

“A Sociolinguistics Approach, Focus, and Interactivity of Students at the Innovative University of Enga”

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ABSTRACT

This study explores sociolinguistic phenomena among students at the Innovative University of Enga, a multilingual educational setting in Papua New Guinea. It investigates language use patterns, language choice, code-switching, and communicative interactivity in both academic and social contexts. The findings reveal that students employ multiple languages, including English, Tok Pisin, and local vernaculars, strategically to navigate academic demands and social relationships. The study emphasizes the importance of recognizing linguistic diversity to foster inclusivity, academic success, and cultural understanding. This study investigates the sociolinguistic dynamics among students at the Innovative University of Enga, focusing on language use, interaction patterns, and communicative practices within the university community. It explores how multilingualism shapes students' academic and social experiences, emphasizing language choice, code-switching, and interactivity in formal and informal settings of the university environment.

Key words: sociolinguistic, innovative university of Enga, language use pattern, communicative practice, code-switching, multilingualism, linguistics, bilingual

INTRODUCTION

Sociolinguistics investigates the relationship between language and society, particularly how language reflects social identities and power structures (Gumperz, 1982). In educational settings, language use is crucial for learning and social integration (Hornberger & McKay, 2010). Papua New Guinea (PNG) is one of the most linguistically diverse countries globally, with over 800 languages spoken (Kulick, 1992). The Innovative University of Enga represents a microcosm of this diversity, where students navigate multiple languages daily. This study aims to understand the sociolinguistic dynamics among these students, focusing on language choice, interactivity, and the role of multilingualism in academic and social contexts.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Sociolinguistics is the study of how language and society interact, focusing on how language use varies according to social factors such as ethnicity, class, gender, and context (Trudgill, 2000). It examines how language reflects social identities and power relations, and how individuals use language to negotiate their social worlds. Within educational settings, sociolinguistics gains particular importance because schools and universities are arenas where diverse languages and dialects intersect, often reflecting broader societal multilingualism and cultural diversity (Hornberger & McKay, 2010).

In contemporary education, especially in multilingual and multicultural societies, understanding students' language practices is crucial for fostering effective communication and learning. Language is not only a medium of instruction but also a key element in social interaction, identity formation, and cultural expression (Gumperz, 1982). The ways students use language in classrooms, social spaces, and digital platforms influence their academic participation, peer relationships, and overall educational experience.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) provides a unique sociolinguistic context with its extraordinary linguistic diversity, hosting over 800 languages (Kulick, 1992). In such a setting, students often navigate between local vernaculars,

Tok Pisin (a widely used creole language), and English (the official language of instruction). This multilingual environment presents both challenges - such as language barriers in academic comprehension - and opportunities, including rich linguistic repertoires that students draw upon to communicate effectively and express their identities.

The Innovative University of Enga, situated in this multilingual milieu, reflects these dynamics strongly. Students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, and their language use involves strategic choices depending on context - whether formal classroom discussions, informal peer interactions, or social media communication. This study focuses on understanding these sociolinguistic practices, particularly the patterns of language choice, code-switching, and interactive communication among students.

By investigating how students at the Innovative University of Enga engage linguistically, the study aims to contribute to better educational policies and teaching strategies that acknowledge and leverage linguistic diversity. It also seeks to enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of communication in academic environments, ultimately supporting students' academic success and social integration

Sociolinguistics plays a vital role in educational settings by providing insights into how language functions within social contexts and how this affects teaching and learning processes. Understanding sociolinguistic principles helps educators and policymakers create more inclusive, effective, and culturally responsive educational environments. The importance of sociolinguistics in education can be highlighted in several key areas.

Understanding Language Diversity and Multilingualism

Educational institutions, especially in linguistically diverse societies, often comprise students from various linguistic backgrounds. Sociolinguistics helps recognize and respect this diversity by exploring how different languages and dialects coexist and interact within the classroom (Hornberger, 2003). It acknowledges students' home languages as valuable resources rather than obstacles, promoting multilingual education that supports cognitive and social development.

Enhancing Communication and Interaction

Language is the primary medium for communication in educational settings. Sociolinguistics studies language use, variation, and interaction patterns, providing educators with tools to understand how students communicate across different social contexts (Gumperz, 1982). This awareness enables teachers to adapt their communication styles and instructional methods to better engage students and facilitate effective learning.

Addressing Language and Identity

Language is closely tied to identity, culture, and social belonging. Sociolinguistics reveals how students use language to express their identities and negotiate social relationships within schools (Milroy & Milroy, 1999). Recognizing and validating students' linguistic identities fosters a positive learning environment where students feel respected and motivated.

Managing Language-Related Challenges

Many students face challenges related to language proficiency, dialectal differences, or code-switching practices that can affect academic performance. Sociolinguistic knowledge helps educators identify these challenges and develop appropriate support strategies, such as language scaffolding, bilingual education, or culturally responsive pedagogy (Blommaert, 2010).

Informing Language Policy and Curriculum Development

Sociolinguistics provides empirical data that inform language policies and curriculum design in schools and universities. It emphasizes the need for inclusive policies that accommodate linguistic diversity, promote

bilingualism or multilingualism, and incorporate students' linguistic repertoires into teaching and assessment (Hornberger & McKay, 2010).

Promoting Social Equity and Inclusion

By highlighting how language intersects with power, social class, and access to education, sociolinguistics advocates for equitable educational practices. It helps address language-based discrimination and supports initiatives that ensure all students have equal opportunities to succeed regardless of their linguistic background (Bernstein, 1971).

Sociolinguistics is crucial in educational settings for understanding and supporting the complex language dynamics among students. It equips educators with the knowledge to create linguistically inclusive classrooms that value diversity, enhance communication, and contribute to students' academic and social success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociolinguistics and Education

Sociolinguistics considers how language varies in different social contexts and how these variations reflect social identities (Trudgill, 2000). In educational environments, language choice and use affect students' academic engagement and peer relationships (Bernstein, 1971). Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991) explains how speakers adjust their language to accommodate others, which is relevant in multilingual classrooms where students and teachers negotiate linguistic identities.

Sociolinguistics, the study of language in its social context, provides critical insights into the complex relationship between language, society, and education. This review synthesizes key scholarly perspectives on how sociolinguistic principles influence educational practices, language policy, and student outcomes.

Language Variation and Educational Contexts

A foundational concept in sociolinguistics is language variation, encompassing differences in dialects, registers, and languages within a community (Labov, 1972). In educational settings, these variations often manifest as linguistic diversity among students. Research by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) indicates that students bring a range of dialects and linguistic repertoires to the classroom, which can both enrich and challenge teaching and learning processes. Educators' awareness of language variation is essential to prevent linguistic prejudice and to support all students effectively.

Multilingualism and Language Choice

Multilingualism is a common phenomenon in many educational contexts worldwide. Hornberger (2003) emphasizes the importance of recognizing students' multiple languages as valuable resources rather than obstacles. Studies show that students' language choices - such as code-switching between languages - function as strategic tools for communication, identity expression, and learning facilitation (Gumperz, 1982; Garcia, 2009). Bilingual education programs, which incorporate students' home languages alongside the dominant language of instruction, have been found to improve cognitive development and academic achievement (Cummins, 2000).

Sociolinguistics and Identity in Education

Language is closely tied to identity construction and social belonging. Norton (2013) explores how learners' investment in language learning is linked to their identity and social positioning. In educational settings, students' linguistic identities influence their participation and motivation. When schools recognize and value students' linguistic and cultural identities, it fosters inclusivity and enhances engagement (Luke, 2003). Conversely, neglecting these identities can lead to marginalization and disengagement.

Language Policy and Educational Equity

Sociolinguistic research informs language policy development aimed at promoting equity in education. Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital highlights how dominant language varieties often confer social and economic advantages, leading to inequalities in educational access and achievement. Educational policies that support linguistic diversity and promote multilingual education are essential for reducing these disparities (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). For example, mother tongue-based multilingual education programs have been shown to improve literacy rates and school retention among minority language speakers (UNESCO, 2003).

Classroom Discourse and Interaction

Classroom interaction is a key site where sociolinguistic dynamics unfold. Gumperz (1982) and Wetherell (1998) illustrate how language use in classrooms reflects and shapes social relationships and power dynamics. Effective teaching practices involve understanding students' communicative styles and adapting discourse to foster participation and learning. Sociolinguistic approaches to classroom discourse analysis reveal patterns of inclusion and exclusion, guiding interventions to promote equitable interaction (Bloome et al., 2005).

Sociolinguistic Research in PNG

Research in PNG highlights the complex interplay between traditional languages and colonial languages in education (Kulick, 1992; Mufwene, 2001). Linguistic diversity poses challenges for teaching and learning but also offers opportunities for developing multilingual competencies and intercultural understanding (Hornberger & McKay, 2010).

Sociolinguistic research in Papua New Guinea (PNG) has extensively explored the nation's remarkable linguistic diversity, encompassing over 800 languages spoken across its regions. This research delves into language variation, dialectology, language acquisition, and the interplay between language and social factors.

Language Variation and Dialectology studies have examined dialectal variations within specific language groups. For instance, a sociolinguistic survey of the Simbu province shows that the Kamara dialects identified a dialect chain encompassing most of Kebai, Kamara and Gomia dialect, noting that speakers from the East Siane could not comprehend texts in Kebai or Kamara dialects. Further research is recommended to explore areas like Ketotapsi, Kile, and west Eribari, which may represent divergent dialects or distinct languages. (pnglanguages.sil.org)

Language Acquisition research has also focused on language acquisition in multilingual settings. A study on the acquisition of Tok Pisin phonology among children in the Highlands revealed that age significantly influences phonological development, with older children exhibiting higher accuracy in consonant production. The study also highlighted the impact of both substrate languages and creolization on consonant use. (tandfonline.com)

Language Documentation and Community Initiatives further shows that community-driven language documentation projects have been pivotal in preserving linguistic heritage. The Vavanagi platform, for example, is a community-run initiative for the Hula language, supporting crowd sourced English-Hula text translation and voice recording. This project emphasizes community governance and elder-led review, showcasing how language technology can bridge village-based and urban members, connect generations, and support cultural heritage on the community's own terms. (arxiv.org)

Sociolinguistic Factors in Language Policy amplifies that sociolinguistic research has also informed language policy in PNG. Studies have examined how language policies affect social aspects and the use of vernaculars, highlighting the need for policies that consider the sociolinguistic landscape to promote linguistic diversity and inclusivity. (catalogue.nla.gov.au) Overall, sociolinguistic research in Papua New Guinea provides valuable insights into the complexities of language use, acquisition, and preservation in a highly multilingual society. The literature underscores the vital role of sociolinguistics in understanding and addressing the linguistic and cultural diversity in education. Recognizing language variation, multilingualism, and identity within educational settings supports inclusive pedagogy, equitable policies, and enhanced learning outcomes.

Research objectives

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the sociolinguistic behaviors and interactive language practices of students at the Innovative University of Enga. To achieve this overarching aim, the study is guided by the following specific objectives:

3.1. To examine the patterns of language use and language choice among students in academic and social contexts. This objective seeks to identify which languages students use, when, and why, highlighting the functional roles of English, Tok Pisin, and vernacular languages.

3.2. To explore the role and frequency of code-switching as a communicative strategy among students. This involves analyzing how students alternate between languages during conversations to negotiate meaning, express identity, or manage social relationships.

3.3. To analyze the nature of interactivity and communicative exchanges among students in classroom and informal settings.

This aims to understand how language use shapes peer interactions, group dynamics, and participation in academic activities.

3.4. To identify challenges faced by students related to multilingualism and language proficiency, particularly in academic English. This objective investigates linguistic obstacles that may affect students' academic engagement and suggests areas for support.

3.5. To provide recommendations for language policies, teaching practices, and support programs that accommodate the linguistic diversity of students. Based on the findings, this objective aims to inform institutional strategies to enhance communication, inclusivity, and academic success.

These objectives collectively guide the research to provide a comprehensive understanding of sociolinguistic phenomena among university students, contributing to improved educational outcomes in a multilingual setting

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the sociolinguistic practices and interactivity of students at the Innovative University of Enga. The choice of qualitative methods allows for an in-depth understanding of language use, social interaction, and the meanings students attach to their linguistic behaviors.

Research Design

A descriptive and exploratory research design was adopted to capture the complex sociolinguistic phenomena in both academic and social contexts. This approach facilitates detailed observation and interpretation of language patterns and communicative strategies.

Participants

The study involved a purposive sample of 30 students from year two with diverse linguistic backgrounds enrolled at the Innovative University of Enga. Participants were selected to represent various social groups, language groups, and academic levels to ensure a broad perspective on language use.

Data Collection Methods

Semi-Structured Interviews - Individual interviews were conducted to gather detailed insights into students' language preferences, experiences, and attitudes. Open-ended questions allowed participants to express their views freely.

Focus Group Discussions - Group discussions facilitated observation of naturalistic language interaction and code-switching practices among peers.

Audio Recordings - Interviews and discussions were audio-recorded with participants' consent to enable accurate transcription and analysis.

Field Notes - Observations regarding non-verbal communication and contextual factors were documented during data collection.

Data Analysis

Data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis involved coding the data to identify recurring patterns related to language choice, code-switching, interactivity, and challenges faced by students. This process was iterative, allowing refinement of themes to capture the nuances of sociolinguistic behavior.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality. Data were anonymized to protect participants' identities, and the study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

FINDINGS

Language Use and Choice

Students demonstrate flexible language use, frequently switching between Tok Pisin, English, and local languages depending on context and interlocutor. English is predominantly used in formal academic settings, while Tok Pisin and local languages are common in social interactions.

Code-Switching and Interactivity

Code-switching serves as a pragmatic tool for clarifying meaning, expressing identity, and managing group dynamics. Students use language to negotiate social relationships and inclusion, with interactivity shaped by cultural norms and linguistic preferences.

Challenges and Opportunities

Some students face challenges in balancing multiple languages, especially in academic comprehension and expression. Multilingualism enriches the social fabric of the university, fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

DISCUSSION

6.1. The importance of recognizing linguistic diversity in educational policies and teaching practices within Educational Settings.

Recognition in sociolinguistics refers to the acknowledgment and validation of students' linguistic identities, varieties, and cultural backgrounds within educational environments. It plays a critical role in fostering an inclusive and supportive learning atmosphere, which directly impacts students' academic engagement, self-esteem, and social integration.

6.2. Linguistic Recognition as a Foundation for Identity and Inclusion Language is a core component of personal and social identity.

When students' home languages and dialects are recognized and valued in school settings, it affirms their cultural identities and promotes a sense of belonging (Norton, 2013). Norton's concept of "investment" in language learning highlights that learners are more motivated and engaged when their linguistic and cultural capital is acknowledged rather than marginalized. Conversely, lack of recognition can lead to alienation, low self-confidence, and reduced participation (Cummins, 2001).

6.3. Recognition and Academic Achievement Cummins (2000) argues that recognizing students' linguistic backgrounds through culturally responsive pedagogy supports cognitive development and academic achievement. When students' primary languages are incorporated into classroom activities, they can transfer skills and knowledge more effectively to the second language (English). This bilingual or multilingual approach not only respects students' identities but also enhances overall learning outcomes.

6.4. Addressing Power Imbalances and Language Hierarchies Sociolinguistics also emphasizes how language recognition challenges existing power structures and language hierarchies in education. Standardized languages, often associated with socio-economic power, tend to dominate educational settings, marginalizing vernaculars and minority languages (Bourdieu, 1991). Recognizing and legitimizing diverse linguistic varieties disrupts these hierarchies, promoting linguistic democracy and social equity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This fosters an environment where all students have equal opportunities to succeed regardless of their linguistic backgrounds.

6.6. Enhancing Interactivity and Communication Recognition of linguistic diversity encourages interactive and collaborative classroom dynamics. When students feel their language is respected, they are more likely to participate actively in discussions, engage in peer interactions, and contribute to group work (Gumperz, 1982). This enhances learning through social interaction, a key principle in sociolinguistic and sociocultural theories of education (Vygotsky, 1978).

6.7. Practical Implications for Policy and Pedagogy Educational institutions that prioritize linguistic recognition develop policies and practices that accommodate multilingualism, such as bilingual education programs, mother tongue instruction, and teacher training in sociolinguistic competence (Hornberger, 2003). Such policies not only improve academic access for linguistically diverse students but also contribute to preserving linguistic heritage and cultural diversity within the community.

Recognition in sociolinguistics is essential for validating students' linguistic identities, promoting inclusive education, and enhancing academic and social outcomes. It challenges language-based inequalities and fosters an interactive, supportive learning environment that respects and leverages linguistic diversity

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Innovative University of Enga exemplifies a vibrant multilingual educational environment where language practices reflect broader sociocultural realities. By embracing linguistic diversity, the university can better support students' academic and social development.

The Innovative University of Enga exemplifies a vibrant multilingual educational environment where language practices reflect broader sociocultural realities. In this setting, students and staff navigate multiple languages - such as Tok Pisin, English, and various indigenous languages - mirroring the linguistic diversity characteristic of Papua New Guinea. This multilingualism is not merely a backdrop but actively shapes social interactions, identity formation, and educational experiences within the university.

Language practices at the Innovative University of Enga serve as a microcosm of the wider sociocultural dynamics in the region, where language choice, code-switching, and language mixing are common. These practices facilitate communication and social bonding among students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, while also reflecting issues of power, status, and cultural affiliation. The university thus provides a fertile ground for studying how language functions as a social resource and a marker of identity in a multicultural context.

Moreover, the university's commitment to recognizing and accommodating this linguistic diversity aligns with broader educational goals of inclusivity and equity. It offers opportunities for students to maintain their heritage

languages while acquiring academic proficiency in English and Tok Pisin, supporting both cultural preservation and academic success. This approach underscores the importance of sociolinguistic awareness in educational policy and practice, highlighting how language environments in universities can foster intercultural understanding and social cohesion.

Recommendations

Develop language support programs tailored to multilingual students. Train educators in sociolinguistic awareness to better understand student communication needs. Encourage inclusive language policies that validate all languages spoken by students.

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