbreaking to be out grouped by Balochi speaking Baloch. The views of this particular participant indicate that at certain points, the Saraiki speaking Baloch have to face lack of acceptability however the participant also says that this is not always the case, which concludes that there are only few times when that they are discriminated against on the bases of their language.

"In the past few years recognition of Saraiki speaking Baloch from the Koh e Suleman range by the Balochi speaking Balochs of central Balochistan has gained momentum. Yes, people now recognize the Saraiki speaking Baloch who reside at the north eastern border of Balochistan. And this happened especially after a lot of Baloch students from all areas of Balochistan went to Punjab and the federal territory of Islamabad for their education." (Participant no. 9)

The above views of the participant are also pointing to the element of time in the acceptability of Saraiki Speaking Baloch ethnicity. According to this participant also in the present times people are more inclined towards the acceptance of Saraiki Speaking Baloch as the member of the Baloch ethnic community.

"I think the Baloch of Balochistan consider the Seraiki-speaking Baloch people to be a part of their group to a large extent because the people on both sides believe that the Baloch are one, not on the basis of language, but on the basis of their Baloch identity." (Participant no. 10)

Yet another participant also shared the same view that Saraiki speaking Baloch are accepted as Baloch on both sides of the border.

Thus it can be observed that most of the participants agreed that Saraiki Speaking Baloch is identified as ingroup members of Baloch community. However there are few factors such as gender, level of education, knowledge of history and the passage of time that contribute to the acceptability of Saraiki speaking as Baloch.

Theme no. 2: Affect of Saraiki language on Baloch Identity

The second theme of the paper is based on the effect of the Saraiki language on the Baloch identity according to the perceptions of these Saraiki speaking Baloch.

"It was hard for Saraiki language speakers to identify as Baloch in early years, but now Saraiki Language is accepted by maximum people as a Language also for Baloch" (Participant no. 3)

According to this theme, also like the previous theme, this participant is of the view that time has played a vital role in the identification of Saraiki speaking Baloch as Members of the Baloch community. Thus it reflects that now their Saraiki language does not play any negative role in the identification as a Baloch.

" I don't think it affects my identity as a Baloch for me. But we might be looked down upon because of Saraiki language by other Balochi people." (Participant no. 4)

It is evident from the above reply that for Saraiki Speaking Baloch, their language does not make them any different from the Balochi speaking Baloch. However, they feel that the Baloch speaking Baloch are a bit biased towards them due to the language difference.

"As a Saraiki speaking Baloch, we face a lot of difficulties because of the division of provincial borders, which makes the Balochs of Dera Ghazi Khan to be considered as Derawal or Punjabi and subject to a lot of prejudice in Balochistan."(Participant no. 5)

Similarly, this participant is also of the same view that because they being residing at the border of Balochistan and speaking Saraiki are often name called and therefore receive a lot of prejudice.

"Saraiki language by no means affect our identity as Baloch. Language and ethnicity are two different things and should never be combined together. Baloch people residing in Kuwait have no idea about Baluchi language

for years, but they still practice Baluchi culture, endorse the history and call themselves Al-Balush." (Participant no. 7)

The views of this participant prove that they feel no difference from Baloch residing at the centre of Balochistan and speaking Balochi. According to the participant, there are people all around the world residing in different parts and even no more using Balochi language, still identify themselves as Baloch.

Thus concluding that language has little or no effect on the ethnic identity.

Theme no. 3: Similarities between Saraiki speaking and Balochi speaking Baloch

The third theme is based on the similarities between Saraiki speaking and Balochi speaking Baloch. The views of different participants are presented below to answer the the research question.

"Being Baloch, we share the same culture and tradition, and so we have similar feelings and sentiments, we just use different languages to communicate them." (Participant no.1)

According to the participant, the Saraiki speaking Baloch share the same culture and traditions as the Balochi speaking Baloch of Balochistan. Additionally, they share the same sentiments and feelings, thus helping them to identify themselves as Baloch residing at the centre of Balochistan

"If I have to see my similarities with the Balochi central culture, our outlook may be different, but we operate on similar ethical and cultural values. The virtues of tribal Baloch culture are the same as the ones narrated through folk tradition to us." (Participant no.2)

The participant points to an essential aspect of identity formation that is literature. According to this participant the folk tradition narrated through the literature inculcated the same ethical and cultural values as are present in the Balochi Speking Baloch residing at the centre of Balochistan. This similarity in the literature refers to the similarities in the two different groups of the same ethnic group.

" We share the same culture, our area has Saraiki and Balochi as its main languages, the features of those Saraiki speaking Baloch are also the same typical balochi features, culture resembles as well. Our codes of life (the way we treat our elders), our tradition and folk singing, the way our weddings are celebrated are all same." (Participant no. 4)

According to yet another participant, these two groups under study have a similar culture, traditions, values and code of life. This leads to a very crucial fact that language is not playing any crucial role in the identity formation of Saraiki speaking as Baloch, and there is not much to differentiate them from Balochi speaking Baloch except for the difference in the languages they use.

"We see ourselves similar to Balochi speaking Balochs of Baluchistan because our food, dressing, social values, moral values, traditions and almost everything is similar except the language." (Participant no. 7) and "Dresscode, food, lifestyle, customs are the same as the Balochs of Balochistan. The naming system is also Balochi. Almost everything is the similar, the only difference is the different language." (Participant no.8)

The above mentioned two participants also share the same views as the other participants. According to them, they share the same culture and traditions that include food, lifestyle, social and moral values, customs and even the way of dressing. Thus all these aids in their identity formation as a Baloch, as the only difference that they find is based on the difference of their languages.

Theme no. 4: Differences Between Saraiki speaking and Balochi speaking Baloch

The fourth theme is based on differences between Saraiki speaking and Balochi speaking Baloch.

"I identify completely with the Balochs of Pakistan where ever they are, we due to being dispersed widely in terms of geography are still same people at the core, we have adopted some cultural traits from the geographical placements, but the core values still remain the same, and the only difference is language" (Participant no. 1)

According to the participant there is only one difference between the under study groups of baloch and that difference is of language. Other than that both groups same similar core values may it be traditions, culture or lifestyle.

"We can differ only in our accents and speaking Languages. Otherwise we are same" (Participant no.5) and "The only difference between us is that of a language." (Participant no. 6)

Similarly the above mentioned views of the participants there is no other difference between the Saraiki speaking and Balochi speaking Baloch. This difference is only of the different languages they use. Other than that they are one and the same.

"The only difference between us and Balochi speaking Balochs of Baluchistan is the language. Other than that, I don't see any difference. I believe that the Seraiki-speaking Baloch and the Balochi-speaking Baloch cannot be distinguished from our culture, although the language separates us"(Participant no. 10)

This participant is of the view that although these two groups share many similarities such as their food, way of dressing, traditions, culture and lifestyle, still there is only one thing that separates the two, and that is the different languages that they speak.

Thus all the participants agreed upon the one, and the only difference between the two groups of Baloch under study, and the difference is that they speak different languages.

Findings

The findings revealed that the replacement of the Balochi language with the Saraiki language has little or no influence on the ethnic identity. However, there were few factors that influenced the perception regarding the Baloch identity of Saraiki speaking Baloch by Balochi speaking Baloch. These factors were gender, knowledge of history, level of education, and the passage of time.

When it comes to the similarities of the said mentioned groups, almost all participants were of the view that they share similarities in terms of culture, traditions, lifestyle, way of dressing, food etc. However, they all agreed upon the only difference in their languages.

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