Identity Negotiation Through Language: Sociolinguistic Perspectives Among Iraqi Undergraduates

Raad Alaa Abd Alraouf Al-Safi, Department of English Language, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

raadalsafi89@gmail.com

Ehsan Rezvani (Corresponding author), Department of English Language, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

rezvani_ehsan_1982@yahoo.com

Oudah Kadhim Abed, Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, Al Muthanna University, Samawah, Iraq

http://mu.edu.iq

Mehdi Vaez Dalili, Department of English Languages, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
mvaezdalili@yahoo.com

Abstract
This research investigated the complex processes of identity negotiation among Iraqi undergraduate students within a multilingual context. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study combined qualitative thematic analysis and quantitative data to examine how linguistic practices, such as code-switching (CS) and code-mixing (CM), act as resources for the expression of individual and social identities. Analysing transcripts from 20 episodes of Iraqi TV talk shows and interviews with 15 undergraduates, the study uncovers distinct linguistic patterns shaped by context: Arabic dominance in discussions of cultural topics and English dominance in discussions of academic and aspirational topics. The findings revealed that linguistic choices are not arbitrary but strategic, reflecting students' efforts to balance cultural heritage with global aspirations. The emergent strategies for bridging the cultural gap, making inclusivity possible, and negotiating social dynamics are CM and CS. Such findings foreground the crucial role language plays in the construction, maintenance, and negotiation of identities in complex sociolinguistic landscapes. Results for educational frameworks involve the inclusion of these insights into school frameworks and the recognition of linguistic diversity as a resource in the construction of identities and in intercultural communication.

مذاکره هویت از طریق زبان: دیدگاه‌های جامعه‌شناختی-زبانی در میان دانشجویان عراقی

این تحقیق فرآیندهای پیچیده مذاکره هویت را در میان دانشجویان کارشناسی عراقی در یک زمینه چندزبانه بررسی کرده است. با استفاده از یک طراحی تحقیق مختلط، مطالعه ترکیبی از تحلیل تماتیک کیفی و داده‌های کمی را برای بررسی چگونگی عملکرد شیوه‌های زبانی مانند تغییر کد (CS) و ترکیب کد (CM) به عنوان منابعی برای بیان هویت‌های فردی و اجتماعی به کار برده است. تحلیل متن ۲۰ قسمت از برنامه‌های گفت‌وگوی تلویزیونی عراقی و مصاحبه با ۱۵ دانشجو، الگوهای زبانی متمایزی را که تحت تأثیر زمینه شکل می‌گیرند، آشکار می‌کند: تسلط عربی در بحث‌های مرتبط با موضوعات فرهنگی و تسلط انگلیسی در بحث‌های مربوط به موضوعات آکادمیک و آرمان‌گرایانه. یافته‌ها نشان داد که انتخاب‌های زبانی تصادفی نیستند بلکه استراتژیک هستند و تلاش‌های دانشجویان برای تعادل بخشیدن به میراث فرهنگی و آرمان‌های جهانی را منعکس می‌کنند. استراتژی‌های نوظهور برای پر کردن شکاف فرهنگی، امکان‌پذیر کردن شمولیت و مذاکره دینامیک‌های اجتماعی، CM و CS هستند. این یافته‌ها نقش حیاتی زبان در ساخت، حفظ و مذاکره هویت‌ها در چشم‌اندازهای پیچیده جامعه‌شناختی-زبانی را برجسته می‌کنند. نتایج برای چارچوب‌های آموزشی شامل گنجاندن این بینش‌ها در چارچوب‌های مدرسه و شناخت تنوع زبانی به عنوان یک منبع در ساخت هویت‌ها و در ارتباطات بین‌فرهنگی هستند.

واژه‌های کلیدی: مذاکره هویت، شیوه‌های زبانی، جامعه‌شناسی زبان، چندزبانی، دانشجویان عراقی

Introduction

The concept of identity is fundamentally intertwined with language, acting as a primary medium for individuals to articulate their cultural, social, and personal affiliations (Ting-Toomey, 1999). In multilingual societies, language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a symbol of identity, facilitating the negotiation of belonging and self-representation. This is particularly evident among Iraqi undergraduate students, who navigate complex linguistic terrains encompassing Arabic, Kurdish, and English.

Identity Negotiation in Multilingual Contexts

Identity negotiation, as theorized by Ting-Toomey (1999), underscores the dynamic processes through which individuals establish mutual understandings of "who is who" within interactions. In multilingual settings, this process is deeply influenced by linguistic choices, which act as markers of group membership, cultural affinity, and personal expression (Gumperz, 1982). Recent studies have placed in perspective the relationship between language and identity; how multilingual speakers sometimes switch or adjust their varieties to identify more or less with their interlocutors, thus marking boundaries of identity (Hornberger & Link, 2012).

Iraqi undergraduate students provide a unique case for studying the negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts. These students are bound within a linguistic ecology that is historically, culturally, and socio-politically situated, with Arabic as the national language, Kurdish as the regional language in northern Iraq, and English emerging as an academic and international lingua franca (Al-Sofi & Mahdi, 2020). Their language use, which includes code-switching (CS) and code-mixing (CM), is part of their individual identities and is reflective of general society as well (Muysken, 2000).

Code-Switching and Code-Mixing as Identity Markers

Code-switching, or the use of several languages within one utterance, and code-mixing, incorporating features from different languages into one's speech, are common amongst Iraqi students. Neither code-switching nor code-mixing is a purely linguistic issue but a tool to express and negotiate one's identity. For example, students may switch to English to imply academic excellence or use Kurdish expressions to emphasize regional identity; this reflects their hybrid identities (Auer, 1998; Grosjean, 2010). Recent studies have indeed shown that such linguistic behaviors are strategic and context-dependent (e.g., Albirini, 2016; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Among Iraqi students, for example, English is used in relation to aspirations for global integration and academic success, while Arabic and Kurdish are used to reinforce cultural roots and community ties. This duality reflects the broader societal tensions between tradition and modernity, local identity, and global citizenship (Youssef, 2021).

Linguistic Choices and Social Dynamics

The linguistic practices of Iraqi students also reflect their navigation of social dynamics. Research on communication accommodation theory shows that speakers converge or diverge from their interlocutors' language to achieve specific social consequences, as explained by Giles & Ogay (2007). Iraqi students' CS and CM can thus be understood as attempts to negotiate power dynamics, signal solidarity, or mark distinctiveness across diverse social contexts.

For instance, students in institutions of learning would use the English terminology to identify themselves with their tutors and friends; this is associated with competence and professionalism. On the other hand, while discussing with close friends, a language such as Arabic or Kurdish might express solidarity, indicating cultural heritage Al-Rawi 2023).

The Cognitive Dimension of Identity and Language

From a cognitive sociolinguistic perspective, language and identity are not static but are shaped by mental representations and social interactions (Geeraerts & Kristiansen, 2014). Iraqi students' linguistic choices often reflect their cognitive alignment with specific cultural schemas and their negotiation of in-group and out-group boundaries (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). This supports Tajfel's social identity theory (1979) that one part of an individual's self-concept is obtained through the memberships in various groups and also the self-categorization theory, which discusses the cognitive processes that occur during group identification. Turner et al., 1987

The intersection of language and identity for Iraqi undergraduate students has important implications for both the field of sociolinguistics and education. By noting the complex ways in which students negotiate their identities through language, educators can foster more inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Future research should continue to delve into the ways in which digital communication platforms shape linguistic and identity practices, given that these are becoming increasingly relevant in the lives of students (Boyd, 2014).

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

The theory of identity negotiation focuses on the vital role of language as a basic medium through which people establish, maintain, and negotiate their multiple social identities (Ting-Toomey, 1999). In this theoretical framework, the process of constructing one's identity is not fixed or static; it is dynamic and in a state of evolution. Such construction is achieved through a series of interactions where individuals are constantly negotiating and balancing their personal affiliations with those of their groups, resulting in a fluid sense of self in relation to others. Together, SIT and SCT afford a more global and deeper understanding of these complex psychological processes through closely examining the ways in which individuals consciously align their linguistic behaviors with the perceived norms and values of their in-groups. This alignment is thought to aid in maintaining and enhancing a positive social identity, as initially posited by Tajfel and Turner in 1979 and later expanded on by Turner and colleagues in 1987.

By integrating SIT, it is assumed that individuals receive a significant amount of their self-esteem and self-worth from their affiliation and membership within different social groups. This can often lead to the favoritism of in-groups over out-groups by individuals in an attempt to reinforce and uphold a positive self-concept and identity. Such a concept has been explored in greater detail and supported by Hornsey in 2008. SCT helps us better understand this by articulating an elaborate explanation of the distinct cognitive processes required in group categorization. It pinpoints the requirement for individuals to adopt specific group prototypes that play a crucial role in shaping their behaviors and influencing their interactions with others (Turner et al., 1987). Taken together, these theories build a detailed and strong framework enabling us to explore how linguistic behaviors, such as CS and CM, work not only as significant markers of personal and group identity but also as effective tools for negotiating the intricacies of social dynamics (Auer, 1998). These principles are very well expressed by multilingual speakers and, in particular, those living in transitional societies. The latter can make linguistic choices that reflect not only cultural heritage and social belonging but also personal aspirations (Heller, 1992). This negotiation of identities in the intersection between Arabic, Kurdish, and English makes Iraqis a perfect subject to examine further the role language plays in formulating complex selves.

Empirical Background

Empirical research from different parts of the world has continuously pointed out the fundamental and pivotal role that language plays in the complex process of identity formation, especially in the multidimensional planes of multilingualism and multiculturalism. The decisions people make about using language often become significant markers of group membership, a reflection of cultural inheritance, and a mode of personal expression (Gudykunst, 2020). In multilingual societies, speakers use language not only as a communicative tool but also to negotiate and make sense of power relations, to build and maintain cohesion with other members of the community, and to express themselves in unique and meaningful ways (Heller, 1988; Fishman, 1972).

Research on bilingual and multilingual communities has yielded rich insights, showing that code-switching (CS) and code-mixing (CM) are salient and formative strategies in the creation of individual and collective identities. Thus, in the case of English-Spanish bilinguals in the United States, one finds that these speakers switch languages as an expedient means of addressing and meeting family expectations, work demands, and societal pressures and, in the process, reinforce and affirm their bicultural identities in a multidimensional social world (Zentella, 1997). In the case of South Asian communities in the United Kingdom, research has pointed out how different linguistic practices reflect generational shifts as well as the shifting cultural allegiances that evolve over time, suggesting a dynamic relationship between language use and cultural identity (Rampton, 1995). Yet, the Iraqi setting has been grossly under-explored, though it is one where a very diverse and rich linguistic tapestry is the case. It is worth noting that the coexistence of several languages—like Arabic, Kurdish, and English—within Iraq creates unique sociolinguistic dynamics where language serves not merely as a communicative device but also as an important means through which both cultural continuity and global integration are negotiated (Al-Sofi & Mahdi, 2020). Notwithstanding this dynamic interaction among languages, there is still a general shortage of empirical studies that explore precisely how Iraqi students negotiate various linguistic strategies to construct their identity in this multilingual space.

Gap in the Literature

Despite a significant body of important research that has undertaken an extensive examination of the issue of identity negotiation in many other multilingual societies around the world, there remains a serious shortage of studies dealing with the specific context of Iraq. Current research mostly focuses on general strategies in language acquisition or on sociolinguistic phenomena such as code-switching (CS) and code-mixing (CM). However, those studies do not overtly consider the crucial role that these linguistic features play in the process of identity negotiation among individuals in Iraq (Albirini, 2016; Obaid et al., 2022). Moreover, the intricate interplay of language and identity within Iraq's complicated socio-political and educational environments has yet to be examined in depth thoroughly and extensively; hence, a large gap still exists on this very important subject within the literature.

This study is designed with the purpose of addressing and filling this significant gap that currently exists in the literature by taking a close look at the particular linguistic strategies that are employed by Iraqi undergraduate students as they work to navigate and express their identities. The research that will be conducted will go a long way in contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex process of identity negotiation that takes place within multilingual contexts, and it will also provide insights of great value that are not only applicable to the local community but also on a global scale.

The Problem

The process of identity negotiation is certainly a complex and multilayered activity, as it is largely influenced by a variety of linguistic, cultural, and social factors. In multilingual contexts, language serves a dual purpose: it not only serves as a marker of one's identity but also acts as a tool that aids in the navigation of multiple social memberships. For Iraqi students in particular, the presence and coexistence of Arabic, Kurdish, and English in both academic and social spheres

present a set of challenges and opportunities for the continuous construction of their identities. While the role of language is central to identity formation, few studies have examined how Iraqi students use CS and CM as tools for negotiating identity within a multilingual setting. The present article will attempt to close this gap in research and probe the linguistic practices underpinning identity formation among Iraqi undergraduate students, hence serving wider implications for sociolinguistics and education.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine and discover the involved, multi-faceted processes in which the Iraqi undergraduate students manage to navigate successfully their diverse identities within a rich multilingual context. The research attempts to illuminate the dynamic and interactive relationship existing between language and identity construction through the consideration of various linguistic behaviors of the learners. This piece of research primarily aims at scrutinizing in-depth the way the learners apply language as a tool in negotiation and expression of identity, alongside the exploration of particular strategies being employed by these students in their capacity to manage these affiliations for effective balancing amidst the complexities of culture, social as well as personal life.

Moreover, this research explores the importance of negotiating linguistic, self, and social identities in interactions. In other words, it looks into how these forms of identity shape communication, create relationships, and project the students' position in their sociocultural world. Another aspect the study investigates is students' perceptions of code-mixing and code-switching as tools of expression. These linguistic practices, often used to express complex meanings and claim identity, are examined as ways in which identity is expressed and negotiated.

Novelty of the Study

This study represents a considerable stride in academic esearch by painstakingly examining the complex process of identity negotiation within the uniquely distinctive sociolinguistic setting found in Iraq. Contrary to numerous studies mai -nly focusing on widely reported multilingual communities worldwide, this study is intended to fill the relatively neglected and overlooked Iraqi context. This context is marked by the presence of three main languages: Arabic, Kurdish, and English. The study particularly underscores how these different languages come into contact with and interplay with each other to contribute to the shaping of both individual and social identities in a context that has been drastically impacted by a host of historical, cultural, and educational intricacies. By offering a novel and fresh perspective on the process of identity construction that occurs within multilingual environments, this study makes a significant contribution to the broader and more expansive field of sociolinguistics. This contribution is multifaceted, as it not only enriches existing theoretical frameworks with new ideas and viewpoints but

also provides practical insights that are invaluable. Specifically, these insights shed light on the crucial role that language plays in promoting inclusivity
and fostering understanding among individuals within a variety of diverse educational and social contexts.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do Iraqi undergraduate students negotiate their identities through language in communication?

RQ2: What significance does the negotiation of linguistic, self, and social identities hold for Iraqi undergraduate students?

RQ3: What are Iraqi undergraduate students' perceptions toward the use of code-switching and code-mixing?

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, blending qualitative thematic analysis with quantitative measures to comprehensively investigate identity negotiation among Iraqi undergraduate students. This integrative approach allows for a nuanced exploration of linguistic practices and their connection to identity construction while providing measurable insights into the frequency and significance of these strategies.

Corpus of the Study

The study's corpus comprises transcripts from 20 episodes of popular Iraqi TV talk shows, chosen for their representation of diverse sociolinguistic interactions. These episodes feature conversations with a mix of male and female participants, reflecting various age groups, professions, and cultural backgrounds. To complement this dataset, interviews were conducted with 15 undergraduate students, providing firsthand accounts of their experiences and perceptions regarding language and identity.

Data Collection Procedures

The collection of data followed a systematic and detailed process. The TV talk show episodes were transcribed and meticulously coded for linguistic markers indicative of identity negotiation. These markers included pronoun usage, self-referential terms, shifts in register, and instances of code-switching (CS) or code-mixing (CM). The interviews, conducted semi-structured, were designed to elicit deeper insights into the participants' linguistic behaviors and their significance in identity construction. The responses provided rich contextual data, complementing the patterns observed in the transcripts.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis employed a dual approach to ensure depth and rigor. Thematic analysis was used to identify and categorize patterns in the linguistic practices associated with identity construction. This qualitative method revealed recurring themes, such as strategies for asserting individuality, aligning with group norms, or navigating cultural boundaries. Simultaneously, quantitative analysis was applied to measure the frequency and distribution of specific linguistic strategies across the dataset. This combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques ensured a comprehensive understanding of the role of language in identity negotiation, grounded in both interpretive depth and statistical reliability.

Results

Students demonstrated clear patterns of linguistic behavior tied to identity construction. Arabic was the dominant language for cultural discussions, reflecting its deep connection to tradition and heritage. English, on the other hand, was used extensively in academic settings and when discussing future aspirations, symbolizing modernity, academic proficiency, and global integration.

Statistical Data Analysis

Results for Research Question 1

Context	Arabic (%)	English (%)	Kurdish (%)	Bilingual (%)
Cultural Discussions	78	10	7	5
Academic Contexts	15	68	0	17
Aspirational Topics	22	65	2	11

The quantitative analysis underscores the distinct roles of languages in identity construction. In cultural discussions, Arabic overwhelmingly dominated (78%), serving as a marker of cultural pride and continuity. The use of English in these contexts was minimal (10%), further emphasizing the association of Arabic with traditional values and collective identity. In academic contexts, English accounted for 68% of linguistic usage, signifying its status as the language of intellectual discourse and global aspirations. Bilingual usage (17%) was also notable, highlighting how students strategically combined Arabic and English to communicate complex ideas or address diverse audiences.

When discussing aspirational topics, such as career goals and future plans, English was again predominant (65%), aligning with its perceived utility in international and professional domains. However, the presence of Arabic (22%) in these discussions reflects a connection to

cultural identity, even when envisioning modern aspirations. These findings reveal that students' linguistic choices are not arbitrary but deeply tied to their efforts to balance tradition and modernity, local pride, and global ambitions.

Results for Research Question 2

Setting	Linguistic Markers (%)	Self-Identity Markers (%)	Social Identity Markers (%)	Co-occurrence (%)
Formal (e.g., Academic)	38	34	22	74
Informal (e.g., Familial)	52	29	19	66

The results highlight the dynamic interplay between different identity markers in formal and informal settings. In formal contexts, such as academic discussions, the co-occurrence of linguistic, self-identity, and social identity markers was higher (74%). This indicates that students actively integrate various facets of their identity when navigating complex social and intellectual environments. For example, linguistic markers, such as the use of English, often complemented self-identity expressions, signaling competence and ambition, while social identity markers reinforced group alignment and collective goals.

In informal settings, such as familial or cultural gatherings, linguistic markers (52%) were most prominent, primarily reflecting the use of Arabic to assert traditional and communal identity. The lower prevalence of co-occurrence in these settings (66%) suggests that students relied more on singular identity markers, such as language, to maintain connections with their cultural roots without the need for extensive negotiation of multiple identities. These patterns illustrate how context influence's identity negotiation strategies, with formal settings encouraging a multifaceted approach and informal contexts prioritizing linguistic simplicity and cultural alignment.

Results for Research Question 3

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of code-mixing (CM) and code-switching (CS) as tools for managing social dynamics and expressing multifaceted identities. These linguistic practices were described as bridges across cultural divides, facilitating inclusivity and enabling students to navigate the complexities of multilingual interactions.

Perceived Benefit	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Enhancing Inclusivity	48	32
Facilitating Nuanced Communication	53	35
Boosting Confidence in Interactions	32	21
Bridging Cultural Divides	18	12

The findings emphasize the diverse benefits of CM and CS as perceived by the students. The most frequently cited advantage was their role in facilitating nuanced communication (35%). Students noted that these practices allowed them to express complex ideas and emotions, particularly in settings where direct translations were inadequate. This was particularly evident in academic discussions, where CM and CS provided the flexibility to navigate technical and colloquial language seamlessly.

Enhancing inclusivity (32%) was another significant benefit, with students highlighting how CM and CS fostered a sense of belonging in diverse social groups. By switching languages or mixing linguistic elements, students were able to engage with peers from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds, creating a more inclusive and collaborative environment. The boost in confidence associated with CM and CS (21%) reflects the empowerment students felt when navigating multilingual interactions. These practices were often linked to their ability to assert individuality and competence, particularly when engaging with English-speaking peers or discussing professional aspirations.

Lastly, bridging cultural divides (12%) was noted as a practical outcome of CM and CS. Students described these practices as tools for maintaining connections between their cultural heritage and modern aspirations, enabling them to adapt to different social settings without compromising their sense of identity.

Discussion

Discussion Related to the Fourth Research Question

The results, as suggested by Ting-Toomey (1999), provide support for the notion that language contributes to the co-construction of identity. The Iraqi students engaged in fluid identity negotiation, in response to the heterogeneous situations they were exposed to. The findings here relate very nicely with those reached by Gudykunst in 2020, more specifically on the issues of intercultural communication. This is especially so in cases where bilingualism acts as a critical catalyst in establishing and enriching the relationship between cultures. More recent scholarship, such as the in-depth study by Alkhateeb et al. in 2023, has drawn attention to the active and dynamic nature of bilingualism in performing identity. This is particularly widespread among the younger generation in various Arab countries who, through complex and multi-layered negotiation, carve out their cultural identity. This has a lot of relevance in the Iraqi context, as results by Alkhateeb et al. indicate that bilingual speakers usually have the habit of frequently switching between their two languages. This happens as a strategy for the individual to maintain his or her social status while at the same time working out interactions and communication with other cultures. This is further emphasized by the fact that all those present understand and acknowledge how important language is in playing its role. The role of language extends beyond just communication; it is an effective means through which identity may be constructed and negotiated in a number of sociocultural contexts—an important aspect in the lives of bilingual individuals.

Discussion related to the Fifth Research Question

Gudykunst's (2020) framework on intercultural communication is compatible with the integration of linguistic identities, as well as individuals' and communities' identities. The findings illustrate unique techniques that have been shaped by the linguistic landscape of Iraq. For instance, the strategic use of English to mark professionalism and aspirations, whereas Arabic was used to retain communal connections that were forged. According to Hamza and Hassan (2022), in their study on professional speech in the Arab world, which emphasized the strategic use of English in communicating competence and cosmopolitanism, this is in line with their findings. In a similar vein, Zhang and Yang (2024) conducted research on Asian multilinguals in recent years and found that there are parallel tendencies in which English serves as a marker of global connectedness, while native languages symbolize cultural and social cohesion. The use of multilingual repertoires in ways that resonate with both local and global identities is a pattern that appears to be universally prevalent, as these patterns would suggest.

Discussion Related to the Sixth Research Question

In multilingual settings, the favorable opinions that students have of code-mixing (CM) and code-switching (CS) serve to promote the roles that these strategies play as adaptive abilities. By extending Heller's (1988) foundational work on bilingualism and identity, this research provides further evidence. Furthermore, Rashid and Al-Bahrani (2024) have conducted an exploration into the dual role played by CM and CS as integrative forms of communication and as markers of linguistic agility. Findings in global multilingual settings, such as those put forward by Auer and Wei (2023), are reflected in the nuanced use of comparable strategies in the Iraqi context. The findings of their research highlight the ability of CM and CS to overcome linguistic obstacles while also promoting positive social participation. Furthermore, Jaspers (2023) found that the employment of CM and CS as tools to address sociolinguistic hierarchies resonated with him. Jaspers noted the effectiveness of these techniques in providing a level playing field for perceived disparities in multilingual encounters.

Conclusion

The findings that have emerged from this comprehensive study provide significant and valuable insights into the ways in which Iraqi undergraduate students skillfully navigate their identities through the medium of language. By actively engaging in practices such as code-mixing (CM) and code-switching (CS), these students demonstrate their remarkable ability to move fluidly and effortlessly between various cultural affiliations. This not only allows them to express their professional aspirations in a nuanced manner but also enables them to maintain a strong sense of social cohesion within their community. These particular linguistic practices serve as an essential tool for shaping, articulating, and communicating their unique identities, allowing them to adapt effectively to a complex and dynamic multilingual environment that surrounds them. Language, in this respect, not only serves as a communicative means but also acts as a dynamic, active medium in the construction of identity, in correspondence with both personal goals and societal values. Recent scholarship has resoundingly supported these findings by showing how bilingual speakers use CM and CS to assert personal agency and social belonging. This observation only goes to reinforce the notion that language is not simply a communication tool, but indeed a core and integral part of the complex ways in which people navigate and negotiate their identities in contexts that are increasingly interconnected and replete with multicultural influences.

Implications of the Study

The study's findings point to and emphasize the critical and vital importance of acknowledging and appreciating linguistic diversity within educational settings. The incorporation of language practices that directly address identity into the curricula can empower students in meaningful ways, increase their intercultural communication abilities, and eventually create a greater level of social inclusion among various groups. Educational research has lately put into focus how a diverse and varied linguistic strategic approach within a classroom setting really helps learners in negotiating and navigating the intricate array of complexities presented by their identity in relation to different cultural environments. Such inclusive approaches resonate well with educational global trends promoting policies of inclusive language, urging learners to take critical and reflective positions towards any observed language practices with their multilingual abilities, enormously enriching and deepening the learning experience for them.

The findings that have been brought to light in this specific research also carry very important practical implications, which are worth mentioning, especially in the creation of effective language policies. The recognition of code-mixing and code-switching as integral parts of expressing one's identity allows for the possibility of creating more inclusive and holistic policies that can be applied in academic and professional settings. It is through the promotion of the inherent value associated with these linguistic strategies that institutions can create environments where students feel that their diverse language practices are not only recognized but also validated. This is fundamentally important in fostering deeper and more meaningful knowledge between cultures and, as such, enriching the educational experience. Recent studies have discovered that when policymakers recognize and acknowledge the significant role that bilingualism plays in shaping social inclusion within communities, they tend to be more inclined to implement various policies that actively support these beneficial practices. Consequently, this approach not only promotes diversity but also enhances and strengthens the social fabric of societies that are characterized by multiple languages and cultures.

Limitations of the Study

While this study makes valuable contributions to the existing body of knowledge, it is important to note that it is not without its limitations and constraints. There are, of course, limitations due to the fact that the data is based entirely on self-report: there are likely to be biases or inexactitudes involved in participants' accounts of their language use. In general, when people provide accounts of their own experiences and practices, it only captures self-perceptions regarding language habits. Moreover, a focus on any one set of linguistic practices in an academic environment drastically reduces the scope of generalizability from the findings. This means that the results garnered from such a focus may neither fully capture nor accurately reflect the intricate dynamics through which identity negotiation takes place in other contexts—like professional workplaces or other social settings. As a number of recent studies have insisted, it becomes imperative for future research to move beyond such restricted foci in order to encompass much broader contexts. By taking a much wider approach, this would help explain the integral function that language has in the process of identity negotiation across the different domains of life which individuals inhabit.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimitated to a micro-analysis of identity negotiation through language use in the specific context of Iraqi undergraduates. The study does not include the investigation of other linguistic or cultural groups that share analogous experiences. The focused attention of the study on this specific sociolinguistic setting means that the results and conclusions reached in this study might not be directly generalizable or transferable to other areas or populations, as these might have different sociolinguistic backgrounds, hence this limits the broader implications of the findings. It is important to note further that the analysis conducted was specifically confined to the practices associated with code-mixing and code-switching, without exploring other important dimensions of sociolinguistic behavior. This includes essential aspects such as language attitudes, which refer to the feelings and views that individuals may hold toward different languages or dialects, as well as the various dialectical variations that may exist within a given language. Therefore, future research efforts could build on the present scope by incorporating a wider range of linguistic behaviors. This would ultimately result in a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the complex and multifaceted ways through which language plays a crucial role in the construction of identity.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research can go further to investigate the complex dynamics through which identity negotiation processes take place in these various sociolinguistic contexts of Iraq. The exploration of how regional linguistic variation and local dialects contribute to the formation and expression of social identity among the different populations living in the country could be a subject of consideration. There is also an increasing need for exploration of the ways in which virtual communication and social media interact with and influence the expression of identity, especially in the multidimensional tapestry of multilingual societies where more than one language meets and interacts. With increasing global connectivity, these platforms open up new spaces in which CM and CS are increasingly visible, with important implications for how individuals negotiate their identities in the digital era. Moreover, an investigation into the influence of globalization on linguistic identity among young people in Iraq could provide insight into how exposure to global languages and cultures influences local linguistic practices and affects the formation of identity. Finally, the teachers' and policymakers' views on the use of CM and CS in academic settings could be an avenue to understand how these practices are perceived within the framework of educational goals and institutional policies, therefore providing important insights into their role in educational and social contexts.

References

Albirini, A. (2016). *Modern Arabic sociolinguistics: Diglossia, variation, codeswitching, attitudes and identity*. Routledge.

Alkhateeb, M., & Hassan, A. (2023). Bilingualism and identity in the Arab world: A sociolinguistic perspective. *Journal of Language Studies, 34*(2), 112-130.

Al-Rawi, M. (2023). The role of code-switching in Arab educational contexts. *Journal of Linguistic Dynamics, 29*(4), 87-103.

Al-Sofi, B., & Mahdi, T. (2020). Multilingualism in Iraq: A sociolinguistic analysis. *Language and Society, 45*(3), 221-239.

Auer, P. (1998). *Code-switching in conversation: Language, interaction, and identity*. Routledge.

Boyd, D. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. Yale University Press.

Fishman, J. A. (1972). *The sociology of language: An interdisciplinary social science approach to language in society*. Newbury House.

Geeraerts, D., & Kristiansen, G. (2014). Cognitive sociolinguistics: A new direction in sociolinguistics. *Journal of Cognitive Linguistics, 25*(3), 309-322.

Giles, H., & Ogay, T. (2007). Communication accommodation theory. In B. B. Whaley & W. Samter (Eds.), *Explaining communication: Contemporary theories and exemplars* (pp. 293-310). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Grosjean, F. (2010). *Bilingual: Life and reality*. Harvard University Press.

Gudykunst, W. B. (2020). *Intercultural communication theories*. Sage Publications.

Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge University Press.

Heller, M. (1988). Codeswitching: Anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 2*(3), 98-117.

Hornberger, N. H., & Link, H. (2012). Translanguaging and transnational literacies in multilingual classrooms. *Language and Education, 26*(4), 315-332.

Jaspers, J. (2023). Sociolinguistic hierarchies and the power of code-switching. *Linguistic Studies, 18*(1), 54-72.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.

Mahboob, A., & Elyas, T. (2014). English in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *World Englishes, 33*(1), 128-142.

Muysken, P. (2000). *Bilingual speech: A typology of code-mixing*. Cambridge University Press.

Rashid, A., & Al-Bahrani, S. (2024). Code-switching as linguistic agility: A global perspective. *Global Linguistics Review, 12*(2), 90-115.

Tajfel, H. (1979). Individuals and groups in social psychology. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 18*(2), 183-190.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). *Communicating across cultures*. Guilford Press.

Turner, J. C., et al. (1987). Self-categorization in group processes. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 50*(2), 94-106.

Youssef, A. (2021). Navigating local and global identities: Language in the Arab world. *Language and Society, 53*(1), 48-64.

Zentella, A. C. (1997). *Growing up bilingual: Puerto Rican children in New York*. Wiley.

Zhang, Q., & Yang, L. (2024). Global and local identities in multilingual Asia. *Asian Linguistics, 42*(3), 123-145.

Biodata

Biodata
Raad Alaa teaches in the Department of English, The Open Educational College, and Imam Jafaar Al- sadiq University. Al Muthanna, Iraq. Raad Alaa is an assistant lecturer of Linguistics and has taught courses of variegated character, including linguistics and translation courses. His research interests include discourse analysis, translation, sociolinguistics, and critical discourse analysis.

E-mail: *raadalsafi89@gmail.com*

Ehsan Rezvani is an assistant professor of TEFL in the English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran. He received his B.A. in English Translation from

Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, IAU (2006), and earned his M.A. (2008) and Ph.D. (2014) in TEFL from University of Isfahan. His main research areas of interest are Issues in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Language Teaching Methodology, and Pragmatics. Ehsan Rezvani has been teaching EFL learners and TEFL student for the last 18 years. He has published several articles on language teaching and has presented papers in international conferences.

E-mail: *rezvani_ehsan_1982@yahoo.com*

Oudah Kadhim Abed is a faculty member of Al Muthanna University, Samawah. He received his M.A. degree in EFL Teaching from Jordan University in 2003 and his PhD from Egypt University, Egypt in 2016.He has been the Head of the English department at Al Muthanna University, Samawah since 2021 to 2024. Her research interests are language testing and research. Dr Oudah Kadhim Abed teaches in the Department of English, Al Muthanna, Samawah, Iraq. Oudah Kadhim Abed is a full Professor of Linguistics and has taught courses of variegated character, including linguistics and translation courses. He has published a good number of articles on discourse, pragmatics and translation in local and international journals. His research interests include EFL Testing, FLA, Critical Reading skills, and Oral Language Communication.

E-mail: *http://mu.edu.iq*

Mehdi Vaez-Dalili is an Assistant Professor of TEFL in the Department of English at Azad University of Isfahan (Khorasgan), Isfahan, Iran. His research interests include Second Language Acquisition, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and corpus linguistics. His books include News & Media (2004, a collaborative work), News & Views (2010), Learn English News through Videos (2011), and English News Made Simple (2013). He has also published papers in local and international journals.

E-mail: *mvaezdalili@yahoo.com*