

Language Ideologies in a Business Institute: A Case Study of Linguistic and Socio-Cultural Realities

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Abstract

This case study explored the English language related ideologies of different management groups and student representatives at a business school of Karachi, Pakistan. The study tried to bring an insider's perspective to the causes of certain language ideologies prevalent in the business school's social structure, and the role language played in power relations between the main actors of the community. For this purpose, a sample of four research participants from each of the focussed management cadres was selected for study. Analysis of semi-structured interviews, administered on the participants, was done using Fairclough's (2009) dialectical-relational approach of critical discourse analysis (CDA). The study suggested the prevalence of certain language ideologies that were manifested and latent in the discourses of the participants. These deeply rooted beliefs were predominantly patterned by centering authorities: language became a means for those in power to sustain their hegemony and maintain social stratification in society. Functionally, English played a stratifying role, and also was found to be extensively

perceived as a commodity, a product that is to be acquired or attained. The study realised this social wrong of inequity and divide in a particular community, and on the basis of the findings, recommends a re-organizing of social structures into those of more inclusive and democratic ones for the operationalizing of equality and fairness in social practices.

Keywords: dialectical-relation, entextualization, interdisciplinary, language ideologies, semiosis

Introduction

Language ideology emerged as an independent field of linguistic-anthropological study in the last decades of the 20th century, combining insights from the fields of linguistic ethnography with social-scientific study of ideology. The field of language ideology has impacted in a large way the disciplines of linguistic anthropology, linguistics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and cross-cultural studies. Language ideologies study relations between the beliefs speakers have about language and the larger social and cultural systems they are a part of, and show how these beliefs are informed by and grounded in such systems. In this way, the field of language ideology has been able to relate to the latent and manifested assumptions people have about language, given the speakers' various educational, socio-economic, historical, and political contexts and backgrounds.

Recently, the subject of language ideologies has attained a significant place in the ethnographic tradition of linguistic anthropology, variationist sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. It is most dominantly developed in the social-scientific tradition and has displaced some very basic established concepts of language, text, speech community, and identity. Major scholarships in the field of language ideology are concerned with ideologies prevalent in education, gender studies, globalization and political economy, migration, media, and organizations. Some of the major probes have been related to power and control, peripheral normativity, racism, inequality, and child labor.

The topic for the present study attracted the researcher because of its scope and intensive study of ideological aspects, social processes related to elements of power and hegemony in business academia. This is an emergent and much-needed potential topic of research in academics, which has not been studied in such an intensive manner in Pakistan. In the context of Pakistan's educational system, specifically in a business education context, this present study is pioneering as it tried to capture the manifested and latent language ideologies embedded in the texts of the various management cadres in a business institute. Due to the scarcity of in-depth research in this area, the study hopes to fill quite some gaps in knowledge about ideological processes and relations of power and hegemony among academics.

The aim of this study was to find explanations for the main actors and other social actors of academia about their perceptions and beliefs related to the English language. It tried to capture the latent and manifested language ideologies of a business education community. Thus, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the factors involved in forming specific ideologies about the English language.
2. Explore the status and role of the English language in a specific business school.
3. Find explanations of how these language ideologies transmit in society.

The objectives of the study led to the formulation of the following questions for the research:

1. What are the perceptions of academia at different management cadres in a business school about the role and status of English?
2. What are the manifested and latent language-related ideologies embedded in the participants' discourses?

Literature Review

A very close construct related to the beliefs and perceptions of people in a socio-cultural situation is of language ideology. Language

ideology refers to a shared body of common beliefs, views and perceptions about language, which includes cultural assumptions about language, nature and purpose of communication, and patterns of communicative behavior as a collective order (Woolard, 1992). Such ideational complexes pertain to every aspect of communication: about linguistic forms and functions as well as about the wider behavioural frames in which they occur (Blommaert 2006). According to Tollefson (1999), language ideology tries to capture the implicit, usually unconscious assumptions about reality that fundamentally determine how human beings interpret events.

Language ideologies maintain that people perform meanings, that is semiosis, and language as a regimented field, is one of the mode, thus language ideologies are ideational as well as practical. Semiosis analyzes language as well as other modalities, such as body language, visual images, tone and intonation. Silverstein (1979) furthered that linguistic form is indexical, that is, it has a social meaning, indexing 'context' through ideological inferences: in this way, a particular form 'stands for' a particular social and cultural meaning (Silverstein 2006). We flag socially and culturally (ideological) indexical meanings while we talk; we continuously manipulate and molest language for social and cultural purposes; and, that widespread language ideologies are indexical.

Language ideology rejects the artifactual view of language, which Silverstein's (2006) referential ideology of language explains as a transparent form and essentially structured. It is non-contextual and characterizes groups of people. This artifactual view postulates that language is a set of grammatical structures with clearly ordered functions. Metaphorically, it is seen as an object which one can possess. Language is collectively seen by a specific culture as stable and contextless. People comment on language quality, lexicon and grammatical structures of language as if it is a product. This view makes language an object of normative control of institutional regimentation, and leads towards centers of authority (Silverstein, 1996). This view dictates standards of language, academically, and at the socio-cultural level signals indexicalities of refinement or crudeness, forming classes, dictated largely from the centering authorities, be it in education, bureaucracy, or politics. Members of a group are expected to use language-genres, grammar, register, etc. in a

patterned way as these are the symbols of their belonging to a particular group.

Language ideology contrarily looks at language as a socio-cultural event, embedded into historical and political aspects of language and language usage, stressing on language as ideological construction which involves power and authority, and essentially is performed in ways that shows control, hegemony and domination. Contextualization is an essential ingredient of language. It maintains that language provides contextual clues, that is, who speaks, in what mode, on which topic and circumstances; therefore, indexical value keeps changing with each context quite dramatically.

Language ideologies are formed through the combination of particular discourses and registers, institutional structures, and professional practices. For instance, Silverstein (1979 & 2003) gave examples of pronouns and honorific language use. The analysis of the specific linguistic forms is organized so as to attain ideological effects. According to Blommaert (2006), language ideology has contributed to the understanding of cultural variability, of concepts such as inequality and power, for example the forms of regimentation used by bureaucracy can differ strongly from those used by laymen.

Taking this view, language is ideological (metapragmatic and indexical) framing. It can also be seen in the metapragmatic framing of texts changes as discourse are lifted out of their contextual meanings and are transmitted with new suggestions of meanings in new contexts (Bauman & Briggs, 1990). Thus, utterances are packed with indexical meanings that are social meanings. Whenever people interact they try to create socio-cultural meanings, which Blommaert (2006) calls the order of indexicality and they use enregistered forms of language use (Agha, 2003; Silverstein, 2004) which is a patterned way of talking and referring to an event, situation, norm or phenomena, and further, situating these norms in relation to other norms.

Language ideology views speech community as the allegiance of people according to the artifactual language, where speakers display joint

orientations towards identities and communities. The existence and range of these discourses depend on the sharedness of indexical values. People are grouped together to display joint membership in certain socio-cultural events, situations, or circumstances, which construct identities and communities. Such speech communities are categorized according to trajectories of class, educational level, professions, etc. and are signaled through shifts in discourses, signifying changing identities. Language inequality and standard language have become sources of such categorization.

There is an organizational speech community with a top-down perspective which looks at language ideologies from the point of language prioritization and policies about language use in institutions and companies; equally and simultaneously, individual ideologies are also at work (Sherman & Strubell, 2013). People actively experience power relations, and weave webs of perceptions and beliefs around their experiences (Blommaert, 2013).

The ideologies are inherently embedded in discourses of the speakers. Fairclough (2009) analyses discourses in society through dialectical-relational approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Semiosis is viewed as a social process which is dialectically related to others. Elements are related but not fully separate. Thus, power relations, institutions, beliefs and cultural values internalize semiosis without being reducible to them. CDA tries to study the relation between semiotic and other social elements, and the current study tries to analyze this relationship in the context of a specific business school.

Research Methodology

This case study followed an exploratory-interpretive design by collecting qualitative data. The study focused upon the uniqueness of data, so as to generate thick descriptions. The design focused on the context and its value for individual differences (Lantolf, 2001). The study tried to explore the sociocultural factors which often limit an individual's interpretation and the way reality is understood.

Sampling

The case study used a representative sample by selecting one member each from senior, middle, junior management group and one representative from the student body to understand the phenomena as a case and bring in-depth insights about English language ideologies prevalent among students and their stake-holders at the Institute.

Measurement

The data were analyzed using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model (2009) of dialectical-relational approach. For this study, the model tended to be the most suitable choice in terms of studying dialogically constructed discourses with their interconnectedness and relatedness of themes, and unfolding relations of power and control as a social practice. The study analyzed the relation between semiotic and other social elements specific to this business institute. Following Fairclough's CDA model, the analysis of the data followed the four stages given below:

- Stage 1. Focused upon relations of power and hegemony, in its semiotic aspects
- Stage 2. Identified obstacles to addressing the power relations
- Stage 3. Considered whether the social order 'needs' the power relations
- Stage 4. Identified possible ways past the obstacles

Following CDA's transdisciplinary tradition, the study included insights from business education, English language education, and teacher education, with references from sociology, history, and politics. It studied the data from three semiotic categories: genres, discourses, and style, as well as the orders of discourses. Interviews were transcribed as verbatim and analyzed focusing mainly on the speakers' basic, high and low tones, pauses, and flow of speech adapting the Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) Model of Discourse Analysis.

Data analysis and discussion

First stage: The first stage of analysis looked at aspects of power and hegemony as a social practice and system in academia. CDA as a

tool of social critical science analyzed the power structures in academia. Such power structures were expressed in participants' discourses through various semiotic forms such as texts, orders of discourses, tones, pauses, and flow of speech. At the second step of this stage, the social order of power and hegemony was studied through the insights gained from the field of language ideology.

Second stage: In the second stage of analysis, the study tried to understand the obstacles in the way to address the hegemonic presence of centering authorities in academia. Nested in the field of language ideology, the analysis laid out the relations of power in its semiotic aspects, through the orders of discourses, and semiotic forms used by senior educational leaders, and adhered to by the junior cadres. The dialectical-relations among the participants of this context became a source of social stratification and inequality, with power and hegemony centering on the main authorities.

To start, the discourses of the research participants reflected an artifactual view of language, of language as a product, stable and contextless- a structured set of grammatical structures, and functions. This view led to perceive language as a field for deploying power and control. According to Blommaert (2006), this view leads to look at language as an object of normative control by the institutional regimentation and leads to centers of control and authority. The senior management participant regarded English as an important medium for accessing knowledge and for business studies and stated:

“In order to become a leading business institution nationally, its graduates need to be placed in leading organizations and multinationals, there English helps.”

The participant created an ideology of high standards laid out for the institution, realizing his senior leadership position at the institute and in academia. The participant entextualized when he talked at length about the deteriorating standards of education, with graduates who are actually 'functional illiterates', but he corrected himself:

“As far as the institute was concerned my statements were very general (repeated in low tones: very general).”

This is the social or indexical meanings. The participant's tone falls where he himself marks the generality in context and the tone rises with the specificity of the context: the relatedness and distancing with the subject: his identity as an educational leader makes him realize the role he has to play:

“We are fortunate to take intakes which are much better, there's a screening test and similarly, our criteria is very strict.”

Immediately after this he said in a low tone:

“So, it's like this. But again the structure is repeated: Louder: ‘...so, our students are quite comfortable in that way. Similarly, our teachers are also comfortable....’”

He himself marks what the text is and how to approach it: “... *what I mean is*”, or “*that's not the point*”, as well as by his rising and falling tones as if he wants to say a few things aside and some things are there for the general public. It leads to the cultural transmission of beliefs from the text of a centering authority in education to the other contexts, with new suggestions of meaning which will be echoed in yet other texts.

The text relays the moment-by-moment construction of ideologies in the order of discourse. The participant indexes the talk as collectivism with an imperative tone:

“So, if communication is imperative, then communication must take place in that medium which is most understandable.”

Participants of the study formed membership in different speech communities but their memberships were volatile. The field of language ideologies adheres to contextualization and the same person whose discourse reflected norms of a particular community, displayed joint memberships in different speech communities, in the progression of the discourse. As the roles changed and the topics turned, the actors assumed

different social roles and contextualized accordingly. The same expression of power and authority continued in the several changing roles the participants played. To start, the senior management participant stated:

“We are fortunate to take intakes which are much better, ... our criteria is very strict (senior academic leadership); In order to become a leading business institution nationally, its graduates need to be placed in leading organizations and multinationals. (member of business management); in order to manage big organizations in Pakistan that organization has to live with a labour force and that labour force talks in Urdu (industrial administrator); if your area of management relates to dealing with local population, then 95% of our population does not know English (a social scientist); So I personally think that language issue has to do with politics rather than communication (a nationalist); The other day we had that conference and in the Hall there was one speaker who was speaking English initially and the whole hall was sleeping and the moment the speaker turned into a local language I could see that the comprehension improved and the listening comprehension improved (a social scientist).”

Middle management participant’s voice also ushered in multiple belonging: first, the identity of the Institute’s membership *it’s our fault’; that’s the way it happens here*, when talking about the conflictual perception about teaching business English courses and the need for teacher education, the participant created a synchronous identity of an educationist, education leader, ELT practitioner, and the Institute’s senior faculty. Switching from a background of English language teaching, the participant realized the new needs of the Institute and associated oneself with that:

“English is not that important it’s the concepts that are more important. And how to transfer those concepts in English is more important.”

Now, a more pragmatic aspect of the artifactual view of language seems to have reified in the participant’s discourse. Here it is also the

‘othering’ process, to weave a new role and identity distinct from old community’s membership: but X didn’t believe in that because X herself was not trained. The identity of the participant became fluid in the older community where the participant belonged and got hardened in the new context, ascribing the participant’s new membership. The participant from middle management, being an expert in the area of English language teaching, immediately categorized the teaching/learning of English in the institute as English for Business purposes, with clearly defined goals and value.

“We support English, we have always supported English ...but English is not that important; it’s the concepts that are more important, and how to transfer those concepts in English is more important.”

These directives in the text polarize obvious trends of control and authority, augmented by a rising tone and strong emphasis in the speech. The flow of speech gets rapid as the discourse centers on the faculty’s need for formal training and education:

“Now where I learn how to teach ... depends upon the books I refer to. So whatever I pick up, whatever I learn becomes my forte.”

Here *I* is used to mean a general educational situation as bleak and by referring to ‘they’ talks about the teachers and *we* generalizes the issue:

“So when they tell the students to write reports, then anything that is given to them is acceptable. So, here it is that we lose base, right at the beginning.”

The transdisciplinary inclusion of discourses entering from English language education teaching, business education, teacher training, history and politics, are recontextualized and relayed with a force as if it was an imperative. The capillary power and regimented control in the field comes into play: *“anyone who has done Masters in English ... needs to be trained.”* Here the tone rose again, with an emphasis on training.

As the discourse progressed, its order changed and turned towards the student community, revolving around the need for teacher education, and the student body is viewed as a victim of a flaw of the educational/academic system:

“They say that whatever you explain to us we take, take a little from here and there and write it.”

And the discourse concretizes the educational flaw:

“But I don’t think that it’s the students who are at fault-it’s our fault. Students get different vibes from the teachers-that’s the way it happens here.”

The intonation turned critical, with rising tone and fast speed. The participant dealt with the concepts fast which were clear and the person had been trained in. This is the inherent contextualization. The event of a face-to-face interview created an opportunity of setting the rules in a patterned manner, and the emphasis in the tone added the indexical meaning of enforcing those rules as enactment in the ELT field as well as in business education.

As compared to the senior and middle management groups, the text sets forth a contrast of tone, lesser intonation patterns and far less speed and more frequent pauses in the junior management participant when talking about the role of English at the Institute. The participant is tackling the operational aspects of teaching English, and the communication of concepts take a higher priority:

“We also have students coming from other places... so where we have classes called mixed ability classes we have to make sure that everybody understands it.”

The person perceived the role of English as very critical in education:

“English is of immense importance because when we look at business it’s not only business in Pakistan but then there are

many global challenges as well,... English as tool of communication is very important because English is a global language.”

The tone of the participant rose, the speed and the flow of speech improved, and there seemed to be more confidence in what the participant was saying. These themes expressed in the participant’s discourse were well-established themes, and there seemed to be entextualized from the fields of globalization and English as a global language.

The study is guided by the field of language ideologies which postulates that every institution or social community constitutes its own ideological frames and membership norms, regenerated by its central actors. Members of this community comprehended and picked these ideologies and enacted those in texts through discursive practices. The student responded:

“The Institute though emphasizes on English..., but it’s basically a production machine. They are producing us to adjust to the outside world... so they have to concentrate on us, and English is one part of it.”

The participant is at the receiving end of the continuum of academia and here it is clearly seen how the pragmatic value of education is realized and followed. The participant repeatedly expressed that perfect English is not needed:

“So we need to have the basics because here also we need to contact clients in the outside world of Pakistan. Not very expert English. No we don’t need.”

The orders of discourse structured these ideologies at the micro level with suggestions of a mediocre approach to education: *We need just the basics*, a utilitarian aspect attached to business education: *Technology has made things very easy for us. We have verbs, synonyms, we have everything available on the net*, with a view of the student body as *production machines*. The discourse of the participant

suggests new world's meanings, new order of academia, and the support of information technology as invaluable.

Discourses centre on the voices of the participants, which polarize the role of centering authorities or main actors—the senior and middle management, as they maintain power relations by nearing or distancing identities. The phoric expressions *I*, and *you* index individuality and authority, as well as generalizing beliefs, by transmitting norms of the Institute as well of the society at large, as if these were a collective order:

“I’m talking about; I could see that the comprehension improved; So, my experience” “I would start off by saying that... I would also like to stress.”

However, notably, at points in the discourses where the burden of responsibility got stronger, the expression turned to *we* and *us*, and even *I*. These cues are in sharp contrast with the use of *we*, by the junior management and non-management participants’ use of a more democratic and inclusive voice. The junior management participant’s voice seemed to echo the norms dictated by the centering authorities or actors, with the emphasis on delivering services:

“We do speak in English in our classes but Urdu is also there especially when we have to describe a concept or phenomena; we understand....”

The main actors or centering authorities (Silverstein, 1998) reproduced patterned manners of giving out popular opinion or belief, that is, *doxa*, in a particular group or community. This generates social meanings to which others orient or attribute to, in order to become one of the group members, to: socialize with them or to call themselves as a member of this group. This study suggests that these attributions are symbolic in nature as they aim at perceived central values of the group, like good, bad, ideal are all created or re-created by the centering authorities to which other members try to take on to become one of the community: Senior management’s valuation of a social ideal “*leading business institution national*”; “*I support communication*”, turns into norms for

those who are attributing towards this central actor. The middle management's orientation is embedded in the expression:

“It's the concepts that are more important, and how to transfer those concepts in English is more important.”

Later, followed by the junior management:

“I do not believe that we cannot switch from one language to the other especially when it comes to explaining the concepts.”

For the last link of the community, the non-management voices it out with full conviction:

“You see, it's very easy to grasp things in Urdu than in English, because there are many technical things that should be explained in Urdu....”

These are speech chains picked from the environment of this specific group and then communicated further to the group members through discourses, behaviours, acts of adherence or rejection-which are easily understood and picked up instantly by the group members. And this is how power structures gain strength and sustenance. Other actors of the community, who were not in the power domains, became a partial source of reinforcing and strengthening the obstacles to remove power by conforming and complying with the power structures and centring authorities.

Discourse also became a means of cultural stratification and created hierarchies among the participants as centre and periphery, through their speech repertoires. The speech repertoires of the senior and middle management participants' were in sharp variability with the junior cadres, based on their semiotic constitutions such as tone and choice of lexicon and argumentation schemes, with a discursive ability of borrowing references from other disciplines such as bureaucracy, politics and history, when reflecting upon education and business. Their language resources

were visibly marked by distinct levels of social and educational awareness; their linguistic repertoires were distinct; their handling of argumentation was with knowledge, logic and reason; and their references to knowledge were discrete. In the discourse of the senior management there was a sense of universality and macro-power display in the handling of topics and themes. At the middle management level, the view of language gets restrained to the Institute's academic management largely, and the structured pattern directing how things should be done here. At the junior management level with the use of *we* and *they*, *other regions* and *them* the discourse settles for the here and now issues; while the non-management participant's approach to knowledge, education and business education, and the vital role of the Institute is understood at this level to be synchronous with getting them *acquiring and adjusting in job markets or higher education or doing business abroad*- something which is directly related to achieving economic stability and control.

Third stage: The third stage of analysis looked at the data from the point of whether the particular social order needs the hegemony and power, linking 'is' to 'ought'. In this study the Ideology as a field, explained structures of power and hegemony as an important constituent of the inherent social order of this context. The study postulates that because of its ideological weight it may be possible that this specific institute as a social order needs the power structures, and addressing it at a large scale would lead to larger social changes which may not be feasible or possible at this macro-level.

Fourth stage: The fourth and the last stage of analysis of the study looked at the possibilities within the social order to look at the possibilities of removing obstacles in order to eradicate the power and hegemony in academia. It led to suggestions, firstly, of change in the system in terms of a more democratic set-up; secondly, more dialogues and consensual forums inclusive of junior cadres of management; and, lastly, for the need of de-centralized hubs of power and protocols. The study also recommends a re-organizing of ideologies of the institute and the roles of senior leadership about and of structures of power and control to that of a more democratic and equality oriented, and the junior management's re-adjustment of perceptions about the roles of senior

leadership in academia. Even if not a comprehensive change is practically possible, it may initiate a constituent change in the power structures. The study envisions this transformation as a building of a new face of the institute and the roles of its main actors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study, situated in the field of language ideologies, attempted to study the nature and causes behind English language perceptions of different management cadres at a business institute. The analysis of the data was done through Fiarclough's CDA Model (2009) and analyzed power and hegemony in the field of academia by selecting a business institute as a case.

The study recommends, firstly, of adopting a more democratic set-up in the social order; secondly, constructing more dialogue-oriented consensual forums inclusive of junior cadres of management; and, lastly, re-constructing de-centralized hubs of power and protocols. The study also recommends a re-organizing of ideologies of the Institute and the roles ascribed to senior leadership. Dialoguing among the actors would be contributive to mutually construct and revise the discrepancies in the perceptions of roles of various members of the academia.

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