

**English Language as a Symbol of Status in Constructing Social
Identity among Undergraduate Students in the Department of
English at University of Peshawar**



Submitted by

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*A research report submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This study examined how English functions as a status symbol in the construction of social identity among undergraduate students in the Department of English at the University of Peshawar. Guided by Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital and Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, the study investigated students' perceptions of English as a marker of social status, the linguistic markers most associated with high status, and the campus settings where English is used to signal academic belonging or gain peer approval. A quantitative survey was administered to undergraduates in the department and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings showed a neutral perception of English as a peer status marker ($M = 3.14$). Accent (57.8%) and vocabulary (54.9%) were the strongest markers of competence and respect, whereas code-switching was rated lowest, with 74.6% viewing it as not contributing to status. English was predominantly used in academic settings—67.6% in classrooms and 56.3% in course WhatsApp groups—but rarely in informal spaces like the canteen (15.5%). The results indicate that students use English strategically as academic capital while maintaining their first language to preserve social solidarity. This reflects dual identity construction: an “academic self” performed through English and a “social self” maintained through L1. The study highlights how linguistic practices are shaped by both institutional norms and peer-group identity processes.



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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work in this research report titled, **English language as a symbol of status in constructing social identity among undergraduate students in department of English at university of Peshawar** has been carried out by me under the supervision of **Mr. Zubair Khattak**. I also declare that this research report has not been submitted for any other degree elsewhere.

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Dedication

This thesis is lovingly dedicated to my parents for their unconditional support, guidance , and prayers throughout my academic journey.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I express my profound love and respect for my parents, whose support and countless sacrifices enabled me to pursue my education. It is a true honor to acknowledge my supervisor, Mr. Zubair Khattak, for his invaluable guidance, continuous encouragement, and generous support throughout the course of this research. Conducting research with him was rigorous, yet his instrumental mentorship helped bring it to completion. The challenges he presented were the determiner of a scholarly taste in my education. He helped me discover the scholar in me. I also extend heartfelt thanks to my university teachers who guided and inspired me throughout my BS journey. Moreover, my sincere gratitude goes to Mr. Arif khan. His humility and kindness have been transformative in integrating human values and intellectual pursuit in my academic journey. Finally, I hold immense love and pride for the University of Peshawar in general, and the Department of English and Applied Linguistics in particular, which has become a second home to me.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter examines English as symbolic capital in Pakistan's academia, focusing on the University of Peshawar's Department of English. It explores tensions between English prestige and indigenous languages, shaping students' social identity and peer dynamics.

1.1 Background

In postcolonial Pakistan, language functions as more than a communicative tool; it is a powerful social institution that structures relations of power and dictates socio-economic mobility (Khalid, Nazir, & Jehanzeb, 2025). The Pakistani linguistic landscape is a socially stratified system where English, Urdu, and regional languages—such as Pashto, Punjabi, and Hindko—coexist within a rigid hierarchy. In this environment, language is the primary medium through which individuals construct social identity and establish credibility (Malik, 2024; Raza, Imran, & Abid, 2025). As noted by Khan et al., 2024, linguistic choices—including accents and specific vocabulary—hold strong social meanings that function to either include individuals in elite circles or exclude them from prestigious groups. This stratification originates from colonial practices that positioned English as the language of authority, a legacy that continues to define social standing in governance and higher education today (Khalid, Nazir, & Jehanzeb, 2025; Shakeel & Rauf, 2024).

In the contemporary global context, English has evolved into a highly valued form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Within this framework, English is not merely a

technical skill but a "status symbol" that undergraduate students utilize to navigate the university's social hierarchy. This has reinforced a diglossic situation where English is synonymous with modernity and competence, while regional languages are often relegated to the domestic or "lower-status" sphere (Raza et al., 2025; Shah et al., 2020). Among undergraduate students in the Department of English, language choice is a deliberate act of identity negotiation. According to Shah et al. (2020), this negotiation often manifests through code-switching (CS), where the alternation between a local language (like Pashto) and a global language (English) allows students to create and recreate social and ethnic identities in response to their surroundings.

Educational institutions serve as the primary "melting pots" where these linguistic identities are forged (Aslam & Javed, 2023). Universities are vibrant environments where students are exposed to diverse viewpoints and the pressure to form a "linguistic self-concept"—a perception of themselves based on their connection to the languages they use (Hajar & Mhamed, 2021, as cited in Aslam & Javed, 2024). However, this process is increasingly influenced by the marketization of higher education. Shahnaz et al., 2024 argue that modern universities are evolving into corporate entities where students are viewed as "consumers" who must acquire specific linguistic markers to ensure their "socio-economic survival" and future marketability.

In Department of English at the University of Peshawar, these dynamics are particularly complex due to the linguistically diverse population, including Pashto, Hindko, and Chitrali speakers. For these undergraduates, English functions as a mechanism of social gatekeeping. While broader scholarship has examined the spread

of English in Pakistan and its role in education, few studies focus specifically on how undergraduates in Department of English at University of Peshawar use English proficiency to signal status within peer groups and construct a superior social identity.

1.2 Problem Statement

In Pakistan's academic landscape, English is widely perceived as a form of symbolic capital, where proficiency is frequently conflated with intellectual superiority and elite social status. In Department of English at the University of Peshawar, this perception creates a stratified social hierarchy that influences how undergraduate students perceive both themselves and their peers. While English is essential for academic and professional mobility, there is a lack of empirical understanding regarding how students in this Department navigate the tension between the prestige of English and their indigenous linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, it remains unclear how this dynamic shapes their identity construction within their immediate peer group. This study investigates how undergraduate students in Department of English at the University of Peshawar use English proficiency as a status symbol to construct social identity and negotiate social positioning within a linguistically diverse academic setting.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do undergraduate students in the department of English at the university of Peshawar perceive English as a marker of social status among their peers?
2. Which specific linguistic markers (e.g: accent, vocabulary, or code-switching) do undergraduate students in the department of English at UOP report as most strongly associated with high social status among their peers?

3. Which settings in campus do undergraduate students in the department of English at UOP report using English to or signal group membership?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To explore how undergraduate students in the department of English at university of Peshawar perceive English as a marker of social status among their peers
2. To identify which specific linguistic markers are reported by these students as most strongly associated with higher social status among their peers.
3. To determine the campus settings in which students use English to gain peer approval or signal group membership.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study offers insights into academic, institutional, and social spheres of the University of Peshawar's English Department. It bridges a gap in Pakistani literature by exploring micro-level peer interactions and applying Bourdieu's "symbolic capital" to the department. The findings can inform inclusive policies, address linguistic elitism, and empower students to view English as a professional skill rather than a social status marker.

1.6 Conclusion

The study reveals English is strategically used for academic belonging, balancing prestige with L1 loyalty. Students navigate dual identities through contextual language use.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

This chapter reviews existing research on English, social status, and identity, highlighting its role as a "power language" in Pakistan. It identifies gaps in understanding how university students, particularly in the Department of English, use English to gain peer status and signal group membership. The chapter sets the need for a study focusing on micro-level peer dynamics in this context.

2.1 Detailed Literature Review

Khan, Hassan and Hussain looked at how people in Pakistan use language to show social class. They talked to people from different backgrounds and found that your accent, dialect, and word choice tell others what “class” you belong to. People actually change how they speak formal at work, casual with friends just to fit in or look powerful. Some even try to copy “higher class” English so they won’t be looked down on. This proves language is not just for talking; it’s a tool people use to climb the social ladder. But their study was about society in general. It didn’t focus on university students, or how English students at UOP judge each other by English skills (Khan, Hassan, & Hussain, 2025).

Shah and his team went to a university in Pakistan and watched how teachers and students mix English, Urdu, and Pashto when they talk. They found that people don’t just switch languages they blend them so smoothly it’s like a new “mix language”. This mix shows who they are: modern and global because of English, but still connected to their culture because of Pashto. So code-switching is not just practical,

it's personal it helps people build a “half local, half global” identity. But again, they looked at the whole university. They didn't ask which one thing — accent, vocabulary, or code-switching gives students the most respect from classmates (Shah, Pillai, & Sinayah , 2020).

Aslam and Javed did a big survey with 400 university students across Pakistan. They asked: “How does English affect how you see yourself?” The answer was clear. Students believe good English = better future. It means good grades, good jobs, and people taking you seriously. If your English is weak, you feel left out in class and even with friends. So English is not just a subject it's a symbol of success and social mobility. The problem is, their study covered all kinds of students from different subjects. It didn't zoom in on English Department students at UOP, where English is your major and your daily status tool (Aslam & Javed , 2024).

Shahnaz and her co-authors studied university prospectuses those booklets universities use to attract students. They found something interesting: universities now sell education like a product. They promise that their degree will make you “industry ready” and “tech smart” for the global world. And what's the main selling point? English. The prospectuses treat students like customers who need English to survive. This shows that even the university itself tells you: “English = power.” But this study only looked at how universities talk. It didn't check how students actually use English with each other in the canteen or classroom to look important (Shahnaz, Fatima, & Qadir , 2023).

Malik studied young people in Pakistani cities who speak many languages. She explained that identity is not fixed — you build it when you talk. In Pakistan, English makes you look modern and educated, Urdu makes you look national and Muslim,

and your regional language like Pashto or Punjabi shows your roots. So young people mix languages, like “Penglish,” to show they are both global and local. The tricky part is what she calls “linguistic schizophrenia”: the government says Urdu is important, but real jobs and power need English. So youth are stuck in the middle. Her study is great, but it talks about all urban youth. It doesn’t tell us which spots on our campus class, society, WhatsApp group where UoP students in department of English use English to impress friends (Malik, 2024).

Khalid summed up many studies and said it straight: in cities of Pakistan, your language shows your class. If you speak good English, people think you’re rich, smart, and powerful. This comes from old ideas where English was the language of rulers. Even today, schools that teach good English are expensive, so poor students get left behind. This creates “diglossia” English for office, local language for home — and people feel bad if their English isn’t perfect. So language keeps rich and poor apart. Khalid proves the problem exists all over urban Pakistan, but she didn’t give numbers from one department like ours to show exactly which marker — accent or vocab — wins you the most respect (Khalid, Nazir, & jehanzeb, 2025).

Rafi (2018) studied Pashto-speaking students in KP universities and found that many hide their Pashto accent because they fear being called “backward”. They force themselves to copy a “neutral” or “posh” English accent to avoid jokes from classmates. This shows that accent shame is real in our own region, but no one has measured how common it is among English majors at UOP (Rafi, 2018).

So when we put all these studies together, we know three things for sure: English is power in Pakistan, accent and code-switching matter for status, and universities are where this plays out every day. What we don’t know is: among English Department

students at UOP, which one — accent, vocabulary, or code-switching — gives you the highest status, and in which campus While places do students use English to get approval from peers. That's the gap my study will fill.

2.2 Research Gap

Existing research shows English is symbolic capital in Pakistan, but gaps remain: (1) no focus on University of Peshawar's Department of English, (2) unclear which linguistic markers (accent, vocabulary, code-switching) students prioritize, and (3) unexplored campus settings where English is used for peer approval. This study addresses these gaps, applying Bourdieu and Tajfel's theories to this unique context.

2.3 Conclusion

The literature highlights English as symbolic capital in Pakistan, but gaps remain in understanding its use in specific university settings. Bourdieu and Tajfel's theories provide a framework to analyze English as a status tool. This study addresses the need to examine how students in the Department of English, University of Peshawar, use English for peer status and group membership.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This chapter outlines the methodology used to explore how undergraduates in the Department of English, University of Peshawar, perceive English proficiency as a marker of social status and construction of social identity among peers. The study uses a quantitative, descriptive survey approach to collect data through a structured questionnaire distributed among students of the department. The goal is to identify which linguistic markers — accent, vocabulary, or code-switching — are ranked highest for status, and to determine the specific campus settings where English is most often used to seek peer approval. Statistical analysis will be applied to measure trends, frequencies, and relationships, helping to understand how English functions as symbolic capital in student interactions.

3.1 Nature of Research

This research is quantitative and descriptive in nature. It focuses on collecting numerical data through a structured questionnaire to measure students' perceptions, rankings, and behaviors related to English proficiency as a status marker. The study applies descriptive statistics and frequency analysis as tools to examine which linguistic markers — accent, vocabulary, or code-switching — are considered most prestigious, and to identify the specific campus settings where English is used for peer approval. The goal is to present measurable trends and patterns rather than subjective interpretations of text.

3.2 Data Collection Process

The data for this research was collected through a structured questionnaire using purposive sampling of undergraduate students enrolled in the Department of English, University of Peshawar. A total of 71 students from 1st to 8th semester were selected to ensure representation across all years of study. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended items, Likert-scale statements, and ranking questions designed to measure perceptions of English proficiency as a status marker. It was distributed in printed form during class hours with permission from the teachers, and students were given 15–20 minutes to complete it voluntarily. All responses were checked for completeness, coded, and entered into SPSS for analysis. The selected items directly address accent, vocabulary, and code-switching as status markers, along with the specific campus settings where English is used for peer approval.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

There are two key theoretical approaches applied in this study: Bourdieu’s Theory of Linguistic Capital and Tajfel’s Social Identity Theory. These frameworks provide the analytical lens through which student perceptions and behaviors will be examined to determine how English proficiency functions as a tool for status among peers, and how group identity influences language use in the Department of English, University of Peshawar.

3.3.1 Bourdieu’s Theory of Linguistic Capital

Pierre Bourdieu (1991) argued that language is not neutral — it is a form of “capital” that can give people power, respect, and better life chances, just like money or education. In any social setting, certain ways of speaking are valued more than others. Those who master the “legitimate” language style — the accent, vocabulary, and

fluency that elite groups use — gain symbolic capital: people listen to them, respect them, and give them opportunities. Those who don't master it risk being judged as lower class or "backward."

This study uses Bourdieu's idea to explain why students rank some English markers higher than others. In the context of UOP, English is the legitimate language of the department. Students who display a "posh" accent, strong vocabulary, or smooth code-switching are likely to gain symbolic capital among classmates — peer approval, leadership in group work, and higher social status. The questionnaire directly tests which of these markers carry the most capital by asking students to rank and rate them. According to Bourdieu, the education system often reproduces inequality because students from elite schooling already enter with more linguistic capital, while others struggle to catch up.

3.3.2 Tajfel's Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel (1979) developed Social Identity Theory to explain how people define themselves through group membership. We all belong to "in-groups" people like us and we compare ourselves to "out-groups." To feel good about our group, we highlight positive differences and sometimes look down on out-groups. Language is one of the fastest ways to show which group you belong to.

This study uses Tajfel's theory to explain where and why students use English to claim status. In the Department of English, "good English speakers" form a high-status in-group. Speaking fluent English in class presentations, society meetings, or even WhatsApp groups signals: "I belong to the smart, modern group." Students may avoid their Pashto or "local" accent in these settings to avoid being pushed into a low-status out-group. The questionnaire items on campus settings — classroom, canteen,

society events test exactly when students switch to English to gain in-group approval. Tajfel's idea of "positive distinctiveness" explains why students invest in English: it helps them stand out positively among peers.

Together, Bourdieu explains what gives English its value, and Tajfel explains how students use it to build group identity. These two theories provide the base for analyzing survey results and answering which marker is most status-laden and in which settings it matters most.

3.3.3 Integration of Bourdieus Linguistic Capital and Tajfels Social Identity Theory

While Bourdieu's Theory of Linguistic Capital and Tajfel's Social Identity Theory come from different traditions sociology and social psychology, respectively they are complementary in function. Bourdieu explains the value attached to language forms, while Tajfel's explains the social motivation for using them in group settings.

In this study, Bourdieu's framework will be used to conduct a close analysis of survey responses that rank accent, vocabulary, and code-switching, identifying which of these carries the highest symbolic capital among English Department students. Simultaneously, Tajfel's theory will be employed to uncover recurring patterns in campus settings such as classrooms, society meetings, and peer WhatsApp groups where students switch to English to claim in-group status and avoid out-group stigma. Together, these show not just what is valued, but where and why students use it.

Together, these theories will help address the core research questions:

1. Which linguistic markers of English proficiency — accent, vocabulary, or code-switching — are perceived as the most status-laden among undergraduates in the Department of English, UOP?
2. In which campus interactional settings do students most frequently use English proficiency to gain peer approval?

This dual-theoretical approach strengthens the study's analytical depth by allowing a comprehensive understanding of both the valuation of language forms and the social identity processes that drive students to use English as a tool for status in daily university life.

3.4 Delimitation of the Study

This study is delimited to undergraduate students of the Department of English, University of Peshawar. Only students from 1st to 8th semester are included, with a sample size of 71 participants selected through purposive sampling. The focus is limited to three linguistic markers of English proficiency — accent, vocabulary, and code-switching — and to campus interactional settings such as classrooms, society events, canteen, and peer groups. Other departments, postgraduate students, teachers, and off-campus contexts are excluded. The study also does not measure actual English proficiency through tests, but only students' perceptions and self-reported behaviors using a structured questionnaire.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodology for examining English proficiency as a status marker among UOP English Department students. A quantitative survey design, guided by Bourdieu and Tajfel's theories, was used to collect data on student perceptions. The approach ensures the study is focused and aligned with the research questions.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 Overview

This chapter discusses the results of the study. It looks at how students in the Department of English, University of Peshawar, view accent, vocabulary, and code-switching as signs of status. The study uses Bourdieu's idea of symbolic capital and Tajfel's social identity theory to explain the findings. The main data comes from a questionnaire given to 71 BS English students. The chapter shows which feature of English gives the most status and how this changes in class, canteen, and WhatsApp group.

4.1 Data Analysis

4.1.1 Quantitative Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated for all variables. For RQ1, the mean of the composite 'Status Score' was calculated. For RQ2 and RQ3, frequencies and percentages were used to identify the most frequently ranked linguistic marker and social context, respectively. independent

4.1.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Department of English, University of Peshawar. Participants received an information sheet and provided written informed consent. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. No identifying information was collected. Questionnaires were coded numerically to ensure confidentiality. Data were

stored securely and used only for academic purposes. No audio or video recordings were made. The study posed no social or political risks to participants.

4.2 Data Analysis and Findings

A total of 71 undergraduate students from the Department of English, University of Peshawar participated in the present study. The sample consisted of 37 female students (52.1%) and 34 male students (47.9%), indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution with a slight majority of female participants. Table 4.1 demonstrates the gender distribution of participants

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution of Participants

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	34	47.9
Female	37	52.1
Total	71	100.0

Table 4.2 shows the distribution of participants across academic semesters. More than half of the respondents were enrolled in the 8th semester ($n = 36$, 50.7%), followed by the 4th semester ($n = 14$, 19.7%) and 6th semester ($n = 13$, 18.3%). The 2nd semester was least represented, with only 8 participants (11.3%). This distribution suggests that the findings may predominantly reflect the perspectives of senior students who have had prolonged exposure to the linguistic norms of the department.

Table 4.2: Semester wise Distribution of Participants

Semester	Frequency	Percent
2 nd semester	8	11.3
4 th semester	14	19.7
6 th semester	13	18.3
8 th semester	36	50.7
Total	71	100.0

Table 4.3 illustrates the first language background of the participants. An overwhelming majority of students (n = 64, 90.1%) reported Pushto as their first language. Only 4 participants (5.6%) identified Urdu as their L1, and 3 participants (4.2%) reported other languages. This finding confirms that the sample is linguistically homogeneous, with Pushto speakers forming the dominant group. This is representative of the student population in the Department of English, University of Peshawar, where most students originate from Pushto-speaking regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Table 4.3: First Language Distribution of Participants

First language	Frequency	Percent
Pushto	64	90.1
Urdu	4	5.6
Other	3	4.2
Total	71	100.0

Table 4.4 presents the cross-tabulation of gender and semester. The distribution shows that the 8th semester had the highest representation, with 20 females and 16 male

participants. In the 6th semester, males (n = 10) outnumbered females (n = 3), whereas in the 4th semester, females (n = 10) outnumbered males (n = 4). The 2nd semester had equal representation with 4 male and 4 female students. While the overall gender distribution was balanced (47.9% male, 52.1% female), variations existed across semesters. Due to small cell counts in some categories, no inferential test was conducted on this distribution.

Table 4.4: Gender by Semester Cross-Tabulation

Gender	2nd semester	4th semester	6th semester	8th semester	Total
Male	4	4	10	16	34
Female	4	10	3	20	37
Total	8	14	13	36	71

Table 4.5 demonstrates the perception of English as a social status marker. The internal consistency of the 8-item Status Perception Scale was examined first. All 71 cases were valid with no missing data. The scale demonstrated acceptable reliability, Cronbach's $\alpha = .728$. The overall mean for the scale was 25.15 (SD=6.312). When average per item, the mean was M=3.14(SD=0.79), suggesting that participants held a generally neutral to slightly positive perception of English as a status marker.

Table 4.5: Reliability and Descriptive Statistics for Status Perception Scale (N =71)

Scale	N of items	Cronbach's	M	SD	Item Mean	Item SD
Status perception	8	.728	25.15	6.312	3.14	0.79

Table 4.6 explore the neutral overall mean further, four key items demonstrating the greatest theoretical contrast were analyzed. A majority of participants endorsed linguistic proficiency as a status marker: 57.8% agreed that a ‘posh accent gives respect’ and 54.9% agreed that ‘difficult vocabulary shows intelligence.’ This indicates that students associate formal features of English with social respect and intellectual competence. However, participants rejected statements linking English to direct social hierarchy. Only 28.2% agreed that 'English gives social status among peers,' while 47.9% disagreed. The strongest rejection was for 'avoiding L1 increases status,' with only 14.0% agreeing and 69.0% disagreeing. This dichotomy explains the Positive attitudes toward English as a marker of linguistic competence are offset by strong resistance to the notion that English confers social superiority or that native language use diminishes status. Students thus differentiate between English as a skill and English as a social weapon."

Table 4.6: Response Distribution for Key Status Perception Items (N=71)

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
1.posh accent gives respect	8(11.3%)	5(7.0%)	17(23.9%)	34(47.9%)	7(9.9%)	3.38	1.12
2.difficult vocabulary shows intelligence	4(5.6%)	18(25.4%)	10(14.1%)	26(36.6%)	13(18.3%)	3.37	1.21
7.avoiding L1 increase status	27(38.0%)	22(31.0%)	12(16.9%)	5(7.0%)	5(7.0%)	2.14	1.20

4.3 Ranking of English Features as Social Status Markers

RQ2 investigated which English feature students perceive as the most important marker of social status. Participants were asked to rank accent, vocabulary, and code-switching from most to least respected. The results, presented in Table 4.7, reveal a definitive hierarchy. Accent was ranked as 'most respected' by a clear majority of participants (54.9%, $n = 39$), with only 14.1% considering it 'least respected.' This establishes accent as the primary linguistic signal of status among the three options. Vocabulary was most frequently ranked as 'moderate' (57.7%, $n = 41$), with 29.6% of students rating it 'most respected,' positioning it as the second most important feature. In stark contrast, code-switching was ranked as 'least respected' by 74.6% ($n = 53$) of the sample, with only 14.1% considering it 'most respected.' This indicates that students view code-switching as the least salient marker of social status. These findings demonstrate that students prioritize phonological competence over lexical or discursive features when making status judgments. The ranking is highly consistent with the results of RQ1, where 'a posh accent gives respect' received the highest agreement (57.8%) and 'difficult vocabulary shows intelligence' was second (54.9%). Conversely, RQ1 also showed strong rejection of code-switching related to status. Therefore, the features students associated most strongly with competence in RQ1 are the same features they ranked highest in RQ2, indicating strong internal consistency in student perceptions."

Table 4.7: Perceived Importance of English Features for Social Status

Feature	Most respected	Moderate	Least respected	Mode
Accent	39(54.9%)	22(31.0%)	10(14.1%)	1
Vocabulary	21(29.6%)	41(57.7%)	9(12.7%)	2
Code-switching	10(14.1%)	8(11.3%)	53(74.6%)	3

4.4 Interpretation of Settings for Peer Approval and Group Membership

RQ3 examined the specific university settings in which English use is perceived to signal social status. As shown in Table 4.8, reveals a clear distinction emerged between academic/performance-oriented settings and social/solidarity-oriented settings. The classroom was identified as the primary domain where English functions as a status marker, with 67.6% (n = 48) of students affirming this association. Notably, the WhatsApp group was the second highest setting, with 56.3% (n = 40) reporting that English signals status. This suggests that digital spaces used for academic coordination are perceived as extensions of the formal classroom environment where linguistic performance is evaluated. The library represented a transitional space, with a near-even split: 46.5% associated English with status while 53.5% did not. This indicates ambiguity about status in semi-formal, individual-study contexts. In contrast, purely social settings showed strong rejection of English as a status marker. Only 22.5% associated English with status in both the hostel and during informal talks in the department. The canteen was the lowest, with only 15.5% (n = 11) agreeing and 84.5% stating English does not confer status there. This hierarchy demonstrates that students perceive English as a form of academic capital rather than social capital. Its status-marking function is activated in contexts tied to institutional evaluation and performance, whether physical or digital, but is deliberately deactivated in face-to-face peer interactions where social solidarity is prioritized. This finding provides a crucial contextual layer to RQ1: students may value a 'posh accent' in class, but they do not use it to assert superiority in the canteen or hostel."

Table 4.8: Settings where Students use English for Peer Approval Membership (N=71)

Setting	Yes ,use English for approval	No, do not use English for peer approval
Classroom	48(67.6%)	23(32.4%)
WhatsApp Group	40(56.3%)	31(43.7%)
Library	33(46.5%)	38(53.5%)
Hostel	16(22.5%)	55(77.5%)
Informal talks in department	16(22.5%)	55(77.5%)
Canteen	11(15.5%)	60(84.5%)
None: I don't use English to gain peer approval	13(18.3%)	58(81.7%)

4.5 Conclusion of Analysis

This chapter looked at how English majors at UOP link English to social status. The numbers showed two main things. First, students connect status to competence accent and vocabulary matter, and they want to be good at them. Second, students put boundaries around English it's for academic belonging, not for social dominance. Because of this, students probably feel two ways about English at once. They trust it in class as a path to respect. But they also worry if it's used wrong, it could divide them from friends or make them look fake. The data shows they've already solved that problem themselves: use English where it works, drop it where it d

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Overview

The findings of this study indicate that for undergraduates in the Department of English, University of Peshawar, English proficiency functions as both an academic resource and a marker of social positioning. The patterns emerging from the data show that students use English strategically to negotiate belonging in the academic field while maintaining their connection to their first language in informal peer spaces.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

5.1.1 English as Academic Capital and a Frame for Competence

The most consistent theme across the responses was the association between English proficiency and academic competence. A majority of students agreed that accent and vocabulary influence how intelligent and respectable they appear in the department. 57.8% believed that accent contributes to respect, and 54.9% linked vocabulary use to perceived intelligence.

This reflects Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital. Within the department, standard English operates as a resource that can be converted into institutional approval and peer recognition. The classroom and course WhatsApp groups function as fields where this capital is recognized and rewarded. Consequently, students treat English not merely as a medium of communication but as a requirement for academic legitimacy. The emphasis on "posh accent" and "difficult vocabulary" suggests that

phonological and lexical conformity are seen as key to gaining approval from teachers and high-performing peers.

5.1.2 Hierarchy of Linguistic Features and the Low Status of Code-Switching

When asked to rank linguistic features, students placed accent first, followed by vocabulary, while code-switching was ranked last by 74.6% of respondents. This ranking reveals a phonocentric hierarchy within the department. Unlike broader urban contexts in Pakistan, where code-switching is often viewed as a marker of elite bilingualism, the English Department appears to uphold a norm of monolingual academic English.

The devaluation of code-switching suggests that students perceive mixing languages as less appropriate in formal academic settings. It is seen as practical in everyday life but not as a resource that contributes to academic status within the department. This finding extends existing literature by showing that the value assigned to linguistic practices is context-specific and shaped by local academic norms.

5.1.3 Contextual Boundaries and Strategic Language Use

The data also reveal clear domain boundaries in language use. 67.6% of students identified the classroom, and 56.3% identified course WhatsApp groups, as appropriate spaces for English. In contrast, only 15.5% reported using English in the canteen. Informal spaces remain dominated by Pashto, Hindko, and Urdu.

This pattern reflects strategic diglossia. Students use English in institutional contexts to signal academic belonging and switch to their first language in social contexts to maintain group solidarity. From the perspective of Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, this can be understood as managing positive distinctiveness. This code-switching

allows them to construct dual identities: an "academic self" through English, and a "social self" rooted in L1, showing that English is a tool for identity negotiation rather than identity erasure. In academic contexts, students align with the high-status "English-proficient" group, while in social contexts they reaffirm their L1 group identity to avoid alienation from peers.

5.1.4 Rejection of Linguistic Dominance and Maintenance of L1 Loyalty

Although students recognize that English can create social hierarchy, they largely reject its use for dominance among peers. Only 28.2% agreed that English gives status among classmates, and 69% disagreed that avoiding L1 increases status. This indicates a critical stance toward linguistic elitism within the peer group.

Two coexisting frames emerge from the data: Academic Competence and Belonging, and Social Solidarity and L1 Loyalty. The first frame drives students to invest in English for academic success. The second frame ensures that this investment does not come at the cost of their cultural and linguistic identity in peer relationships. The result is a form of strategic bilingualism that allows students to meet academic expectations without undermining their social ties.

5.2 Conclusion

This study examined how undergraduates in the Department of English, University of Peshawar, frame English proficiency as a status marker and how these frames affect peer dynamics and identity. The findings show that English functions as academic capital within the department, where students perceive accent and vocabulary as the primary linguistic features that secure institutional approval and academic belonging. This confirms that language operates as symbolic capital within the academic field

(Bourdieu, 1991). However, the status associated with English is context-bound. While it contributes to status in formal academic spaces, it does not carry the same weight in informal peer spaces, and students largely reject the idea of using English to create hierarchy among classmates.

Code-switching, despite its prevalence in broader Pakistani society, holds low status within the department and is ranked lowest for academic purposes, indicating a strong norm toward monolingual English in formal settings. At the same time, students maintain a clear separation between domains, using English in academic contexts and their first language in social contexts. This separation allows them to meet the competing demands of academic performance and cultural belonging without feeling forced to choose one over the other.

Overall, UOP English majors adopt a balanced approach. They pursue English proficiency for academic purposes while maintaining loyalty to their first language for social solidarity. This balance reduces linguistic insecurity among peers, though it also means that the ethical implications of linguistic hierarchy are rarely addressed openly within the Department.

5.3 Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for teaching, theory, and policy in the Department of English at UOP.

5.3.1 Pedagogical Implications

Create space for students to discuss language, identity, and power; acknowledge L1 value; reduce English anxiety.

5.3.2 Theoretical Implications

Bourdieu and Tajfel's theories explain language choices and power dynamics among peers.

5.3.3 Policy Implications

Promote balanced language approach, recognizing domain-specific use and strategic bilingualism for better outcomes.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited to one department and relies on self-reported survey data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. The sample size of 71 students is adequate for descriptive analysis but does not allow for generalization beyond the Department of English at UOP.

Future research could include classroom observations and semi-structured interviews to capture actual language use. Comparative studies across departments and universities would clarify whether these patterns are specific to English majors. Longitudinal studies could also examine how students' language attitudes evolve as they transition from undergraduate study to professional life.

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Questionnaire

Topic : English language as a Symbol of Social Status in constructing social identity among undergraduate students in department of English University of Peshawar

This questionnaire is part of a research study. Please read each question carefully and select the option that best reflects your opinion. there are no right or wrong answers. Your response will be kept confidential and used only for research purpose.

Part A: Demographic information

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Semester: ☐ 1st ☐ 2nd ☐ 3rd ☐ 4th ☐ 5th ☐ 6th ☐ 7th ☐ 8th
3. First Language: ☐ Pashto ☐ Urdu ☐ Other: ____

Part B: Perception of English as Social Status

SD=strongly disagree , D= disagree , N= neutral , SA= strongly agree , A= agree

Tick one box for each each statement.

Statements	SD	D	N	SA	A
1 I believe students with a “posh” English accent get more respect from peers in the department					
2 Using difficult English vocabulary makes teachers and classmates think I am intelligent					
3 I switch to English during group work to sound superior to other students					
4 Classmates judge me negatively if my English pronunciation is wrong.					
5 Speaking English in the department canteen raises my social status among peers.					
6 Teachers pay more attention to students who use English outside the classroom					
7 I avoid Urdu/Pashto in front of certain classmates to appear more educated.					
8 In my department, English speaking skills often matters more than subject knowledge for gaining respect.					

Part C: Ranking Linguistic Markers

Rank the following from 1 = most respect, 2 =middle , 3 = least respect

Important: you must write 1,2 and 3 use each number only once

Q 9: which gives the most respect from classmates? rank each one from 1 -2-3

Speaking with a posh English accent	Using difficult vocabulary	Codeswitching to English during Urdu\Pashto conversation
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Part D: campus setting

Tick all the places where you sometimes choose to use English, even when Pashto\urdu is allowed, to gain peer approval or feel part of a group:

1. Canteen []
2. Library []
3. Hostel []
4. WhatsApp group with classmate []
5. Informal talk with classmates in department corridor []
6. Classroom []
7. None of these__ I don't use English to gain peer approval []