

## **Cultural Identity in Intercultural Communication: Analyzing the Impact of Linguistic Choices in Multilingual Interactions**

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### **Article History:**

Received:

25 September 2024

Accepted:

7 December 2024

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### **Keywords:**

Language and Identity,  
Intercultural Communication,  
Linguistic Choice, Cultural  
Identity, Multilingual  
Interactions

In an era characterized by global migration and multicultural interactions, this study delves into the linguistic dimensions of cultural identity among Bangladeshi international students in China. The study employs a 20-question survey to examine the role of code-switching, bilingualism, and linguistic choices in identity formation and expression. The dataset includes 65 students from 34 disciplines. One of the major conclusions is that people are ambivalent, particularly about the sense of cultural identity mediated through multilingualism, although there was a strong correlation between cultural expression and use of the mother tongue. The huge proportion of these participants admitted the use of certain linguistic features in different sociolinguistic situations, nevertheless, the importance of English and Mandarin used in the educational contexts emphasized the global and local linguistic dynamics. In order to overcome the drawbacks of this study, future studies must aim to explore the longitudinal impact of settling down in unfamiliar language territories on people's cultural orientation. Furthermore, this study recommends to take note of the growing need for engaging in acceptable linguistic behavior for the protection and promotion of cultural identity and appreciation among different societies.

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## INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, intercultural communication has become a pivotal aspect of social interactions. How people articulate themselves across cultural divides both allows for mutual comprehension and significantly influences and embodies their cultures. While research has shown that language variation mirrors social structures and cultural norms (Labov, 1972), it also means how people use spoken words are investigated according to their being members of particular cultural group. Language is an inseparable intermediary in this fluid process, acting both as a bridge and obstacle for intercultural communication.

After all, language is not merely a communication tool but an archive of cultural heritage and also inseparable from identity (Padilla-Iglesias et al., 2020; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2014). Identity as a Dynamic and Multifaceted Construct, Bucholtz & Hall (2005) describe identity work as an ongoing activity produced by our social interactions. Moreover, the (hierarchical) dominance of a language in conversation can be linked to the hegemonic discursive practices associated with its societal power – exerted by processes such as identity negotiation and enacted at different levels: both controlling what people do and also taking shape through what identities they express and are expected to adopt (Fairclough, 1992). Consequently, this maintains the disparities of dominance and coercion when it comes to determining whose identity is privileged or centred in cross-cultural encounters; just who is — often unfairly so— subjected. As such, the idea of translanguaging highlights that bilingual communication is a dynamic process and allows for fluid construction over identity (Garcia & Wei, 2014). The selections we clip from the surrounding language in turn reflect background and personal identity. In diverse and multi-lingual environments, these choices carry even more weight since people also need to navigate between different cultural norms or expectations.

Code-switching, the ability to toggle between two or even more languages within interactions, is completely normal among people who speak more than one language. It remains a strategic resource through which individuals assert their

culture, negotiate relationships and make meaning in diverse contexts (Auer 1998; Chitiga 2021). Theory of conversational code-switching enables this social function (Gumperz, 1982). Hence, Myers-Scotton (1993) revisited the census and through her Markedness Model analyzed how speakers perform their identity in a code-switching occasion as well as negotiate power relations amongst different cultures. Accordingly, bilinguals may be expected to use different languages in social contexts if they feel using particular language can help them preserve or boost their positive self-image (Tajfel & Turner 1986).

The holistic conception of bilingualism forwarded by Grosjean (1982) also implies that the processing in a second language is not merely translation, and represents more than just using one or another linguistic mode for communication. Therefore, exploring how code-switching occurs can offer insights into the ways cultural identities are shaped and preserved in intercultural communication. Similarly, research on bilingualism in intercultural settings can inform how people manage their linguistic repertoires to cross multiple cultural boundaries. Hence, the researcher has chosen Bangladeshi international students who are studying in China in order to collect the primary data for this study.

Language is the outlet in which we contribute our representation to build a shared communication throughout an anthropological quilt, threading and connecting bright colourful strands of fabric that shows us for who it represents (Kohler, 2017). As globalization fosters increased mobility, many Bangladeshi students go for higher study in countries where the language and cultural experience are quite different from those of Bangladesh (Rahman, 2018). To those students who are studying in China, linguistic preferences are more than academic or survival tools; they are brushstrokes of their developing self-portraits on a foreign landscape. They are cultural ambassadors, each conversation a delicate dance between preserving their heritage and embracing new cultural norms.

Several factors happen to contribute to the choice of these populations. Fundamentally, they operate within a multifaceted linguistic landscape including their native language, Bangla, with English, global lingua franca, and Mandarin,

the primary medium of communication in their host country. This unique trilingual setting ends up offering a unique opportunity to explore how their language choices shape and influence their cultural identities. Daily switching of these languages enables thoughtful consideration in-depth into code-switching, language preference and thus identity negotiations.

Besides, the dynamics of China in terms of culture are entirely different from Bangladesh. Therefore, there is a new area for these students to navigate through their cultural identity again. When one of these is immersed in the other, culturally or linguistically, it can give us a good look at how language (in less extreme cases) helps or hinders intercultural communication and acclimation. More importantly, however, this tension over whether or not to reject one culture in favor of another points even more towards language as essential to identity.

Moreover, the context of academia adds extensive fluid dynamics. These students bring together extensive knowledge not only in their study field but with important linguistic and cultural competences, being part of the internationalization process. Their experiences interacting with diverse peers from various backgrounds, working together in classrooms and exchange dormitory rooms etc. provide first-hand information on language as a connection between cultures.

In essence, in a multilingual and multicultural context, Bangladeshi international students can be an exemplary case that the nexus of language and identity is dynamic. As their experiences are a simple reflection of global trends, they serve as the perfect subjects to probe further into how and why language choice reflects cultural identity in intercultural conversation. The findings of this study promise to contribute significantly to sociolinguistics, intercultural communication and identity studies. Moreover, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do linguistic choices in intercultural communication reflect and shape cultural identities?

2. What is the role of code-switching in the negotiation of cultural identities during intercultural interactions?
3. How do bilingualism and language dominance influence intercultural communication and identity construction?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the intricate dance of words and meanings across cultural boundaries, linguistic choices become the threads that weave together the rich tapestry of identity in multilingual interactions. In this chapter, the researcher reviews and analyzes some of the existing literatures which directly align with the interest of this project to ascertain a distinct point of departure for this study.

The choice of language in multilingual interactions, as well its use or manipulation can have a significant impact on the way people define and are treated by others. The findings of Norton (2000) further reinforce the idea that language can be used as an identity builder rather than just a means of communication. This view is echoed by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004); they refer to such processes as a double-voiced or third-space effect: the idea that, depending on which languages one speaks, an individual may have many identities at once, a versatile chameleon in terms of identity, or different aspects of his/her life influences several unlike behaviours with each language. Likewise, in discussing the biographical work of identity construction, Gee (2000) argues that what people do with language is central to how they come to be or become a certain kind of person, for example by affiliating themselves with particular groups and cultural norms.

In examining the role of language in intercultural communication, Kramsch (1998) highlights the concept of the “third space”, where individuals create hybrid identities through the blending of linguistic and cultural elements. This perspective is supported by Bhabha’s (1994) theory of cultural hybridity, which posits that the interaction between different cultural identities leads to the creation of new, composite identities. Studies by Canagarajah (2012) further illustrate how

multilingual speakers strategically employ code-switching and code-mixing to navigate and negotiate their identities in intercultural settings.

The choice of language is related to our identity, and this can be illustrated in no more clear a way than in questions associated with language policy and planning. Indeed, both Spolsky (2004) and Ricento (2005) suggest that language policies often represent a dominant cultural identity which reiterates itself as well as promotes marginalization of other languages. In a globalized world, it is particularly evident, where English often plays a hegemonic role (Phillipson, 1992). However, this promotion of English can threaten local languages and the culture associated with it (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

For example, at more of an individual level through personal narratives, the relationship between language and identity is explored. Benwell and Stokoe (2006), using the framework of Identity, end up describing how personal identities are created and displayed in discourse. With regard to this narrative, Bamberg (1997) describes storytelling as a tool that makes sense of multilingual experiences and is central for articulating changing identities.

Linguistic relativity – the idea that languages influence how we think about our cultural identities based on where and with whom we live (Whorf, 1956). This is reexamined in the current literatures (Lucy, 1997; Boroditsky, 2001) that consider how language structure affects cognitive processes and cultural worldviews. The implications of linguistic relativity on identity are significant, as they highlight the deep-seated connections between language, thought, and culture.

Intercultural competence, in the context of multilingual interactions, is one of the sole concerns for intercultural communication scholars (Gudykunst, 2005). Moreover, it is also claimed that considering and respecting differences in language are essential for two reasons: one to be an ability of a good communication; another reason is the promotion in developing favourable intra-cultural relations. Deardorff (2006) extends on this perspective by emphasizing the role of intercultural competence in successfully resolving cultural identities. As Bourdieu (1991) has argued, linguistic practices always occur in the context of

social power relations; they can be an instrument of subjugation but also a means to contest that position. Studies of language and gender such as Cameron (2005) and Tannen (1990) offer this perspective through an analysis of linguistic choices by reproducing the world and enacting dutiful roles depending on ways, which analyzes their language patterns.

Cummins (2000) looks into how language shapes cultural identity in educational context, and makes a case for the need of bilingual education in the promotion of a positive identity among speakers of minority languages. García (2009) takes it to another dimension called translanguaging, where bilingual individuals fluidly integrate their linguistic repertoires to express their multifaceted identities.

The digital age has introduced new dimensions to the study of language and identity. Androutsopoulos (2006) and Boyd (2014) investigate how online communication platforms provide spaces for the performance and negotiation of identities through language. These digital interactions often transcend geographical boundaries, creating virtual communities where diverse linguistic and cultural identities can converge and coexist.

After analyzing and reviewing the above literatures, it has been seen that no study has been conducted on how linguistic choices impact cultural identities in intercultural communication, let alone examining the impact of bilingualism on identity formation within multilingual interactions of Bangladeshi international students in China. Thus, this study intends to fulfill this gap. Therefore, the study's point of departure is to dissect and synthesize how linguistic choices, including code-switching and bilingualism, shape and reflect cultural identities in intercultural settings, illuminating the role of language dominance in influencing power dynamics and cultural identity during these interactions. The quintessence of this study lies in developing a nuanced understanding of how language and identity intersect, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of communication within the culturally diverse framework of global interactions.

## METHOD

### Sampling and Procedure

This study utilized a quantitative research through surveys, using a 20-question questionnaire with both open-ended and close-ended questions. Close-ended questions, measured on a 5-point Likert scale, captured quantitative data on linguistic practices and identity markers, while Open-ended questions offered qualitative insights into personal experiences, with responses presented as direct quotes (where applicable) to illustrate participants' perceptions and experiences.

The primary data is collected through a Google form of the questionnaire from 79 Bangladeshi international students who are currently studying in various universities in China. However, only 65 of the responses, who are studying in 34 different academic disciplines in 39 distinct universities, were purposefully selected based on the respondents' multilingual backgrounds for this analysis. All of them are male students. This sample comprises individuals from diverse educational backgrounds: 55.4% respondents are pursuing Bachelor degrees, 26.2% are Master's students, 9.2% are engaged in PhD programs, and 9.2% hold Diplomas. Such diversity ensures a rich variety of perspectives and experiences, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The respondents' experiences in China vary significantly, providing a valuable dimension to the analysis of intercultural communication. 30.8% participants have resided in China for 1 to 2 years, 24.6% for less than a year, 16.9% for a period of 3 to 4 years, and remaining 27.7% for more than 4 years. This temporal variation allows for an examination of how length of stay influences linguistic adaptation and identity negotiation.

Variations in language competency among the respondents were observed further complicating the research. From the total number of participants, fifty one speak Bangla and English – making it a bilingual affair, whereas Hindi and Mandarin are incorporated by 11 and 10 respectively for the trilingual habitation. In addition, from the total population of this study, there were only 2 quadrilingual



respondents: speaking Bangla, English, mandarin and Hindi and there was only 1 participant whose languages included Urdu, Mandarin, Bangla, English and Hindi. Such variations with respect to the language abilities of respondents are also important in understanding the use of language in the context of intercultural communication in different sociocultural environments and their relation to the cultural identity.

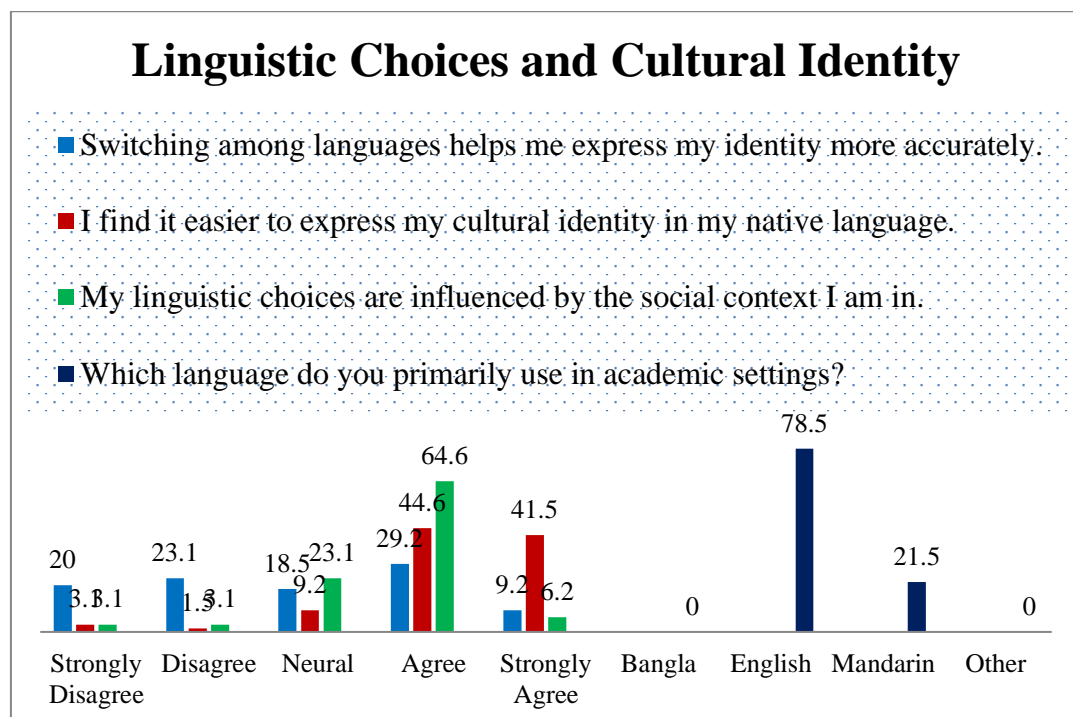
The collected quantitative data are analyzed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v.23, and qualitative data are scrutinized using NVivo. The final result is demonstrated by using figures in Microsoft Word 2016.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### Quantitative Analysis

The analysis offers a graphical depiction of the participants' varied responses to the questionnaire items. The results are exhibited in a systematic and progressive order, facilitating a clear and coherent understanding of the data's developmental trajectory.

**Figure 1.** Linguistic choices and cultural identity

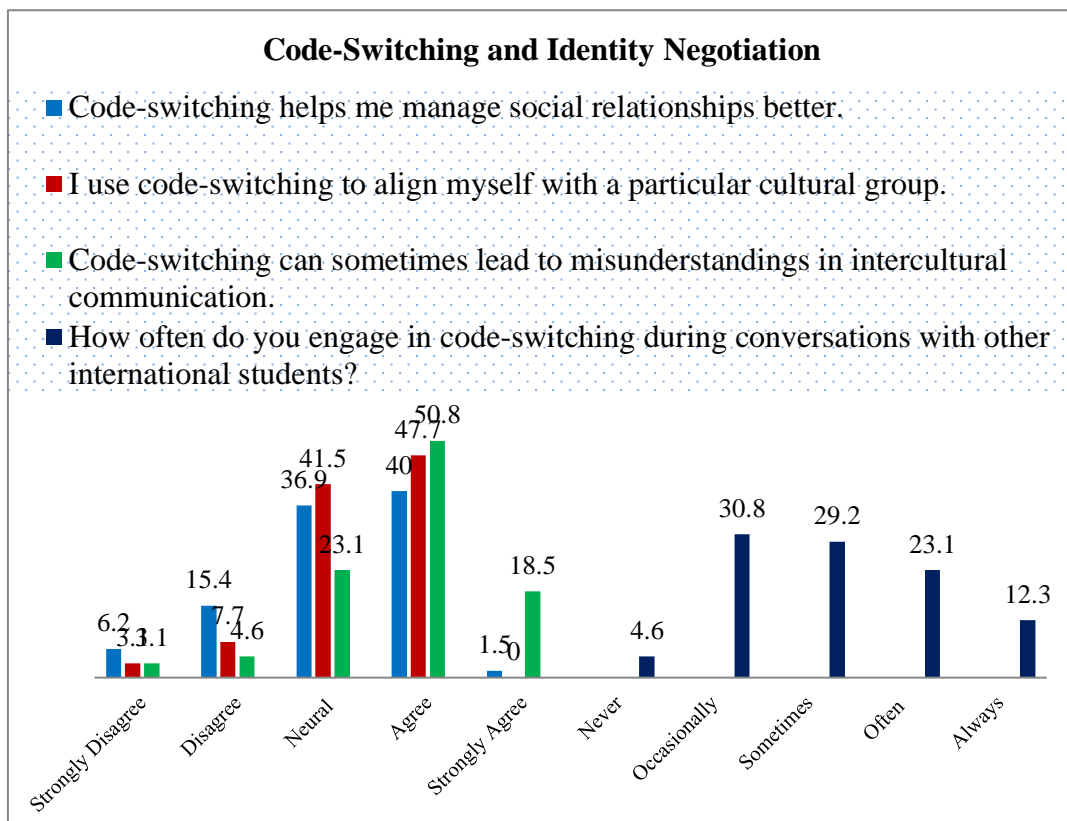


The responses indicate varied perspectives among Bangladeshi international students in China on how linguistic choices affect their cultural identity in intercultural communication. A notable portion of respondents expressed disagreement or ambivalence toward switching languages as a tool for expressing their identity, with 20% strongly disagreeing and 23.1% disagreeing, while 18.5% were neutral. However, a significant number also expressed agreement, with 29.2% agreeing and 9.2% strongly agreeing that language switching helps them express their identity more accurately.

A much clearer pattern emerged when participants were asked about expressing their cultural identity in their native language. Here, the vast majority agreed that it is easier to convey their identity in Bangla, with 44.6% agreeing and 41.5% strongly agreeing. This suggests that despite their immersion in a multilingual environment, the native language retains a critical role in identity expression. Only 3.1% strongly disagreed, and 1.5% disagreed, showing minimal opposition to this idea.

Additionally, most respondents acknowledged that their linguistic choices are influenced by the social context they find themselves in, with 64.6% agreeing and 6.2% strongly agreeing. Only a small portion of respondents, 3.1% each, expressed disagreement or strong disagreement with this notion. This demonstrates that the social environment plays a significant role in shaping the language use of these international students.

In academic settings, English emerged as the dominant language, with 78.5% of respondents using it primarily, while 21.5% primarily used Mandarin. Notably, none of the respondents used Bangla in academic contexts, which points to the prominence of English and Mandarin as essential languages for academic communication in China.

**Figure 2.** Code-switching and identity negotiation

The data on code-switching among Bangladeshi international students studying in China provides valuable insights into how they navigate their social and cultural relationships in multilingual contexts. In terms of managing social relationships through code-switching, the responses were somewhat divided. While 40% agreed that code-switching helps them manage social relationships better, and 1.5% strongly agreed, a significant number of respondents remained neutral at 36.9%, with 15.4% disagreeing and 6.2% strongly disagreeing. This suggests that while many see the benefit of code-switching in social interactions, a considerable portion either does not see it as crucial or feels ambivalent about its role in such contexts.

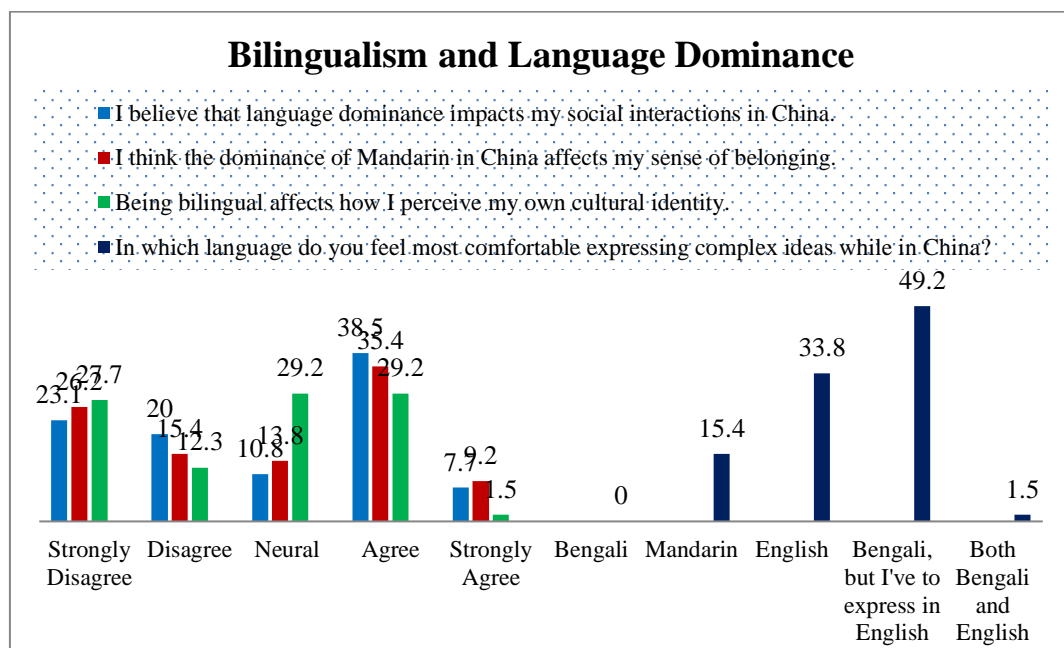
When asked whether they use code-switching to align themselves with a particular cultural group, 47.7% of respondents agreed, but only 3.1% strongly disagreed and 7.7% disagreed. Notably, 41.5% were neutral on this question, indicating a potential uncertainty or lack of strong opinion on the role of code-

switching in cultural alignment. This suggests that while nearly half of the respondents do consciously use code-switching for cultural identification, the practice may not be equally significant for everyone.

Regarding the potential for misunderstandings due to code-switching in intercultural communication, half of the respondents (50.8%) agreed that misunderstandings can occur, and 18.5% strongly agreed. Only 3.1% strongly disagreed, while 4.6% disagreed. The neutral response was lower here, at 23.1%, suggesting that more participants have a definite opinion on this issue, with a significant majority acknowledging the risks of code-switching in creating communication barriers in intercultural contexts.

The frequency of code-switching during conversations with other international students varied. While 12.3% always engage in code-switching, 23.1% often do, and 29.2% sometimes do. Meanwhile, 30.8% only occasionally engage in this behavior, and 4.6% reported never code-switching in such interactions. This distribution highlights the varying degrees to which international students rely on code-switching, with the majority engaging in it at least occasionally, if not regularly.

**Figure 3.** Bilingualism and language dominance



The data on language dominance and its impact on social interactions and cultural identity provides insights into the experiences of Bangladeshi international students in China. When asked about the influence of language dominance on social interactions in China, the responses were somewhat divided. A significant portion of respondents, 38.5%, agreed that language dominance affects their social interactions, with 7.7% strongly agreeing. However, a notable 23.1% strongly disagreed, and 20% disagreed, reflecting a substantial group that does not perceive language dominance as a major factor in shaping their social experiences. A smaller group of 10.8% remained neutral on the matter, indicating mixed opinions on how the dominance of particular languages in China, such as Mandarin, influences social interactions.

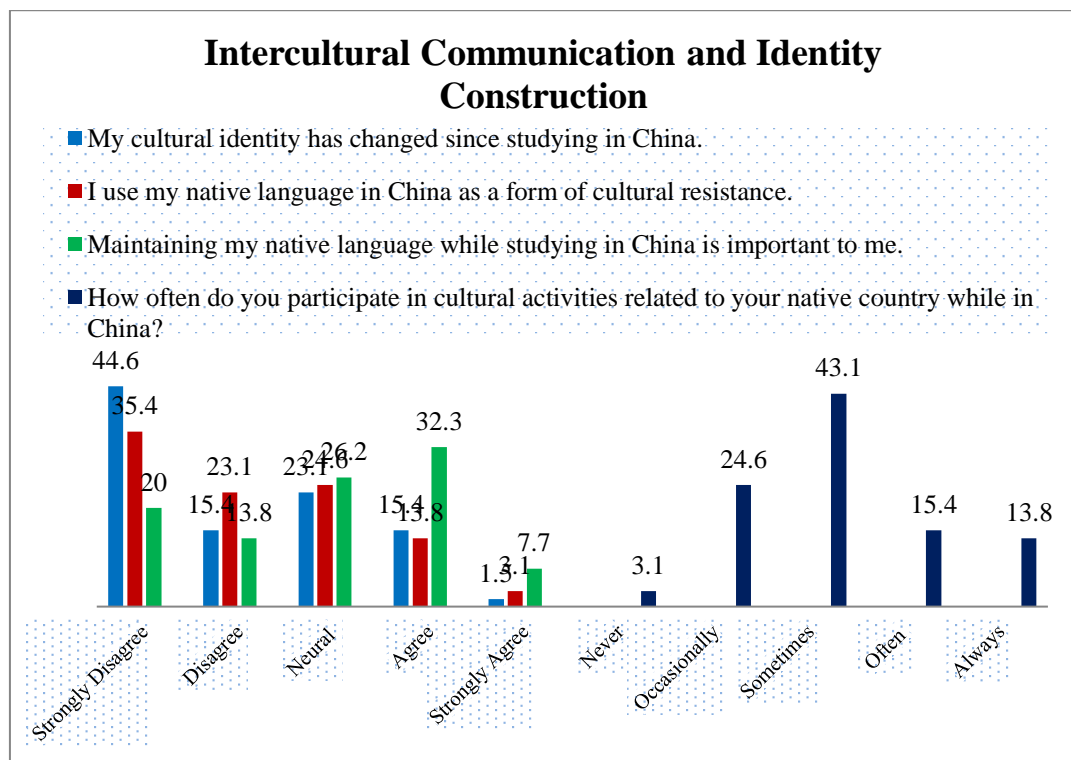
The respondents were similarly divided when asked whether the dominance of Mandarin affects their sense of belonging in China. While 35.4% agreed and 9.2% strongly agreed that the dominance of Mandarin affects their sense of belonging, 26.2% strongly disagreed, and 15.4% disagreed with this statement. A smaller portion, 13.8%, were neutral, showing that a considerable number of students either do not feel impacted by Mandarin dominance or have mixed feelings about it.

In terms of how bilingualism affects the students' perception of their own cultural identity, there was a significant range of responses. About 29.2% agreed that being bilingual affects their perception of cultural identity, with 1.5% strongly agreeing. On the other hand, a combined 40% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, while a further 29.2% remained neutral. This distribution indicates that bilingualism plays a complex and varied role in the respondents' understanding of their cultural identity.

The responses regarding the language in which students feel most comfortable expressing complex ideas highlight the challenges these students face in a multilingual environment. None of the respondents reported feeling most comfortable using Bengali, their native language, in China, while 33.8% preferred English and 15.4% preferred Mandarin. A large portion of respondents, 49.2%, felt

more comfortable expressing complex ideas in Bengali but had to do so in English, indicating a tension between their native language and the linguistic demands of their academic and social environment in China. Only 1.5% felt equally comfortable in both Bengali and English, reflecting a small minority with a high degree of linguistic flexibility.

**Figure 4.** Intercultural communication and identity construction



The data on cultural identity and linguistic choices among Bangladeshi international students in China presents a varied picture of how these students perceive their cultural identities and use language in a multilingual setting. When asked whether their cultural identity had changed since studying in China, a significant proportion of the respondents strongly disagreed (44.6%), indicating that they do not feel that their identity has been altered by their time in China. Another 15.4% disagreed, while 23.1% remained neutral. Only a small portion of respondents felt that their cultural identity had changed, with 15.4% agreeing and 1.5% strongly agreeing. These responses suggest that for most of the respondents,

studying in China has not led to a significant transformation in their cultural identity.

Regarding the use of their native language as a form of cultural resistance, 35.4% of the respondents strongly disagreed, and 23.1% disagreed, with only 13.8% agreeing and 3.1% strongly agreeing. The remaining 24.6% were neutral, indicating a range of opinions on this issue. These responses suggest that while some students may use their native language as a form of resistance to cultural assimilation, the majority do not perceive their language use in this way.

The importance of maintaining their native language while studying in China was another point of interest. Here, 32.3% agreed, and 7.7% strongly agreed that maintaining their native language is important, while 26.2% remained neutral. However, a notable portion of the respondents either strongly disagreed (20%) or disagreed (13.8%), indicating that, for some, maintaining their native language may not be a priority while living in China.

When asked how often they participate in cultural activities related to their native country while in China, the responses were distributed across various levels of engagement. The majority of respondents indicated that they participate sometimes (43.1%), while 15.4% reported often, and 13.8% always. A smaller percentage indicated limited involvement in such activities, with 24.6% rarely participating and 3.1% never participating. This suggests that while many students maintain some level of engagement with their cultural heritage, the extent of participation varies significantly.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

In this study, qualitative analysis revealed that the majority of Bangladeshi international students in China did not report significant instances of code-switching impacting their interactions. Most respondents, 62 out of 65, either did not experience or recall situations where code-switching played a role. However, the few participants who did report such situations highlighted the positive aspects of code-switching, such as fostering better communication, enhancing mutual

understanding, and demonstrating cultural sensitivity. Thus, one participant described a scenario where switching between Bangla and Chinese in a bilingual meeting facilitated better communication and strengthened relationships, showing respect for the languages involved. Similarly, the other participant mentioned that switching languages enhanced communication clarity and helped build rapport, especially in professional and social settings, indicating a positive influence of code-switching in enhancing cultural exchanges.

The answers to the question of maintaining the native language and learning new languages varied. Some members, for example, first and fifth respondent, have stressed that mastering Chinese is the crucial for career development and not a step for cultural assimilation for them. By contrast, the rest of the participants, such as Participant 3 and Participant 9, found pleasure in this while they kept their native Bengali for social interactions. The use of different languages among the participants was also remarked by some who reported that the choice is based on context, but a small portion did not let, concerns with language balance, deter them from practicing their languages, thereby signaling an individualistic approach to language maintenance.

The participants generally reported the problem of language barriers, which were the result of their limited Mandarin or English vocabulary, so the communication was often hindered, especially in the academic or professional field. Some respondents like Participant 12 mentioned that idiomatic expressions and cultural references were the leading cause of confusions, implying that the communication of the details of a culture in a foreign language is very complicated. Nevertheless, few respondents were not faced with any challenges, especially those who studies in Hong Kong, where the use of English is predominant, which shows the difference in experience from one place to another depending on own language background.

Learning Mandarin had diverse effects on the students' views of Chinese culture and their self-identities. Among them, respondent number six was able to reach this level, as his mastery of Chinese words and expressions led to the cross-



cultural friendships that he managed to form. Additionally, he was able to show his cultural identity communicating in a foreign language, Chinese. While others got that measuring out their abilities in using the Mandarin helped them to deepen their knowledge of Chinese culture, traditions, and history, as well as broaden their cultural identity. In this way, the Chinese language learning becomes a reflective process that enables the learner to establish an in-depth relationship with the host culture as well as their own culture.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The outcomes of this study imply a subtle and multifaceted relationship between language, cultural identity, and intercultural communication among Bangladeshi international students in China. The significance of the language in the formation of cultural identity has been documented by the past study in many ways. For instance, Piller (2017) investigates that language is the nucleus of cultural identity and bilingualism offers a more flexible and inclusive identity establishment. In this research, more than one third of the sample (38.4%) acknowledged they switch between languages as a helpful tool for denoting their identity in more defined terms, which corroborates Piller's (2017) findings. However, the substantial number of respondents who either disagreed (23.1%) or remained neutral (18.5%) complicates this narrative, suggesting that for many, multilingualism does not necessarily equate to greater identity clarity. This could be due to the specific sociolinguistic context of the respondents, where English, Bengali, and Mandarin each serve different roles in personal and public life.

One of the most prominent discoveries is the strongest preference for the native language as a channel of cultural identity expression where 44.6% of students agree and 41.5% of them strongly agree that Bangla, mother tongue, provides them with an easier way to express their own identity. This result fits well with the core idea of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981) that is primarily concerned with language acting as a group-like bond. The native language preference is a form of in-group favoritism where individuals feel a stronger sense of belonging and authenticity when using their mother tongue. This result is also in

line with Fishman's (1999) language loyalty theory, as he suggests that this behavior is prevalent among individuals in such contexts with one group dominating others. In the meantime, many students (78.5%) reported that the medium of instruction in their academia is English which might imply a pragmatic adaptation to the demands of their environment, highlighting the distinction between personal and public language use.

The impact of social context on language selection fits in with the conclusions made from the intercultural communication study. Various works, like Kim (2001) are the source of many investigations that insist upon the influence of the setting on the use of the language. The vast majority of the participants in this study revealed that the choice of language they used were actually shaped by the social context, reinforcing the notion that multilingual people adopt their linguistic behavior according to their social cues and cultural expectations.

The findings on code-switching show some commonalities as well as differences with other investigations in the fields of intercultural communication and multilingualism. The data which proposed that 41.5% of respondents did not have a problem with code-switching and, thus utilize it to align with a particular culture that may be the reflection of perplexity of the literature on how multilingual individuals negotiate their identities. The studies of Auer (1998) and Grosjean (2010) prove the fact that code-switching as a tool for both group affiliation or cultural identity is frequently used in the community. However, the neutral responses are in fact the main findings in this study, suggesting that for Bangladeshi students in China, the connection between code-switching and cultural alignment may not be as strong or simple. This can be seen as a result of the multilingual environment they are in which is dominated by English and Mandarins and the chances to use Bangla, native language, may be limited to their fellow countrymen.

The potential for code-switching to lead to misunderstandings is acknowledged by over half of the respondents (50.8%), with 18.5% strongly agreeing. This finding echoes Bhabha's (1994) notion of the "third space" in

intercultural communication, where linguistic and cultural differences can lead to misinterpretation and confusion. The frequent engagement in code-switching among respondents—particularly the 23.1% who do so “often” and the 12.3% who do so “always”—suggests that while code-switching is a common practice, it is not without its risks in intercultural communication. This finding reflects the situational and context-dependent nature of code-switching, as Blom and Gumperz (1991) argue that multilingual people often adapt their language use in accordance with the communicative demands of the setting.

The matter of language dominance and how it reflects upon social interactions and the sense of affiliation is another focal point of this study. While 38.5% of research participants acknowledged that the dominance of language, Chinese Mandarin, exerts influence on their social interactions, a considerable amount of them (23.1%) strongly disagreed this notion, which may imply that the research population did not experience the effects of Mandarin dominance exclusively. This echoes with Norton’s (2013) argument, which emphasizes the importance of social power and language in determining the inclusivity of social interactions. The dominance of Mandarin also affects the sense of belonging for 35.4% of respondents, which supports Yuval-Davis’ (2006) theory of belonging as contingent on linguistic and cultural inclusion. However, the fact that 26.2% strongly disagreed with this statement suggests that for many, linguistic dominance does not necessarily translate into feelings of exclusion, perhaps due to strong ties to their own linguistic community or a greater level of linguistic resilience.

Furthermore, Bangladeshi students’ language preference in China for expressing complex ideas happens to emphasize the linguistic challenges they are used to face. The fact that 49.2% of respondents feel more comfortable thinking in Bengali but have to express those thoughts in English reflects the tension between cognitive comfort and communicative necessity. This aligns with Canagarajah’s (2012) work on translingual practices, which suggests that multilingual individuals often navigate complex linguistic landscapes by thinking in one language but expressing themselves in another. The large portion of respondents who use

English (33.8%) in academic settings, despite being more comfortable in Bengali, also supports research by Kachru (1992), who emphasizes the dominance of English as a global academic lingua franca. However, the relatively low percentage of students who prefer Mandarin (15.4%) may reflect the fact that, while Mandarin is crucial for social and practical purposes in China, English remains the more dominant language in academic and intellectual spheres for these international students.

The findings on cultural identity and language maintenance reveal that most students (60%) do not feel that their cultural identity has significantly changed since studying in China. This contrasts with studies by Kim (2001), which suggest that intercultural adaptation often leads to shifts in identity as individuals are exposed to new cultural norms and practices. However, the relatively stable sense of identity observed in this study may be attributed to the students' strong ties to their native language and cultural practices, as reflected in the 40% who prioritize maintaining their native language and the 29.2% who regularly engage in cultural activities. This finding suggests that for many international students, maintaining cultural roots through language and activities can serve as a buffer against the pressures of cultural adaptation, a notion supported by Berry's (1997) acculturation theory.

Likewise, some Bangladeshi students studying in China have successfully utilized code-switching as a tool to enhance communication and social rapport, the majority of students have not experienced significant linguistic shifts in their intercultural interactions. This contrasts with Bhatt's (2008) finding, that says code-switching happens to be a robust apparatus for negotiating identity and maintaining relationships in multilingual environments. One participant's acknowledgement of mixing languages to enhance collaboration supports the findings of Zamecnik et al. (2024) that refers to code-switching in professional settings can lead to better group cohesion and task completion. Similarly, the other participant's experience in a healthcare context reflects studies that highlight the

role of language in building patient trust and cultural sensitivity in cross-cultural medical interactions (Brooks et al., 2019).

Contrasting with some existing literature, however, this study found that many respondents did not report significant challenges related to code-switching or maintaining cultural identity through language. Studies like that of Norton (2010) have highlighted the difficulties multilingual individuals face in balancing linguistic and cultural identities, particularly in environments where their native languages are not widely spoken. Yet, many participants in this study seemed to adapt relatively well, particularly in informal settings where they maintained their native language among peers while using English or Mandarin in formal or professional contexts. This might suggest that these students, through either prior exposure or adaptive strategies, were able to navigate linguistic diversity more easily than what has been reported in other cultural contexts.

When it comes to language barriers, the research participants struggle with linguistic essences of Mandarin, notably those related to vocabulary limitations and cultural references. These are the general issues of mastering a new language while culturally expressing themselves. However, unlike the research that is negative on these issues, this study has revealed some participants who considered language learning as a chance to interact with a different culture and develop their own cultural norms. Participant seven, for instance, described that learning Mandarin has not only led to a better understanding of Chinese culture's hidden aspects but also has provided a bridge to the unparalleled authenticity of Chinese culture which might help in finding jobs in the Chinese farms. This goes along with the notion of Byram (1997) that language learning increases the intercultural competence of learners.

Furthermore, the impact of learning Mandarin on the respondents' understanding of Chinese culture and their own cultural identity simply happens to be similar to the findings of Zhu (2011) that argues language learning develops intercultural understanding and empathy. Some of the participants expressed that learning Mandarin expose them to different cultures, Chinese culture, which

illustrates the notion of Ramirez-Esparza and Garcia-Sierra (2014) that is bilingualism enhances cultural sensitivity and hybrid identity formation. Nevertheless, a number of respondents reflect the pragmatic perspective of language acquisition, where the utilitarian purpose for language learning is pursued.

In conclusion, this study underscores the complex relationship between language, cultural identity, and intercultural communication among Bangladeshi international students in China. While many participants shared experiences consistent with the literature, there were also unique nuances in their motivations and challenges, reflecting the diversity of individual cultural adaptation processes.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study demonstrates what is meant by the relationship between language and cultural identity in the context of Bangladeshi international students in China. It also tackles the issues of language use, self-identity, and cultural embedding in society. There is an interesting view among the participants with regard to native language being important in showing cultural identity, and that is emotional connection to one's first language. Nevertheless, the divided opinions on the utility of multilingualism for identity expression suggest varied experiences and personal inclinations, with some embracing linguistic diversity while others remain anchored in a single language.

An important point of view of the study is the consideration of code-switching and its interaction with culture and friendships of individuals. The results suggest that if code switching can ease the challenges of finding one's place in sociocultural networks while reinforcing their commitment to those sociocultural networks, it also creates some problems, such as intercultural miscommunication. This dualism accentuates the nature of language being adjusted in a multicultural society for language is a unifying factor and an alienating one as well. Further, the evidence from language use in academic context suggests that English as a global academic language practiced in Universities cuts across all, overpowered state language including Mandarin

despite the fact that it is used regionally. This is in line with comprehensive global patterns in the dynamics of higher education and the consequences for non-native speakers in these structures.

Recollections pertaining to the safeguarding of one's mother tongue while learning new languages bring forth a number of approaches and attitudes among the respondents. Some of them take their time and are more organized by, for example, incorporating cultural practices and language objectives while others have a more laissez faire, situational practice to this. Such variation points to the individuality as well as the contextual factors that affect language practices and the preservation practices of culture. The respondents have also pointed out the emotional and psychological dimensions of linguistic adaptation, where they have to struggle with language or cultural barriers, leaving them isolated or frustrated.

Moreover, there is a necessity for educational bodies and policy makers to come up with language support strategies for international students. Also, there is a scope of enhancing cultural experiences to students and staff in order to ensure diversity. Also, for international students while learning and especially speaking a new language there should be places where their mother tongue and culture are preserved. These measures will aim at minimizing the drawbacks of language accommodation barriers and facilitate providing a better and more unfolded way of education system.

The study, which has exclusively focused on male students from Bangladesh, blames self-reported data for potential biases as well as the confines of limited generalizability. Responses based on surveys have such a restricted qualitative depth. Future study should include females' voices, and voices of other international students. Also, in-depth longitudinal studies, and investigation of the resources offered by institutions for linguistic and cultural adjustment will provide better understanding of the changing patterns and assimilation as well.

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***Hasan Shaikh***

*LET: Linguistics, Literature and Language Teaching Journal Vol. 14 No. 2 2024*

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