

# Academic Factors on the Discourse of Multilingual Students

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## ABSTRACT

Multilingualism sharpens the mind, enhances the decision-making, and exercises the [1] ability to multitask which contribute to a students' success in learning. Amidst the arising benefits of being a multilingual student in a classroom with diverse cultures surrounding them, there are factors that hinder the fluency of communication of the students during class discussions and peer communication. The study aims to unlock the factors affecting the discourse of multilingual students majoring in English language Studies at a state university in the Northern Philippines. The study uses a descriptive-correlation design and therefore, the result revealed that there is a significant difference between the language(s) used in university on the vocabulary and speaking and listening process factors. Furthermore, there are no significant differences between the vocabulary and speaking and listening process factors affecting the students discourse to the respondent's age, ethnicity, and language(s) use at home. Overall, it is concluded that an affective and positive relationship of the diverse students with each other is needed to boost their self-confidence in using different languages for them to be able to express, communicate, and expand their language vocabularies as they learn and immerse to language itself that will enable them to freely use every linguistic-repertoire they have to broaden their perspectives towards diversity of language learners.

**Keywords**— Diverse Speakers, Multiple Languages, Culture, Speaking Process, Listening Process, English Language Students, Academic Discourse, Dialect

## INTRODUCTION

A multilingual educational system is one that incorporates two languages into its academic curriculum. According to Baker (2011), multilingual education is meant to preserve minority groups' linguistic and cultural heritage, foster academic success, advance national language resources, and allow native speakers to learn a second language. When used in the classroom, multilingualism promotes and enhance the language abilities of the students. Amidst the arising benefits of being a multilingual student in a classroom with diverse cultures that surrounds them, there are factors that hinder the fluency of communication of the students during class discussions and peer communication. As stated by Collis (2015), in a multilingual classroom, there is no common first language among the students, that is why they cannot converse in their first language in which they are comfortable with to clarify or defense a grammar point or to define a vocabulary. This results to reluctance of students in defining and expressing their knowledge and ideas in academic discussions and peer communication.

The way the ideas or notions are expressed through language might vary based on the dominant cultural aspects at any given time. The culture shifts whenever linguistic diversity increases. A learned set of standards for behavior among a population is referred to as culture (Greey, 1994). Not only culture people's values and behaviors are altered yet has an impact on how people speak and act. In order to become fluent in another language, one must have a thorough understanding of that language's culture. Due to the fact that not all students have backgrounds in other races and cultures, therefore unable to accurately understand the meaning of the words used by other students, misinterpretations and conflicts in academic discourse are

often caused by language use among students. Countless articles, publications, and studies were arguing about multilingualism and its shortcomings, Lefebvre (2012) on her thesis, she stated that she saw clearly her students who struggled to learn second, third, or even fourth language, they expressed confusion and occasionally frustration when switching between languages. A multilingual student cannot convey and converse to other students given that they are taking a hard time in switching to other language. Diverse culture is also a contributory factor in which students are hesitant to allocate their intentions.

Diverse students tend to use code mixing and code switching when they cannot express their ideas using a language that are common to the majority of class, doing so silently creates hesitance to the student-speaker in conveying their ideas in front of the class due to the fact that students came from different cultures and languages spoken, there might be a slight or huge difference in the meaning of words influenced by diverse culture of the student-listener that leads to misinterpretation of the intended meaning of the speaker.

The classroom is filled with students who come from a variety of cultures and speak different languages. Lack of awareness of a particular culture's language, beliefs, and ideologies certainly limits discourses and prevents the exchange of ideas, which leads to misunderstandings in the classroom. The inability to convey an idea effectively and the reluctance to share it because it can alter one's perspective to a point that is different from others' beliefs is also one reason why great ideas are sometimes overlooked.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study has a chief concern regarding the factors affecting the expressed ideas on the academic discourses of multilingual speakers of students.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of ethnicity, age, language(s) use at home, and language(s) use at university?
2. What are the factors affecting the discourse of multilingual speakers in the classroom in terms of vocabularies and speaking and listening process?
3. What is the difference in the factors affecting the discourse of multilingual students when grouped according to their profile?

## METHODS

The study employs descriptive-correlation method to investigate and gather data for the description of the existing phenomenon. The respondents of the study involve the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> year students majoring in English Language Studies at state university in Northern Philippines with a total population of 175 students enrolled during the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of S.Y. 2023-2024 as the respondents of the study.

The researcher ended up gathering themes such as *vocabularies* which was adapted from Ningrum, Mahdum, and Novitri (2019) & Richard LaBontee (2019) and *speaking and listening process* adopted from Richard LaBontee (2019). In order to obtain the pertinent data of the study, the researcher used a test-questionnaire as the main instrument. The questionnaires were given per year level of the students and consists of two (2) parts: The part I was designed to give the respondents ethnicity, age, language(s) use at home, and language(s) uses at university. The part II consists of 2 parts which is the section A and B, 14 questions each for *vocabulary* and *listening and speaking process* section and it is where the respondents were asked to answer by putting a mark in every scale. The respondents used a 5-point Likert type scale with 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 signifying Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher presents, analyses, and discusses the result of the data gathered. The presentation followed the sequence of the objectives of the study as well as the hypothesis.

**TABLE 1 Profile of the Respondents**

Profile	Frequency (n=120)	Percent (100)
Age		
19 below	45	37.5
20-25	75	62.5
Ethnicity		
Tagalog	56	46.67
Ilocano	53	44.17
Gaddang	2	1.67
Yogad	3	2.5
Itawis	1	0.83
Ibanag	3	2.5
Igorot	1	0.83
Ifugao	1	0.83
Languages Used at Home		
Tagalog	64	53.34
Ilocano	50	41.67
Gaddang	1	0.83
English	1	0.83
Yogad	3	2.5
Tuwali	1	0.83
Languages Used in University		
Tagalog	97	80.84
Ilocano	4	3.33
English	19	15.83

As shown in table 1, 75 frequency count or 62.50% are ages 20-25 years while the rest of the respondents are ages 19 and below with a frequency count of 45 and a percentage of 37.50. This means that majority of the respondents are 20-25 years old. As to ethnicity of the respondents, it shows that there are eight existing ethnic groups that the respondents are part of namely, Tagalog, Ilocano, Gaddang, Yogad, Itawis, Ibanag, Igorot, and Ifugao. Majority of the respondents are Tagalog which has the highest frequency count of 56 or 46.67.

In terms of the language(s) use at home, majority of the respondents speak Tagalog in their home with a frequency count of 64 or 53.34%. As to the language(s) use at university, the respondents mostly use Tagalog with the highest frequency count of 97 or 80.84%.

**TABLE 2. Vocabulary Factors that Affect the Discourse of Multilingual Speakers in the Classroom.**

FACTORS	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
2. I feel that I don't have exact words in my native language to express my idea.	3.11	Undecided
5. I feel that I do not have enough vocabulary in my two or three languages to express my thoughts.	3.32	Undecided
9. I try to practice word meaning, pronunciation, or spelling to avoid in committing mistakes in front of my diverse classmates.	4.29	Strongly Agree
10. I try to read words out loud [or quietly to myself] over and over to adjust in class.	4.08	Agree
13. I always try to speak in one language that everyone can understand to avoid errors in multilingualism.	4.08	Agree
<b>GRAND MEAN</b>	<b>3.77</b>	<b>Agree</b>

Table 2 revealed that majority of the respondents agreed to the statements that affect their discourses in a diverse classroom except for factor 2 and factor 5 which most of the students become undecided with it. It seems that the reason for having such answer is that the respondents only use their two or three languages when they are certain of the situation and context of the discourse. The respondents make sure that they make themselves clear and they also avoid errors in multilingualism through speaking the language that everyone can understand. The study of Ticheloven et al. (2019) emphasized that mixing two or three languages when speaking especially in conveying thoughts to diverse students may have a backlash and it creates confusion to the meaning of mix language utterance that may not be understandable by the diverse listeners.

Furthermore, it shows the result of language enhancements in the respondents' pronunciation, practicing word meaning and spelling to avoid mistakes in the classroom despite their culture and language differences. Based on the result, the respondents assigned the highest mean value to factor 9. That being the result, it is connected to the study of Canagarajah (2016), he states how different cultural and linguistic resources are used by each student and how they will manage this diversity to keep their academic discourses well-balanced for learning and acquiring.

**TABLE 3. Speaking and Listening Process Factors that Affect the Discourse of Multilingual Speakers in the Classroom.**

FACTORS	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
3. I am worried about my pronunciation when I speak multilingual language.	4.05	Agree
8. I try to listen carefully for new multilingual vocabulary information.	4.16	Agree
9. I don't participate in conversation because I am scared that I would make noticeable grammar error in one's language.	2.93	Undecided
11. I feel unmotivated in speaking multilingually because I myself, lack of speaking fluency.	3.13	Undecided
14. I think what keeps me silent is my poor multilingual proficiency.	3.39	Undecided
<b>GRAND MEAN</b>	<b>3.73</b>	<b>Agree</b>

Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents agreed to the statements that affect their discourses in a diverse classroom except for factor 9, factor 11, and factor 14 which most of the students become undecided with it. It presents that the reason why respondents having such these answers is because some of them can express themselves when they speak multilingually when they are having discourses in the classrooms or even with their peers. Classroom discourse of multilingual students contributes to silencing or exclusion of

students' sociocultural groups, students' participation in knowledge production are unnatural due to their self-consciousness using unfamiliar language that ushers to lack of self-confidence and reluctant to participate as claimed by Kiramba et al. (2018). The anxiety to use code-switching and code-mixing, wherein they use different languages alternately or switch completely from one language to another, also arises due to listeners' existing diverse cultural groups wherein different words have the same or opposite meaning as to other regional dialect used. The study of McConville (2019) states that students learning a second language often struggle to express themselves if they do not have a full command of that language. Students only participate in a class discussion if they are only sure of their statements causes the language barriers that hinders themselves to freely communicate their feelings and thoughts in a diverse classroom.

**TABLE 4. Differences in the Vocabulary Factors that Affect the Discourse of Multilingual Speakers in the Classroom according to Language/s Used in University.**

FACTORS	F-TEST	P-VALUE
5. I feel that I do not have enough vocabulary in my two or three languages to express my thoughts.	3.490*	0.034

Table 4 indicates that there is a significant difference between the respondents' vocabulary factors according to their language(s) used in university. Based on the result, it suggests that one factor that affects the discourse of multilingual students in classroom is that they feel that they don't have enough vocabulary in their two or three languages to express their thoughts. One of the reasons that the students, even if they can speak multiple languages, cannot still express their thoughts when speaking is that they lack of exposure to those languages and their word information are limited therefore, they cannot express and expand the complexity of words of the languages being used. Further, this can be also the result of the lack of preciseness and depth of knowledge to a certain language that leads to poor expansion to word meanings and the exact appropriate context wherein needed to be applied. To support, the study of Sasidharan (2015), stated that multilingual students can lose grasp to her own native language when s/he speaks due to rarely using it in conversations with people who speaks the same language.

As explained by Bhandari and Prashad (2015) that using two or more languages in classroom creates a division in class for the reason that the students work at a different speed. Students who came from different backgrounds came across different problems such as their pronunciation and spelling. The study shares similar conflict to the use of multilingualism in classroom, the researcher wants to resolve and unleash the dominant factor of reluctancy. Also, Fernando and Lee (2018), stated in their study resulted that fear of making errors in speaking and doing speech is connected to the reluctancy of students to speak other languages and labeled them as failure rather than a learning process. Speaking two or more languages can cause inconsistencies and multiple errors in expressing ideas that leads to hesitations and misapprehension of peer communication.

**TABLE 5. Differences in Speaking and Listening Process Factors that Affect the Discourse of Multilingual Speakers in the Classroom according to Language/s Used in University.**

FACTORS	F-TEST	P-VALUE
11. I feel unmotivated in speaking multilingually because I myself, lack of speaking fluency.	5.190*	0.007

Table 5 illustrates that there is a significant difference between the respondents' speaking and listening process factors according to their language(s) used in university. Based on the result, it suggests that one factor affecting the discourse of multilingual students is that they feel unmotivated in speaking multilingually because they themselves, lack of speaking fluency. One that makes students unmotivated is

their limited opportunities to speak and converse their ideas in a diverse classroom, they don't use their languages often for the reason that they cannot apply it in all context and situation in their peer discussion especially in academic discussion that leads to lack of speaking fluency, poor speaking skills, anxiousness and become unmotivated in speaking. Also, students' feel shy and unmotivated to speak is that they don't have enough knowledge to words and grammars that they will use that make them reluctant to speak and affects their confidence in speaking fluently.

To support, according to McConville (2019) that students learning a second language often struggle to express themselves if they don't have a full command of that language, notes from John Schumann of UCLA's Department of Applied Linguistics. Their ability to learn can be impacted by emotional stress caused by this. Also, the study of Kiramba et al., (2018) that classroom discourse of multilingual students contributes to silencing or exclusion of students' sociocultural groups, students' participation in knowledge production are unnatural due to their self-consciousness using unfamiliar language that ushers to lack of self-confidence and reluctant to participate. The anxiety to use code-switching and code-mixing, wherein they use different languages alternately or switch completely from one language to another, arises due to listeners' existing diverse cultural groups wherein different words have the same or opposite meaning as to other regional dialect used.

Multilingual learners often feel embarrassed or too shy to say anything in front of the whole diverse class due to the fact that they are conscious that their partner/classmates do not understand their languages spoken and have realized that they do not share the same knowledge and have not understood what just have said as explained by (Bashir, et.al., 2015). The learners are afraid to expand their answers when they are speaking because they have limited vocabularies on the common language and they tend to switch in their regional language, they hesitate for the reason that there are existing cultural barriers.

## CONCLUSION

In the light of the results, conclusions were deduced. The profile of the students plays an essential role in determining the factors affecting the discourse of the diverse multilingual students in the classroom. In which it shows that their age, ethnicities, and languages used at home and university are profoundly used in the language learning area. Their diverse ethnic groups, languages, and age enables them to express and communicate their ideas in the class though it sometimes creates confusion due to their differences, yet it also builds identity and pride for the multilingual learners.

The vocabulary and speaking and listening process factors affecting the discourse of the students shows that there is a significant difference between their language(s) used in university indicating that the respondents have their reason in the factors presented that affects their discourses inside the learning area. One of the reasons that the students, even if they can speak multiple languages, cannot still express their thoughts when speaking is that they lack of exposure to those languages and their word information are limited therefore, they cannot express and expand the complexity of words of the languages being used. Students' feel shy and unmotivated to speak is that they don't have enough knowledge to words and grammars that they will use that make them reluctant to speak and affects their confidence in speaking fluently that causes negative effect and delay on their enhancement in language earning area.

Furthermore, the result shows that there is no significant difference between their age, ethnicity, and language(s) used at home in the vocabulary and speaking ad listening process factors, this shows that that no matter how old they are, no matter what ethnic groups they belong, no matter what language(s) they use at home, the vocabulary and speaking/listening factors will always affect their speaking and the way they express their ideas in a diverse classroom. This implies that the students given that they are an English Language-learners, they are still affected by different factors in conveying their thoughts, therefore, this

shows that these students need allotted time to practice and enhance their skills in speaking and conversing to better improve their skills and establish their perspective towards diverse cultures since the languages that the students are using are impacted by their own cultures.

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