Identity Construction Through WhatsApp Chat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Dr.Mujahid Shah[1], Parkha Durrani[2],
[1]Assistant Professor, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan
Mujahidshah@awkum.edu.pk

[2] MPhil student, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan
parkhadur123@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Identities has been widely studied across the globe from different perspectives in different spheres and settings. However, identity construction through social media chat has not been studied much. Moreover, in Pakistan identity construction in relation to social media chat particularly whatsapp chat, has not been drawn in depth. So, the current study is an attempt to fill that gap by investigating identity construction in whatsapp chat of two students group in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Data were collected by means of whatsapp chat between two graduate level students groups which were qualitatively analyzed. The findings brought fourth that the interactive practices of students and teachers reflect their micro and macro identities. The study bears importance as it will bring into limelight the less explored dimension of identity and language.

Keywords: Identity, whatsapp, social media, globe & qualitatively

1.   INTRODUCTION

The link between identity and language is deep and rooted in the socio culture contour. Some of the research studies have considered the relation between language and identity as stable and static and assuming that identity is just a mirror and reflection of societal structure (Bloom and Gumperz,1972; Myers Scotton ,1993). But on the other hand, there do exist scholars and researchers who consider that identity is not something given but dynamically structures and restructures through interactive practices such as CS. In other words, identity is not something which can be attributed to certain predefined features or qualities, but it is an ongoing process changing continuously by the interactants through their own practices. However, it does not mean that it is completely exclusive of the broader social forces and factors. In fact, it is a joint venture of the social and local forces developing into dynamic social realities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Identity also refers to some features which determine the relation of individual with his surroundings (Norton, 2000). As a result, the change in the concept of identity can be attributed to the change in social environment around, which is more vividly observed in the recent studies in different parts of the world. Arnett (2000) defines bicultural identity as "most of the people in

the world now develop bicultural identities, in which part of their identity is rooted in their local culture while another part stem from awareness of their relation to the global culture" (p.777). Both types of identities are retrained and maintained separately side by side (Lamb, 2009).

In Pakistan, as far as the investigation of WhatsApp chat and identity construction is concerned, it has not yet been properly explored. A qualitative investigation of CS as resource for identity construction has been the need of hour. Therefore, the current study will not only address the gap but also help in understanding the relation between WhatsApp chat and identity. Therefore, the existence of societies, social context and social culture are essential for the growth of languages and speakers. This means that socio culture, socio political and historical background of the speaker are closely engaged in the negotiation between self and others. So, identity can be defined as the perception of a person about himself. It also refers to some specific attributes which determines the relation of an individual which his surroundings. The link between identity and CS in this context is deep and rooted in socio cultural counter of the community concerned. As a result, the change in the concept of identity can be attributed to the change in social environment around, which is more vividly observed in the recent studies conducted in

different parts of the world. The current study decade, the new developments, particularly in the field of communication and information technology have strongly affected humans thinking and way of livings, which led to the creation of multi-cultural and multi lingual societies and spaces. These new advancements have also changed people's conceptions of self and others, which are clearly reflected in their interactive practices and behaviors. Therefore, the study is important as it will give a new insight and direction to identity construction on one hand, and further their understandings about the link and relation between the interactive practices and the social world around on the other.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This objectives for this study are as follows:

- To explore the student's identity construction through Whatsapp chat.
- To determine the link between micro identity and macro identity of the students

1.2 Research Questions

- 1: How do the students construct their identities through WhatsApp chat?
- How do the micro identities of the students lead to their macro identities?

1.3 Delimitation

The current study is delimited to the setting of public sector university i.e. Abdul Wali khan University Mardan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity refers to the fact how an individual sees himself in relation to the world across space and time. In other words, identity basically refers to some specific features which determine the relation of an individual with his surroundings which has been approached from two different perspectives: Static and dynamic. Identity as a static concept is something old, which focused the stable psychological and social dimensions. They believed that identity is fixed and what a man does to reflect psychological and social structure through their interactive behaviors and practices (Fishman, 1965). While the proponents of dynamic/non-essentialist school of thought take it as dynamic, fluid, multiple and subject to change. The static concept is now an outdated one and most 0f the current identity related studies advocate for the dynamic concept of identity. Hall and Nilep (2015) very recently published a detailed overview on identity where they have given a historical overview of different theoretical paradigms on the identity. They have classified these studies into four main streams.

1: In the first category they have included studies which have explored CS and identity construction from ethnographic perspective. These studies investigated identity in local speech communities. For example, Gumperz (1982) concept of "we" and "they" codes were correlated with certain prior identity positions such as solidarity and distancing.

2: The second tradition which began in 1990 focused on the nation state identities. These studies have tried to explore CS identities. For example, Cerulo (1997) focused on constructing and maintaining individual and group identity.

3: Third tradition emerged in 1990s onwards which has challenged the static functional approach by focusing on CS and identity from an introduction perspective. For example, Brown and Barton (2004) focused on identity as self-representation in educational field.

4: The third tradition step into fourth tradition, focuses on hybrid identities. Speaking broadly, the above mentioned fourth theoretical streams can be classified into two main approaches. The researchers not only challenged the ethnic and national classification of identities but also taken languages as fluid and dynamic which could not be classified into separate and discrete categories (Garcia and Wei, 2017). The focus on micro identities can be observed in King (2013).

The increasing access to internet among young generation has led to more research

interest on the role of identity construction on internet in social networking sites (Hamburger 2013; Bosch 2009). Other areas of interest include how their online social interaction reflect the dilemma between privacy and disclosure of identities (Hargittai 2007; Livingstone and Brake 2010). Available evidences reveal that social networking with peers by means of new media has become an inseparable part of everyday lives of the young generation today and a tool that has a potential for learning and dynamism in knowledge production (Bosch 2009; Greenhow 2011; Dunne et. al. 2010). Many people connect to social networking sites at least once a day to check their profiles or to participate in different social interaction (Livingstone and Brake 2010).

Speaking broadly, the above mentioned four main theoretical streams can be classified into two main approaches essentialist and non-essentialist. Keeping in view the focus of the current paper, we have restricted the range of the review to the essentialist and non-essentialist.

Essentialist and Non-Essentialist

According to essentialist identity is fixed and it cannot be change while the educates of non-essentialist believes that identity is not something fixed, but it is structure and restores by the speaker through their interactive practices. Identity have been studied not only in face to face interaction

but some of the studies have explored identity construction in written and electronic media as well, for instance identity can be construct through WhatsApp chat as well. Therefore, keeping in view the dearth of identity construction through WhatsApp chat, the current research has tried to investigate the nature of identity construction. A growing number of researchers have tried to unpack the relation between CS and identity from a dynamic perspective. They have explored CS and identity in different domains. Some of the researchers have turned to explored identity construction in teachers and student's interactive practices. For example, Gu and Benson (2015) explored the identity construction of Chinese teachers in Hong Kong. The study showed that in the WhatsApp chat the students construct their identity in a dynamic way, wherein they are guided by their broader social economic and socio-cultural backgrounds. A critical look at the study reveals that there appears an over emphasis on the socio-cultural background of the speakers, while the micro dimension is comparative less focused. Besides they tried to link the micro with macro in a direct manner, which creates a gap between the two levels and makes the study disjointed. The study showed that participants in the WhatsApp chat were involved in developing their identity level. The study

seems to be overreaching in bridging the connection between micro and macro identities. It gives a fleet of presupposed correlation between linguistics structures and its symbolic value and significance. The study tried to show that how students construct their identities through WhatsApp chat. The study investigated identities construction in the interactive practices of international university students in Taiwan. Data collected through WhatsApp chat. The finding showed that the students discursively construct their identities through WhatsApp chat. The study further suggests that linguistics identities such as in the current context, one should also take into consideration both.

Identities have been studied not only in face to face interaction but some of the studies have explored identities constructions in written and electronic media as well. For instance, one can construct their identity through WhatsApp chat, viber, messenger, Facebook etc. The study is a good compact one, but the findings are based on the WhatsApp chat of the students. The brief review shows that non-essentialist approached has changed the conception of identity from a static and stable phenomenon to something dynamic and emergent. The focus of identity changes from local to national to global spheres, merging the cultural, and boarders by providing equal opportunity to every

speaker to link and use their linguistics repertories.

In accordance to non-essentialist stance, identity cannot be dealt without understanding several terms. Self is 'who I feel myself to be'. Person is the 'perception of others in a socially defined role'. Ethos is 'person's identity as constructed in a context'. It refers to the inner qualities of self, evidenced by others. Subject position is 'social position in which self is located' (Joseph, 2004). Therefore, identity is 'a process of representing self rather than a fixed condition'. Keeping these terms in mind, the following study helps to understand the process of identity construction between two participants through Whatsapp chat.

However, in the current study, we have integrated the micro and macro as usual into macro level. Keeping in view the dearth of the research the current research has tried to investigate the nature of identities construction in the interaction and WhatsApp chat between two graduate level students. Moreover, in order to adopt a balance micro and macro integrated approach, the current research is guided that how two persons can construct their identities? The brief overview also highlights the facts that identity is an emerging phenomenon, which has not been studied much and needs further investigations. However, it was also noted

that the dynamic approach over emphasizes the dynamic aspects and is more inclined towards the micro dimension

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Generally, there are two broader approaches to research i.e. qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative is self-explanatory in its meanings and implications. Quantitative research involve quantification dealing with statistical measurement and facts and figures while on the other hand qualitative research is exploratory in nature apply to in depth investigation of an unknown phenomenon (Creswell 2013). So, keeping in view the nature of current study, WhatsApp as resource for identity construction, and research questions which are open in nature, it was deemed appropriate to opt for qualitative research. Than in qualitative paradigm, as the current study approached human activities in a particular socio-cultural setting, therefore, ethnography as research method was opted.

3.2 Setting and Participants

As the study was exploring identity construction in the context of Pashto and English in higher education and consequently, the study was conducted in Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan a public-sector university in KP.

Qualitative research tends to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issues under study. For this study, data was gathered by taking WhatsApp chat among 3 job seeking graduate students from Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan. These students were having BS English educational background. The age of these students ranged between 22-24 years. Before proceeding with data collection, all formalities were fulfilled.

3.1 Data Collection

After fulfillment of all formalities, data were collected by means of observations of WhatsApp chat among three graduate students. Creswell (2013) talks about the role and nature of observation in qualitative study in multiple observations in qualitative studies as researchers often engage in multiple observations during the course of a qualitative study and use on observational protocol for recording information while observing (p.244).

In the following extract, the participants were observed to be exhibiting a particular aspect of identity construction during their conversation. The participant A plays the role of a conversation starter i.e. at the micro level according to Bucholtz and Hall (2005). The participant B plays the role of a guide as his/her answer is straightforward and the answer involves normal tone. Therefore, the inquirer replied with the word "thanks". However, the next response of the participant involved sarcastic tone. Hence, he/she plays the role of a sarcastic

advisor as the response shows that if the participant A already had a job, so he/she should not have been concerned about the evening shift. Therefore, the response of the conversation starter is also aversive as he/she uses the word stupid. The participant C ignores the reply as he/she does not say anything in response. Hence, the conversation ends without the involvement of a parting or thanking phrase. The micro-analysis of the conversation was based upon the fact that the use of different languages indicated different kinds of identities. The Urdu words indicated the regional identity at the macro level as it involves the use of the national language. The use of English words indicated the elite class identity as the English language enjoys a very prestigious status in Pakistani society.

A: Salam everyone! School ma Jo Double shift program aaya hai us ma Jo already teacher hain unhe appoint krhn gy k new condidates ko rekhain gy? Plz guide me.

Translation: Hello everyone! Are new candidates supposed to be considered for job at the schools, according to the double shift program? Please, guide me.

B: Jo already ausi school ma job pe hai aus ko be moqa hai evening ma shift lenay ke leway. Frist aus ko moqa dengay. Agar school walay instrested na ho to dosro candidate ko moqa dengay.

Translation: Those who are already on job would be given chance for the evening shift. If they are not interested, the unemployed ones would be offered the job.

A: Ok. Thanks.

B: Welcome.

B: Di berozgara la moka warkae kana tasu already teacher yae.. New candidates ba akhali.

Translation: Let the unemployed ones be given chance, you already are a teacher. The new candidates will be considered.

A: Thanks for your stupid information.

.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The interactions were analysed guided by Bucholtz and Hall (2005). The model proposes the analysis of data at macro and micro levels. In order to identify the micro and macro identities, the data was approached from the perspectives of the question that how the two participants constructed their identities through WhatsApp chat. The above chat was taken from WhatsApp which was a conversation between two graduate level students. They both were unknown to each other. Both participants tried to construct micro and macro identity throughout their conversation. The micro identity here refers to small scale process of representing self, while macro identity refers to large scale

process of representing self. In the above data the micro identity of the two participants refers to their motivation and self-disclosure while macro identity refers to qualification which is graduation and their gender in the above chat.

For identification of micro identities, the chat was analyzed from the perspective of the question that how the speaker index their perception of self and others through their language in WhatsApp chat. The micro identities identified during the data analysis were conversation starter, guide and sarcastic adviser. Now these micro identities positions lead to macro level identity positions. In other words, the interactional sentences of the participants show their behaviour and practices which enabled us to mark their identity orientations, underlying their macro and micro identities, which are guided by their broader, social, national, historical and global ideologies and affiliations. To identify macro identity, data were approached from the perspective of the question that how the speaker index their perceptions of self and others through their language choices. The use of wishing words 'salam' represent their cultural and religious identity.

Here, only the word "wai" is from the Pashto language which indicates the word "says". This depicts the cultural i.e. Pashtoon identity of the individual although the rest of the comment is in the English language. The semiotic aspect of the post shows that two of the reactants liked while two of them loved the post. Hence, the comment shows a positive influence upon the audience as no one mocked it. According to the proposition given by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), it can be seen that the commenter is playing role of an advisor.

A Mathew Arnold wai (says), 'Have something to say, say it as clearly as possible'. It's just a suggestion that avoid bombastic, complex and fancy vocabulary in competitive exams cz the examiner won't bother every time to consult dictionary. Peace out.

B Mathew Arnold says, 'Have something to say, say it as clearly as possible'. It's just a suggestion that avoid bombastic, complex and fancy vocabulary in competitive exams because the examiner won't bother every time to consult a dictionary.

In the next comment, the participant is again playing the role of an advisor but in a sarcastic way. He/she first explained that contextual meaning can sometimes be changed when using synonyms without proper consideration but then asks sarcastically about the dictionary. The confused face emoji and declaration of him/her to be afflicted by English adds fuel to the fire of sarcasm. Hence, the emoji

8

plays a complementary role towards the words used because it enhances the meaning instead of opposing it. Besides, one person has liked the post which shows his/her agreement to the remark.

A: BHAI JAN (dear bro)synonymsuse KRTY WAQT BAZ AWQAT (sometimes while) sentence KA (of) sense HAI BEGAR JATA HAI (gets spoiled)… btw KONSI (which) dictionary use KRTY HO (do you)? ANGREEZI SAI MUTASIR INSAN

B Dear brother, while using synonyms, sometimes the sense of the sentence gets ruined. By the way, which dictionary do you use? (Confused face emoji) English-afflicted dude!

The analysis also showed that the above conversation is the integration of multiple cultures because of the use of different languages i.e. Urdu and English. The use of Urdu shows that the participant is constructing national identity by using national language. Likewise, English is used as a language of high prestige and the language of literacy therefore, both participants, A and B in order to project themselves as educated elite class turned to English. Although, both participants can understand each other languages which means that the participants are multilinguals.

Whatsapp communication is one of the most important application that the people use for communication. It is widely used across different fields of life. In academia the teachers andstudent quite freely use whatsapp for academic and personal purposes. This study found that the WhatsApp chat laid the base of identity construction on micro and macro levels. Micro identity refers to small scale process of representing self, like motivation, and macro identity refers to large scale process of representing self, like gender identity. A number of studies conducted in different parts of the world reported the integration of local and global cultures (identities). The study showed that the participants very rarely used their first language i.e. Pashto and continuously, tried to change their linguistic identity by using second languages i.e. Urdu and English. In other word, the speakers tried to hide their ethnic bend and tended towards the national and global ideologies.

5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore identity construction through WhatsApp chat and the link between micro and macro identity dimensions. The findings showed that the students have used their WhatsApp chat for construction of their identities. The micro identity orientations of the participants are directly linked with broader macro ideologies. For instance, the way students turn to English and their body language clearly indicate that they use English just

for social status and social standing. Their preference for Urdu is indexical of the comparative importance of Urdu symbolizing their national identity orientations. Their occasional use of Pashto represent their ethnic bend. In other words, their linguistic choices in one way or the other link with their social and ideological positioning.

6. REFERENCES

[1] Arnett, J.J. 2002. The psychology of globalization. American psychologist,57(10), 774:Chicago.

[2] Bosch, T. E. 2009. Using online social networking for teaching and learning: Facebook use at the University of Cape Town.

[3] Brown, R., & Barton, E. 2004. From the editors: Special issue on personal statements. *Issues in writing,* 15, PP 1-4

[4] Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. 2005. Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. Discourse studies, 7(4-5), PP 585-614.

[5] Burns, M.P. 2003. Collaborarive action research for English language teachers. Ernst Klett Sprachen.

[6] Cerulo, K. A. 1997. Identity construction: New issues, new directions. *Annual Review of Sociology,* 23, PP 385-409

[7] Creswell, J. W. 2013. Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. California, United States: Stage publications.

[8] Dunne, Lawlor, M. A. & Rowley, J. 2010. Young people's use of online social networking sites- a uses and gratifications perspective. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing,* 4, PP 46-58.

[9] García, O., & Wei, L. 2017. Translanguaging, Bilingualism, and Bilingual Education. *The handbook of bilingual and multilingual education*, 223.

[10] Greenhow, C. 2011. Online social networks and learning. *On the horizon*, 19,PP 4-12.

[11] Gu, M., & Benson, P. 2015. The formation of English teacher identities: A cross-cultural investigation. *Language Teaching Research*, *19*(2), PP 187-206.

[12] Gumperz, J.J. (1982). Discourse strategies (Vol.1): Cambridge University Press.

[13] Hall, K., & Nilep, C. 2015. Code switching, identity, and globalization.

[14] Hargittai, E. 2007. Whose space? Differences among users and non-users of social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated communication*, 13,PP 276-297

[15] Jwett, C. 2012. An introduction to using video for research

[16] King, K. A. 2013. A tale of three sisters: Language ideologies, identities and negotiations in a bilingual, transnational family. *InteractionalMultilingual Research Journal*, 7(1),PP 49-65.

[17] Livingstone, S. & Brake, D.R. 2010. On the rapid rise of social networking sites: New findings and policy implications. *Children & society.* 24, PP 75-83.

[18] Mahboob, L. 2014. English medium instruction in higher education in Pakistan: Policies, perception, problems and possibilities.

[19] Martin, P, 2003. Bilingual encounters in the classroom. Bilingualism: Beyond basic principles, PP 123.67.

[20] Norton, B. (2000). Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Editional Dunken.