

LANGUAGE LEARNING IN SOCIAL INVESTMENT: IDENTITY, POWER, AND INVESTMENT IN MULTILINGUAL ADULT LEARNERS**Guzalkhon Khaydarova Bokhodir kizi***Teacher, International Institute of Food Technology and Engineering*

Abstract : This paper explores the language learning journeys of two multilingual adult learners, Sara and Mubina, through the lens of sociolinguistic and sociological theories. This research highlights how language learning is shaped by social structures, identity, and motivation using Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital. Sara's self-directed multilingualism in acquiring languages and Mubina's formal instructional learning illustrate distinct pathways influenced by power dynamics, economic mobility, and cultural adaptation. The study underscores that acquiring English is not just a cognitive process but a social investment – one that opens doors to broader networks, opportunities, and social capital. These findings have implications for adult language education, emphasizing a holistic, identity-aware approach to teaching English as a second language.

Key words: social investment, social identity, multilingualism, economic status, motivation, linguistic capital, social networking, formal education, language acquisition.

Introduction

Language Learning is deeply tied to social identity, cultural adaptation, and economic mobility. While much research focuses on the cognitive aspects of language acquisition, this study examines it as a social process, where identity and motivation shape individual experiences (Darvin & Norton, 2017). This paper explores how two adult learners' language learning experiences align with sociological theories of identity, power, and investment, drawing from case studies of Sara and Mubina. Framing language learning through Tajfel & Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory and Bourdieu's (1991) linguistic capital, this study positions language acquisition as a means of negotiating social belonging and professional advancement.

Methods

This qualitative study employs a case study approach (Yin, 2014), drawing on interviews, language learning histories, and reflective narratives. Sara and Mubina were selected for their diverse linguistic backgrounds and motivations for learning English. Pseudonyms were assigned to ensure anonymity. Their experiences were analyzed using thematic coding, focusing on identity shifts, linguistic investment, and socio-economic factors influencing their learning trajectories.

Results

1. Sara: Language Learning as a Tool for Social Mobility. Sara, a 40-year-old accountant, embodies self-directed multilingualism. Although she grew up in a monolingual household, she became fluent in Russian through immersion in kindergarten and school, later she learnt Turkish informally through watching Turkic movies and chatting with friends. Her learning strategies align with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, emphasizing natural exposure over formal instruction. In her 30s, Sara moved to china for work and began learning English independently. She used social networks to develop her fluency – an approach Darvin & Norton (2021) describes as "investment in language." For Sara, English was not just a skill but a bridge to new professional

and social opportunities. Reflecting on her experience, she shared, “Improving my English helped me connect with influential people and access career opportunities I never thought possible.” Her case exemplifies Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of linguistic capital, where language is an asset that enhances social mobility.

2. Mubina: The Role of Formal Education in Language Learning.

Mubina, a 41-year-old interior designer, took a different route. She grew up bilingual, acquiring Uzbek and Russian simultaneously in her neighborhood. Later she learnt Turkish through formal instruction and travel program experiences. Her English learning journey began in secondary school, where she was taught through Grammar-Translation Method. At 15, she attended a Turkish lyceum where all subjects were instructed in English providing structured exposure to the language.

Unlike Sara, Mubina’s learning experience was heavily shaped by educational institutions. As Bourdieu (1991) claimed the idea that access to linguistic capital is mediated by formal education. However, her case aligns with Tajfel & Turner’s (1979) Social Identity Theory – her strong identification with her Turkish and Russian-speaking communities influenced her English use. Despite reaching a C2 level in high school, she rarely used English after graduation as it wasn’t necessary for her professional and social life. Years later, however, professional demands reignited her motivation to use English actively, illustrating how identity and social needs evolve over time.

Discussion

Both case studies reinforce the idea that language learning is not just about cognition – it is a deeply social process shaped by identity, power and opportunity (Darvin & Norton, 2017). Key themes emerging from their experiences include:

Language as Social and Economic Capital: Sara and Mubina’s motivations were based on their economic growth. Bourdieu’s (1991) argued that language is a form of capital, offering access to higher socio-economic status and global mobility.

Social Identity and Language Use: Their linguistic choices reflect identity negotiation – using different languages in various social and professional settings. Darvin & Norton (2021) claimed that investment in language tied to social belonging.

Motivation and Power Dynamics: Sara’s proactive networking and Mubina’s reliance on formal education highlight different ways of individuals navigate power structures in language acquisition. Moreover, these case studies of two learners showcase the effect of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to language learning process (Dornyei, 1998).

Conclusion

This study highlights that language learning is more than just mastering grammar and vocabulary – it is an act of social positioning. For adult learners, acquiring English means gaining access to global networks, professional opportunities, and social capital. To better support learners, language educators should adopt a sociolinguistic perspective, taking into account students’ identities, motivations, and socio-economic contexts to create more inclusive and empowering learning environments.

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