

Language Attitudes of High School Students in a Multilingual Classroom: An Ethnographic Study in a Remote Village School in Khiva, Uzbekistan

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ABSTRACT

The researcher explored the language attitudes of high school students in a remote village in Khiva, Uzbekistan in a multilingual classroom. The research focused on the understanding of the attitudes towards Uzbek, German, Russian and English language among high school students. Students have feelings and opinions about these languages. They might think one is more important, more "cool," or easier to learn. This study observed how students use these languages in school, considering their motivation and engagement. Using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the researcher analyzed: (S) the setting and scene where interactions take place, (P) the participants involved, (E) the ends or goals of communication, (A) the act sequence of conversational flow, (K) the key or tone of communication, (I) the instrumentalities or language varieties used, (N) the norms governing the interaction, and (G) the genres of communication observed. Data collection included participant observations, casual interactions, and document analysis while ensuring ethical considerations. School Director, Head of English Department and local partner teacher received comprehensive information about the study's goals, methodology, and the right to confidentiality and voluntary participation of the students. This research aimed to analyze how the interplay of language attitudes towards Uzbek, German, Russian, and English among students, impact their motivation and engagement in each of the four languages. Additionally, the study explored how these findings could inform the development of more effective and culturally responsive multilingual education programs in remote school villages in Uzbekistan.

Keyword: Language Attitude, Multilingual Classroom, Motivation, Engagement, Interplay

INTRODUCTION

"Interplay of language attitudes" means how students' feelings and thoughts about languages affect each other. If a student thinks Uzbek is the most important language because it's their native language, they might not be as motivated to learn German. If they think English is the "coolest" language because it's used worldwide, they might put more effort into learning English than Russian. In line with the tripartite model of attitudes in social psychology, language attitudes are generally defined as a set of beliefs, feelings, and behavioral intentions towards different language varieties (Dragojevic 2016). The Russian language is still taught in schools across Uzbekistan, even though only around 2% of the 35 million people living there are ethnic Russians (RFE/RL's Uzbek Service, 2024). Despite having no official status, Russian is widely used as a de facto language and lingua franca in Uzbekistan. Demoskop Weekly estimates that there were 5 million active Russian speakers and 1,200,000 native speakers in the nation in 2004. An undated estimate from the World Factbook states that 14.2% of the population speaks Russian. There are still Uzbek and Russian signage all around the nation. German is taught in schools and higher education institutions in Uzbekistan as a first and second foreign language (Shermukhammadov et al, 2024). One of Uzbekistan's main European allies is Germany and the nations' relationship is getting stronger. Naturally, one of the key elements in

fostering closer ties between nations and peoples is language. More than 355 thousand pupils are currently studying German as a foreign language in 1677 schools throughout the Republic of Uzbekistan (up 54 schools from the 2017–2018 school year). Approximately 3,000 German language instructors are employed by the republic's secondary schools. German is thoroughly studied in nine schools. There were 54 more German-language schools in the 2018–2019 school year than there were in the 2017–2018 one, there were nine more specialized schools with advanced German language instruction, there were more German-taught classes (14525 compared to 14081, a difference of 444), and there were more students learning German (350560 compared to 355064, a difference of 14504). As part of the Schools: Partners of the Future initiative, the Central Office of Schools Abroad of Germany (ZfA) and the Goethe-Institute branch in Tashkent are collaborating with the Ministry of Public Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan to enhance and develop the secondary school German language curriculum (Kun.Uz, 2019). In 2024, 20 American English teachers were welcomed by the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent to start professional development and teaching programs across Uzbekistan. They joined the local teachers in giving pupils direct classroom instruction. These educators constitute only a small portion of the U.S. government's extensive efforts to improve English language instruction in Uzbekistan, which also include training over 18,000 English teachers nationwide to guarantee that the country's students receive top-notch English instruction. The U.S. government has spent about \$31.2 million on English language instruction and learning in Uzbekistan since 2018. The Ministry of Preschool and School Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovations have teamed up with the U.S. Embassy to support Uzbekistan's educational reforms and make sure that graduates have the professional and language skills required to boost the country's economy (U.S. Embassy in Uzbekistan, 2024). This study examines the language attitudes of high school students in a multilingual classroom in a remote village in Khiva, Uzbekistan. It explores how students perceive and engage with Uzbek, German, Russian, and English, considering factors such as communication, preference, and perceived importance of each language.

Statement of the Problem

In the multilingual classrooms of remote villages in Khiva, Uzbekistan, students grow up surrounded by Uzbek, German, Russian, and English—each language holding a different level of importance in their lives. Some languages are seen as more valuable for future opportunities, while others are deeply tied to their identity and culture. However, little is known about how these feelings toward language affect their daily experiences in school—how they participate in class, interact with their peers, and stay motivated to learn. By observing their real-life interactions, this study seeks to understand how language choices, cultural identity, and school policies shape students' learning journeys in a multilingual setting.

Relevance in Sociolinguistics

By analyzing the interplay of language attitudes of the high school students in one of the remote schools in Khiva, Uzbekistan, this research could help develop a more effective and culturally responsive multilingual education programs in remote school villages in Uzbekistan. By exploring how students perceive different languages—whether Uzbek, Russian, German, English or other and foreign languages—this research can help which languages they prefer, which is “cool” and which ones they see as more important. Understanding these attitudes is essential for creating multilingual education programs that not only respect the region's linguistic diversity but also help students learn languages for further opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized an ethnographic design, incorporating participant observation in classrooms and casual interactions. Using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the research analyzed students' preferred language to use in school settings, their perceived importance of the language, and the sociolinguistic influences on their attitudes. The study also aims to provide insights that can help develop linguistically responsive in a multilingual education classroom in similar remote school settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language attitudes are subjectively conditioned opinions about any language or language variety (Kirilenko, 2024). The term "language attitudes," which is used primarily in psycholinguistic research, is defined as "the feelings people have about their own language or the language of others" (Crystal, 1997: 215). In social linguistics, the combination of individual language attitudes, whether positive or negative, is primarily considered: "assessments that speakers make about the relative values of a particular language" (Myers-Scotton, 2006: 109). In general, sociolinguists observe that social factors, rather than psychological attitudes, determine language attitudes to a greater extent. Research on language attitude has a long history and is based in many different fields. Discourse analysis, communication, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, social psychology of language, and sociology of language have all contributed (Cargile, Aaron & Giles, Howard & Ryan, Ellen & Bradac, James, 1994). Given the significance of language attitudes, Nur et al. study examined the Betawi teenagers' attitudes about their mother tongue. One of the dialects spoken in Jakarta, Indonesia, is Betawi. Descriptive qualitative research was used in this study. In-depth interviews, observations, and questionnaires were utilized to gather information about the Betawi community language's attitude. Mapping out the linguistic attitudes of Betawi teenagers toward their mother tongue or Betawi language is the aim of the study. The findings demonstrated that (1) Betawi teenagers had a negative opinion about the Betawi language. (2) The Indonesian language is heavily used in their day-to-day interactions, and (3) the maintenance of their mother tongue is unaffected by foreign languages. In addition, other languages like "slang" influence their language preference. This linguistic reality is ongoing and occasionally affects their attitude toward language. Although they can understand Betawi, it is not their primary language (Nur et al, 2021). It has been demonstrated that language attitude research can identify students' language acquisition successes and failures. Attitude is learnt rather than innate. Through specific educational activities, students can develop and enhance their favorable attitudes toward foreign languages (Utami, E. et al, 2020). In The Language Attitude of Islamic Boarding School Students toward English (Eka Ayu Rizki Utami, 2020) paper, the purpose of the study was to determine the linguistic attitudes of Islamic boarding school students toward English and to provide evidence for these attitudes. Several inferences can be made from this study based on the information gathered from the questionnaire and interview. Both at HAC (High-Achieving Class) and LAC (Low-Achieving Class), the students from this school who participated in the study exhibit favorable linguistic attitudes regarding English. Among the three - cognitive, emotional, and conative components, they also exhibit favorable language attitudes. Cognitively, they already understand the value of English in the globalized world, they think studying the language will provide them with information, and they like learning more in the future. In French and Kreyòl in multilingual Haiti: insights on the relationship between language attitudes, language policy, and literacy from Haitian Gonâviens study, it looked at literacy, educational language policy, and language attitudes in a marginalized group within Haiti's multilingual society. They adopt a critical stance, drawing on decolonizing theory, and contend that the marginalization of Kreyòl in Haitian schools reproduces colonial language ideologies that favor French and disempower Kreyòl. This led to low literacy rates and exacerbating postcolonial power dynamics and socioeconomic disparities. The results showed a wide range of opinions and orientations regarding school language policy, French, and Kreyòl, with participants occasionally supporting colonial notions and other times opposing them. In general, the majority expressed favorable language attitudes regarding Kreyòl as a cultural identity language and said it should be utilized in literacy instruction (Ulysse, G. M., & Burns, K. E. 2021). In Denise Amankwah and Katie Howard paper (2024), they examined the variables affecting African families' intergenerational language transfer in the United Kingdom. Semi-structured interviews with Early Years Professionals and parents of children visiting nurseries were used to gather data because educators have the power to affect the language choices of parents. According to the findings, the monolingual school system had an impact on the instructors' language practices, and colonial language ideologies that elevate English above African languages still have a significant impact on parents' language attitudes. The study's implications include the necessity of better understanding the distinctive language profiles and practices of bilingual African households in early childhood education. In Sharona Moskowitz and Jean-Marc Dewaele (2024) paper, it examined the relationships between language attitudes and IH in Hebrew L1 speakers. A Hebrew survey that was modified from the Comprehensive Intellectual Humility Scale (CIHS) (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016) was used, treating multilingualism and Arabic as distinct factors. According to statistical analyses, attitudes toward multilingualism

and Arabic were predicted by openness to changing one's opinions and respect for the opinions of others, respectively. The sensitive subject of Arabic's position in Israel was examined using qualitative data, which supported the quantitative findings by revealing themes of intellectual humility like performing behaviors that are intended to benefit others and respect for other people's opinions. Among other aspects of language development, language attitudes are crucial for language learning, identity formation, language maintenance, and language planning and policy. Our views, interactions, and society structures are shaped by these dynamic and complex attitudes. The researcher identified a methodological gap in literature. While few studies are explicitly labeled as ethnographic research on language attitudes in Uzbekistan, many incorporate ethnographic elements for contextual analysis. Large-scale ethnographic studies dedicated solely to language attitudes are limited; however, ethnographic principles are embedded in much of the sociolinguistic research in the region. Researchers employ qualitative methods and contextual analysis to explore the intricate relationship between language, culture, and society. Thus, while not always classified as pure ethnography, these studies contain significant ethnographic components. A variation of research methods is necessary to generate new insights or to avoid distorted findings (Jacobs, 2011; Müller-Bloch & Kranz, 2014; Miles, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study follows a qualitative ethnographic research approach, focusing on exploration of sociolinguistic and language attitudes. Data is gathered through direct participant observations in classroom and casual interactions. Using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the research analyzed students' language use in school settings, their level of engagement, and the sociolinguistic influences on their attitudes.

Research Locale

The research locale for this ethnographic study is Maktab 7, located in Khiva District, Khorezm, Uzbekistan. This setting was chosen due to its diverse linguistic environment, where students are exposed to multiple languages, influencing their language attitudes. As an educational institution, Maktab 7 provides a natural setting for observing language use, interactions, and sociolinguistic behaviors among students. The researcher is immersed in the school community, engaging with students through observations and casual interactions to understand their perspectives on language.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study are students from grades 8, 9, and 10 at Maktab 7 in Khiva District, Khorezm, Uzbekistan. These students are actively learning Uzbek, English, German, and Russian, making them suitable for exploring language attitudes in a multilingual educational setting. Their varied levels of exposure and proficiency in these languages provide insights into how they perceive and interact with different linguistic systems. By focusing on this group, the study examines how sociolinguistic factors influence their language preferences, biases, and motivation for learning. Observing and engaging with these students allows the researcher to analyze the dynamics of language attitudes within a structured school environment.

Data Collection

Direct observations and casual conversations with children in grades 8, 9, and 10 at Maktab 7, Khiva District, Khorezm, Uzbekistan, are the methods used to collect data for this ethnographic study. In order to learn about students' attitudes regarding Uzbek, English, German, and Russian, the researcher immersed oneself in the classroom and observed how they use language, communicate, and engage with one another. Additional information about students' linguistic preferences, motivations, and perceptions of other languages can be gleaned from casual talks. To find recurrent themes and patterns in linguistic attitudes, field notes and recorded observations are methodically examined.

Ethical Considerations

1. The School Director, the Head of the English Department, and the partner local teachers were informed on the research's goals, procedures, and ethical considerations prior to the observations and casual interactions. To make sure the study complied with institutional norms and school policies, their consent and cooperation were requested.
2. The study's goals, procedures, and participants' (students') freedom to discontinue participation at any moment are explained.
3. All study reports and publications shall anonymize participant identities and maintain the confidentiality of personal information and replies.
4. Students' participation must be entirely voluntary and free from coercion; they cannot be made to do so under any threats. The local teachers are also with them during the casual conversations.
5. By making sure that students' participation does not adversely affect their academic standing or general well-being, the research should prevent any psychological, emotional, or social harm to them. Casual conversations are also done after class.
6. The researcher must maintain objectivity, refrain from influencing the linguistic attitudes of participants, and accurately convey findings without distortion or misinterpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

T/r	Fan yo'nalishlari va nomlari	Haftalik o'quv soatlari (sinflar kesimida)											Haftalik umumiy soat
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
I.	Filologiya fanlari	9	11	11	11	12	12	10	10	10	9	8	113
1	Ona tili va adabiyot	8	7	7	7	6	6	5	5	5	4	4	64
2	Rus tili		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	20
3	Chet tili	1	2	2	2	4	4	3	3	3	3	2	29
II.	Ijtimoiy fanlar	1	1	1	1	3	3	4	5	5	4	4	32
4	Tarix					2	2	3	3	3	2	2	17
5	Davlat va huquq asoslari								1	1	1	1	4
6	Tarbiya	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
III.	Aniq fanlar	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	67
7	Matematika	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	55
8	Informatika va axborot texnologiyalari	1	1			1	1	1	1	2	2	2	12
IV.	Tabiiy va iqtisodiy fanlar	1	1	2	2	2	3	8	8	8	8	8	51
9	Fizika va astronomiya							2	2	2	2	3	11
10	Kimyo							2	2	2	2	2	10
11	Biologiya							2	2	2	2	2	10
12	Geografiya va iqtisodiyot							2	2	2	2	1	9
13	Tabiiy fan (Science)	1	1	2	2	2	3						11
V.	Amaliy fanlar	4	5	5	5	6	6	6	4	4	3	3	51
14	Musiqqa madaniyati	1	1	1	1	1	1	1					7
15	Tasviriy san'at va chizmachilik	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			9
16	Texnologiya	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1			12
17	Jismoniy tarbiya	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	21
18	Chaqiruvga qadar boshlang'ich tayyorgarlik										1	1	2
	Jami	21	24	24	24	29	30	34	33	34	31	30	314

Mother tongue
Russian
Other languages



The multilingual nature of Uzbekistan's educational system reflects the country's diverse linguistic and cultural heritage. To prepare pupils for global interaction, the educational system integrates a number of additional languages, including Russian, German, French, and English, even though Uzbek is the official state language and the main language of instruction. The table below shows the Basic curriculum for general Secondary Education for 2024-2025 academic year. The table shows the emphasis in teaching the Mother Tongue, which is taught 8 times a week. Russian language is taught twice a week. Other languages such as English, German and French are taught thrice a week.

The researcher gathered the data through direct participant observations in the classroom and casual interactions of Grades 8, 9, and 10. The table presents the thematic categories that emerged during the study.

For Communication	# of participants	Cool	# of participants	Important	# of participants
Uzbek	38	Uzbek	26	Uzbek	1
Russian	0	Russian	1	Russian	9
English	2	English	3	English	27
German	0	German	1	German	0

Table 1. Students' Answers

The data presented in the table indicates that 95% of the 40 students prefer Uzbek as their primary language for communication. While 84% of the 31 students think Uzbek language is cool. 73% of the students think English is important. Some students who chose Russian an important subject expressed, "I will go to Russia", "I plan to work in Kazakhstan", "Overseas work". Another student who chose English as an important subject said, "for employment."

One of the nine students who chose Russia as an important part of their curriculum stated, "I want to become a tour guide after Grade 12." One of her classmates added, "Russian grammar is near with English structure. If Uzbek, there will be a misunderstanding in the translation." It shows that most of the students use Uzbek language for communication and cooler than Russian, English and German. However, they view English as important for employment. The Language Attitudes Theory is within the framework of Bernard Spolsky's Language Policy Theory (2004) and Lambert's Matched-Guise Technique (1967). Spolsky argues that language use is influenced by three interrelated components - Language Practices (how people use language in daily life), Language Beliefs and Attitudes (what people think about languages) and Language Management (policies regulating language use). The theory examined students' attitudes toward Uzbek, Russian, German, and English and how they use Uzbek more frequently while valuing English for economic reasons. Lambert's research focused on how people unconsciously assign social and economic value to different languages. The students favor Uzbek for communication (local identity) but perceive English as valuable for employment (instrumental motivation). This aligns with the idea that languages carry different levels of prestige in society. Uzbek as a Preferred Language - Language Practice (Spolsky), English Valued for Jobs - Language Attitude & Prestige (Lambert) and Russian and German Less Preferred - Changing Language Hierarchies & Economic Influence.

The SPEAKING Model by Dell Hymes (1967) provides a structured way to analyze and report sociolinguistic findings by breaking down communication into key components.

Abbreviation	Keyword	Details
S	Setting	A multilingual classroom in a remote village in Khiva, Uzbekistan
	Scene	High school students in Grades 8, 9, and 10 engage in classroom observations and casual interactions in a linguistic environment where Uzbek, German, Russian, and English coexist.
P	Participants	(Grades 8, 9, and 10): The primary subjects of the study.

		Students within the classroom setting, impacting language choice in communication
E	Ends (Purpose & Goals)	To understand students' attitudes toward Uzbek, German, Russian, and English. To analyze how language attitudes shape their communication, preferences and importance of learning the languages. To explore the perceived value of different languages in their future careers.
A	Act Sequence (Form and Content of Communication)	Inside the classroom: Uzbek is the dominant language used in discussions, clarifications, and peer interactions. English is mostly used during English subject lessons but is not commonly spoken outside of academic requirements. Outside the classroom: Students primarily communicate in Uzbek for casual conversations. Russian is occasionally used, but it is still seen as important. German is rarely used, with minimal everyday application. English is not used at all.
K	Key (Tone or Mood of Communication)	Uzbek: Comfortable, natural, and preferred in daily interactions. Russian: Some donor words are used comfortably. German: Used with hesitation, showing a declining role. English: Associated with prestige, opportunities, and employment but spoken with uncertainty.
I	Instrumentalities (Forms and Styles of Communication)	Uzbek: Spoken and written; used for peer conversations and informal communication. English: Primarily written and spoken in academic settings, showing an instrumental function for career prospects. Russian and German: Limited to specific contexts, such as historical or cultural discussions.
N	Norms of Interaction and Interpretation	Students feel most confident speaking Uzbek in informal settings. English is highly regarded but is mostly learned rather than actively used in everyday speech. Russian and German, though historically significant, are not widely spoken by younger students.
G	Genre (Type of Communication Event)	Classroom Discussions: Mostly in Uzbek, with English used when required. Peer Conversations: Predominantly in Uzbek, rarely in other languages. Formal Academic Use: English is viewed as a tool for success but lacks widespread spoken fluency.

Summary of Findings using the SPEAKING Model:

Uzbek is the dominant language for daily communication and is considered "cooler" than Russian, German, and English. English holds high prestige and economic value but is not widely spoken outside academic settings. Russian is occasionally used, but it is still seen as important especially the donor words. German is declining in use, with students showing little attachment to them. Language attitudes align with motivation, where students favor languages that provide future job opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that Uzbek is important and "cool" for the students. It is being used in communicating with their friends, teachers and other people in the school community. However, Russian is also can be heard in their conversations, in writing and other academic topics because of the loaned words. Some of the translations of English to Uzbek is in Russian. Others even expressed that it is easier to use Google Translate using Russian – English because it follows the English grammar structure. German is the least language used but still seen important and still part of their curriculum.

Future research could further explore and make full ethnographic research about the linguistic attitude of the students better. This will help and guild policymakers and educators to enhance multilingual education strategies, bridge the gap between students' language preferences, learning and the demands of an increasingly globalized job market.

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