

# Role of Language in Maintaining Ethnic Identity

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**Abstract:** Identity means to display ourselves how we want others to perceive us. How people construct their identities has been an important concern. Because, identity is an important mode of lifestyle. Language has been in close relationship with identity. Role of language in maintenance of identity has been obvious in many renowned works. The Present study investigated the role of language in constructing ethnic identity and data interpretation revealed the need and importance of language for maintenance of identity.

**Keywords:** Identity, maintenance, language, ethnic group, researchers.

## 1. Introduction

Identity and language are in close relationship. Identity includes the ways in which we, through the use of language reveal who we are and we not only display who we exactly are rather we also display “**how we want people to see us**”. People create their identities through the use of language. (Paltridge 2007, 2008) The Present study was concerned with Identity of an ethnic group. Status and the development of ethnic identities is influenced by the interaction of many factors ( Lazarev V & Pravikova L ,2005).

### RESEARCH DESIGN& INSTRUMENT:

This was a quantitative research which utilized quantitative research instrument which was questionnaire.

### POPULATION:

Target population was Language students of private sector universities of Pakistan.

### SAMPLING:

Minhaj University was taken as sample. 100 questionnaires were distributed among language students and responses were calculated in percentage as shown in the following table shows to get the average response of people.

*Data was analyzed in the form of percentage and the following results WERE derived.*

SR No	Statements	Agree+strongly agree	neutral	Disagree+strongly disagree
1	An ethnic group as a whole can preserve its identity	28%	32%	40%
2	Values are being preserved by language.	53%	21%	26%
3	Identities determine inferiority or superiority of language.	35%	30%	35%
4	Superiority of a language is determined by the culture	32%	40%	28%
5	To construct ethnic identity language is essential.	75%	5%	20%
6	It's a matter of great pride to get education in native language.	40%	10%	50%
7	Language shifts by shift in group values.	50%	30%	20%
8	Societal demands affect the language use of the group	41%	19%	40%
9	Bilingual education enhances language compatibility to interact	41%	38%	21%

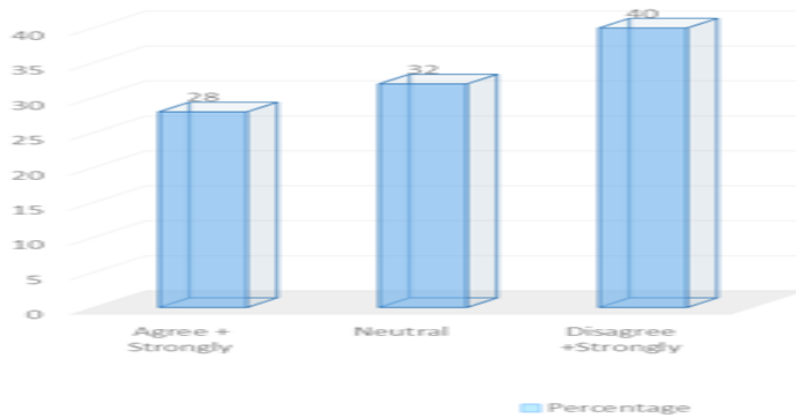
	at national and international level to promote culture.			
10	Bilingual education helps to enlarge cultural boundaries.	32%	43%	25%
11	Language supports bilingual identities.	25%	49	26
12	Role models affect language of minor groups.	41%	31%	28%
13	Language is a means of maintaining status in a society.	35%	47%	18%
14	Wants affect identities of groups.	38%	21%	41%

## 2. Analysis of Questions

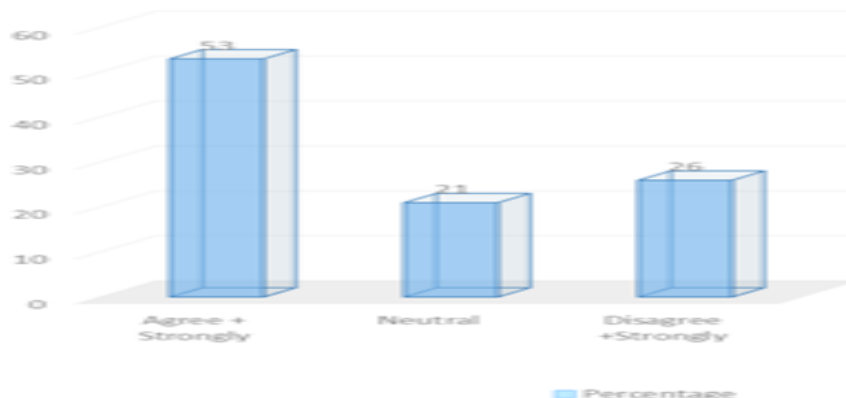
### 2.1. An Ethnic Group as a Whole can Preserve Its Identity

The Researchers included this statement to find out whether people think that an ethnic group can preserve its identity, living in a bilingual situation or not. The Researchers found that most of the people thought that an ethnic group cannot preserve its identity because of the influence of the other dominant groups present in that specific area. However the views were not totally one sided as the people who thought that identity can be preserved were also 28% against the odd 40%. So we can say that the views were not only one sided.

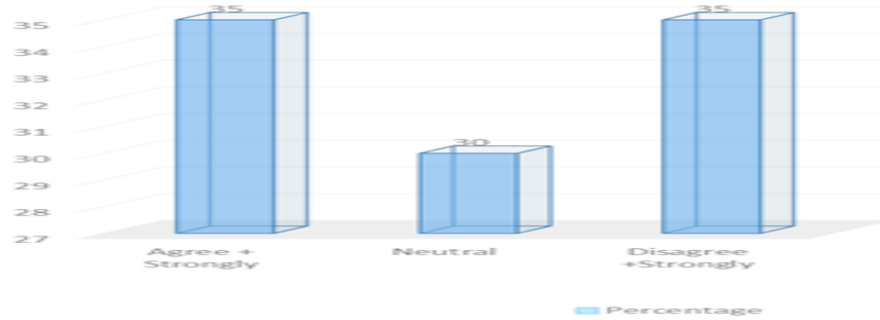
This question meant to find out the relation between the language and values of a community. The Researchers wanted to find out that whether or not values of a community or a group are influenced by a language. Results were driven by calculating responses of respondents by getting 53% in the favor of the point that language preserves the values of a community against the 26% people who disagreed or strongly disagreed to this point. However 21% remained neutral.



### 2.2. Values are being Preserved by Language

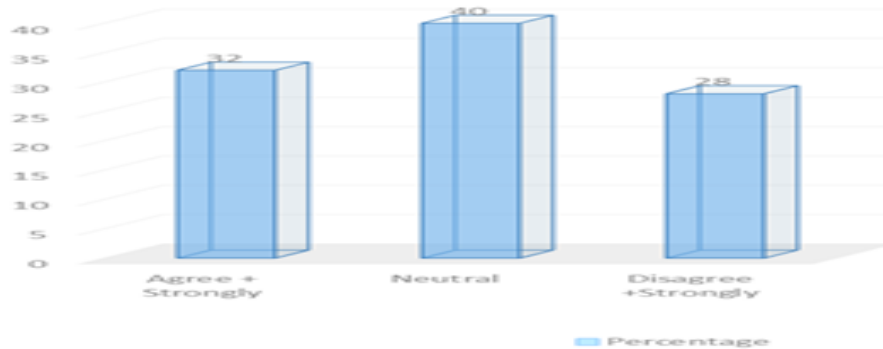


### 2.3. Identities Determine Inferiority or Superiority of Language



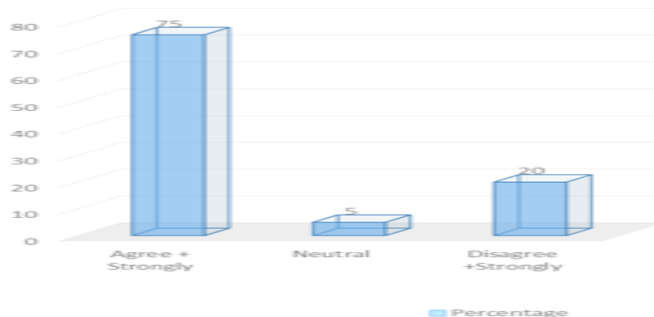
This question was aimed to find out that whether or not an identity of a group of people DESIGNATES their language as superior or inferior or not. Researchers found that people in society tend to speak dominant languages instead of other local languages that are present in country. That is why the people from middle class also fantasize about that language and tend to speak languages of high prestige instead of their mother tongue. This situation compelled the researchers to ask this question as well to find out the views of people who instead of maintaining their identity through language switch to speak dominant languages. But surprisingly found the mixed views about this situation. This shows that only half of the people think that it is fact that identity determines the inferiority or superiority of a language.

### 2.4. Superiority of a Language is Determined by the Culture



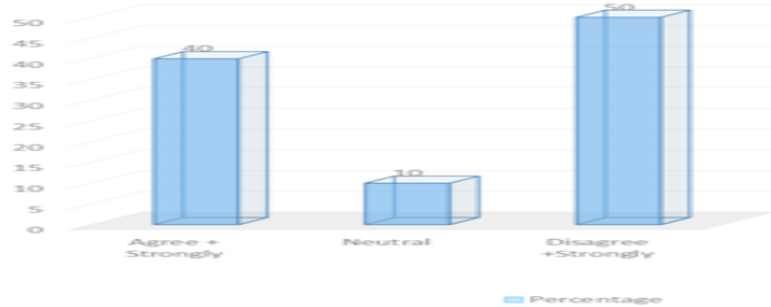
We all know that European and American culture is praised all over the world for their superiority and well organization. And both of these cultures use English language as their first language and it is obvious that English has become linguafranca in the whole world. The Researchers intended to find out that whether culture determines the superiority of a language. Responses revealed that 32% of people think that it is true that a language is superior when its speakers have strong cultural basis. 40% remained neutral or had a limited knowledge about the subject so they voted for neutral.

### 2.5. To Construct Ethnic Identity Language is Essential



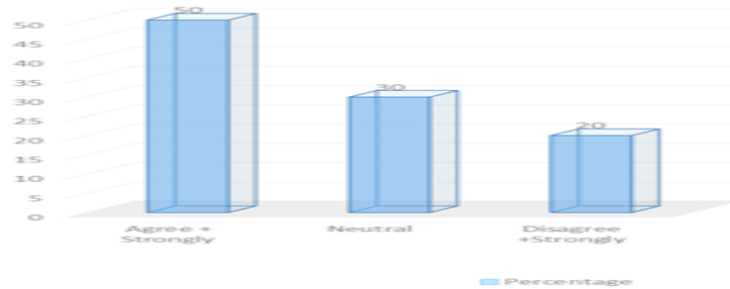
Intentions behind this question were to analyze the role of language in constructing ethnic identity. Responses to this question gave clear views that it is always essential for a group to speak or maintain their own language to construct an ethnic identity. 75% of the people got agreed to this fact and supported the necessity of language for constructing an ethnic identity

### 2.6. It's a Matter of Great Pride to Get Education in Native Language



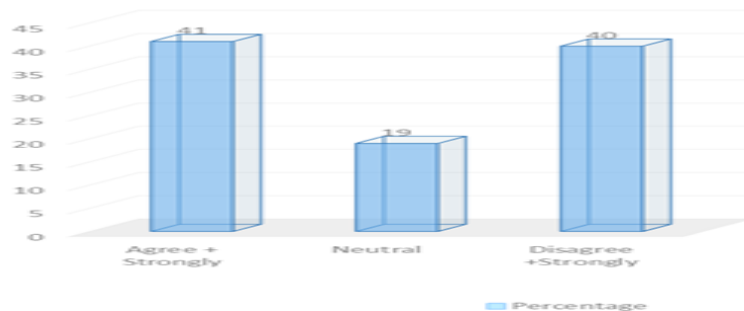
This question was asked to find out what people think of getting education in their own language. Was it a matter of pride that their children would get education in their own language to Here things get a little complicated when we turn to this question. However 40% of people considered it a matter of great pride to get educated in their native language but exceptions are always there as responses lead the researchers towards the fact that 50% respondents denied the fact.

### Language shifts by shift in group values.



Generally speaking communities keep on shifting. Intentions behind given question were to investigate whether this shift is confined to cultural values or language also suffers. Pakistan, for example as a former colony of British is under the influence of that culture and so is our language. Hence, the researchers got the view that 50% respondents supported that language shifts becomes essential in case of shifting of group values. Language and culture shift relationship were the intentions behind this statement.

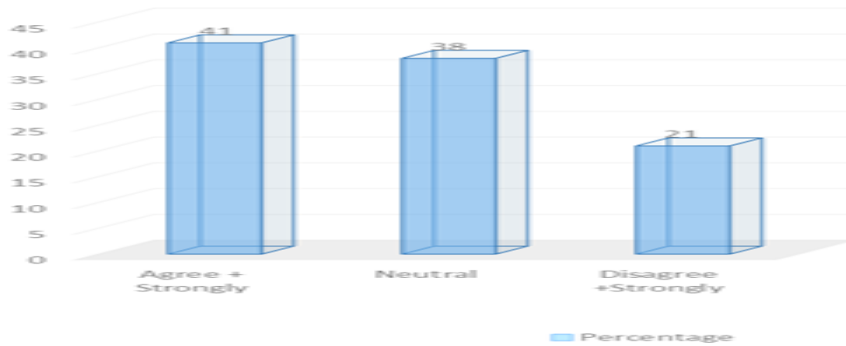
### 2.7. Societal Demands Affect the Language Use of the Group



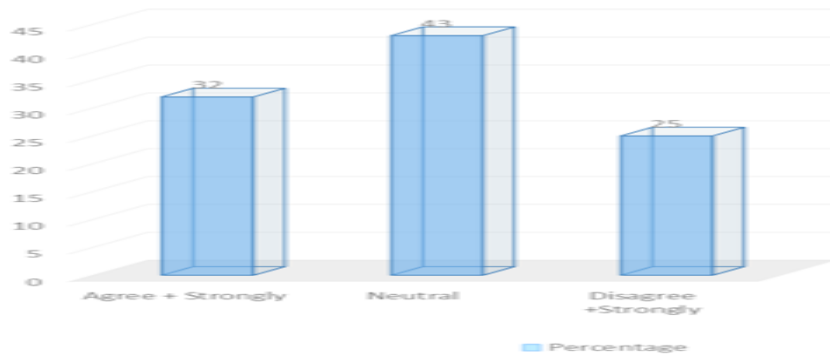
Speakers use language as per demand. In a monolingual community speaker cannot be bilingual or multilingual in official rather non official dealings rather in such cases all the speakers are supposed to be monolingual. So Here societal demands means the needs of getting a job or getting due position in society. Here also researchers received mixed answers for. 41% got agreed that society compels a person to change his language and 40% denied the fact.

**2.8. Bilingual Education Enhances Language Compatibility to Interact at National and International Level to Promote Culture**

The Researchers intended to know how much bilingual education helps people to interact nationally and internationally to promote their culture. Because the researchers perceived that a person would be able to promote his culture and values only if he would be able to communicate in other language that is known by second speaker. However only 41% supported the view.

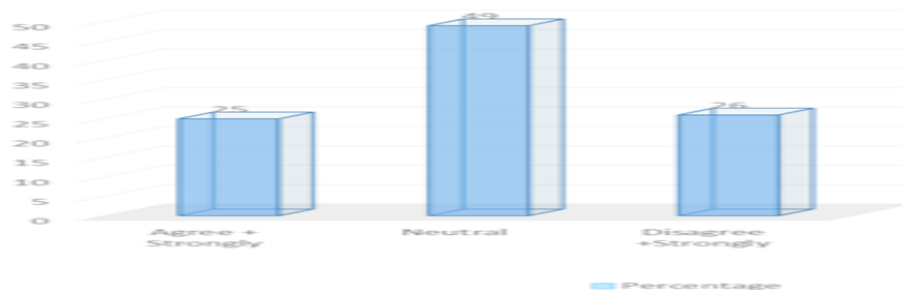


**2.9. Bilingual Education Helps to Enlarge Cultural Boundaries**



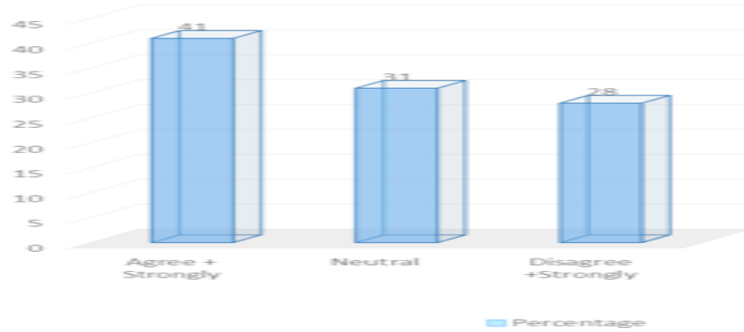
The hypothesis behind this question was to get the idea that whether bilingual education would help a culture to expand or not .The researchers were sure to get maximum positive results about this but fact was that only 32% respondents supported the hypothesis and 43% were remained neutral.

**2.10. Language Supports Bilingual Identities**



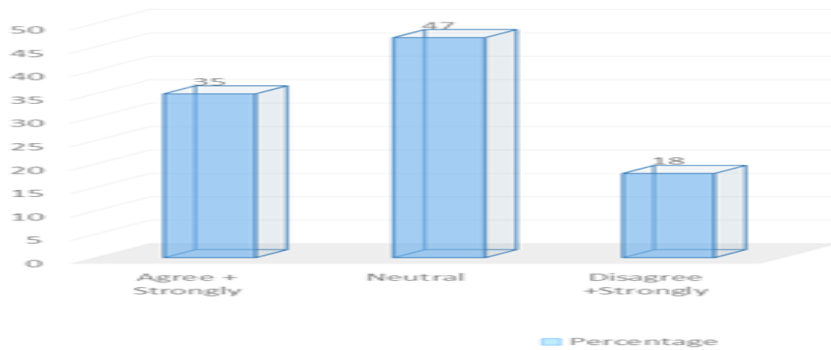
Bearing the hypothesis that language supports bilingual identities the researchers calculated responses. Intentions were again to see the role of language in supporting bilingual identities instead of ethnic identity. This statement was not easy to answer. Respondents found themselves unable to argue over hers that is why 49% remained neutral. Those who were in favor were in minority as only 25% got agreed and 26% got disagreed.

### 2.11. Role Models Affect Language of Minor Groups



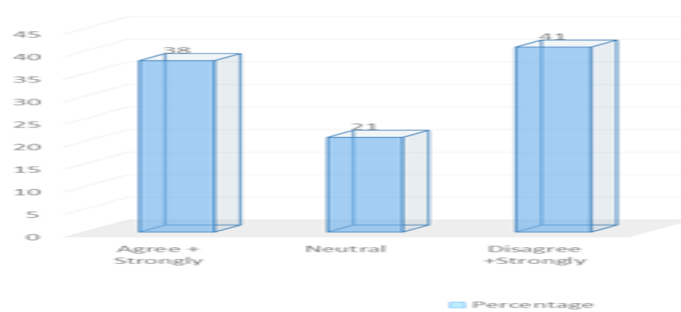
This question was aimed to analyze that whether the role model which always affect the life styles of minor groups or individuals, also have effect on the language of the target group or not. 41% realized the effects of role models on their language accordingly. They tend to follow the language of their role models. However the 28% did not agree with this point of view and 31% remained neutral.

### 2.12. Language is a Means of Maintaining Status in a Society



The researchers intended to see whether language helps in maintenance of status if it does, then how?. For example in Pakistani context status conscious group tend to speak English language obviously as a tool of maintenance of status. Researchers expected positive responses but respondents did not support the view as much as was being expected. Responses revealed that 35% got agreed 18% stand on rival side while 47% remained neutral.

### 2.13. Wants Affect Identities of Groups



Researchers intended to know the perceptions of people about the affect of wants on group identities. Wants here means group desires. This view was supported by 38% respondents and 41% stand on rival sides while 21% remained neutral. So the affect of role models on ethnic group identities was found minimum.

### **3. Conclusion**

Finally this can be concluded that most of the people think that language and identity are in close relationship with each other and cannot be separated from one another. Identity is formulated through the language and is preserved through the language and also it changes with the language change. Language determines the identity of a group and in the light of the views of people. Therefore, a person or a group needs to maintain their language choice to maintain their identity in their society. Desires of people also have effect over their language use. Social needs also compel a group to change language. It seems as if bilingual education also helped in the expansion of culture. Mixed views are received over the question of inferiority and superiority of a language by any means. Some respondents supported the view that culture lets the language to be superior and few thought that it was not true. Some responses revealed that it is social status that determines language prestige.

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