LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND ENGLISH DIGITAL STORYTELLING PRACTICES IN SOUTH PUNJAB

Mahrukh Choudary [1]
Institute of Humanities and Arts, Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology, Rahim Yar Khan
E-mail: mahrukhch280@gmail.com

Dr. Shazia Andleeb[2]
Institute of Humanities and Arts, Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology, Rahim Yar Khan

Waheed Shahzad*
Corresponding Author*
Institute of Humanities and Arts, Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology, Rahim Yar Khan

Abstract

This paper evaluates how English as a medium has played out in digital storytelling practices and how it engages with the local languages in South Punjab which is a diverse linguistic and socioeconomically disadvantaged area of Pakistan. Based on poststructuralist views on language, identity, and investment, the study takes a qualitative design using the narrative inquiry, critical discourse analysis, and multimodal analysis. The sampling method used was purposive, and three locally produced digital vlogs posted on social media sites were chosen in which spoken storytelling is combined with visual representation and audio. The review indicates that English has been employed strategically and selectively as opposed to being a dominant language of narration. It is mainly a symbolic and a practical resource of digital literacy, modernity, aspiration, and a broader audience reach whereas Saraiki, Punjabi, and Urdu are the key to emotional expression, identity anchoring, and cultural representation. The results also show that code-switching between languages is strategic and structurally diffused and is a product of a complementary multilingual ecology and not a linguistic displacement. Digital storytelling by the English in South Punjab can therefore be seen as a place of negotiation of identity wherein the local and the global are developed simultaneously. The paper has added to the sociolinguistic and applied linguistic research by anticipating the fringe voices and emphasizing how marginalized groups make use of English in the digital community to facilitate power, identity, and cultural maintenance.

Keywords: *Digital storytelling; Language and identity; English in Pakistan; multilingualism; South Punjab*

Introduction

In recent years, digital storytelling has become one such compelling genre for self-representation as people are able to construct, contest and spread their own personal and collective identities using multimodal narratives (Lambert, 2013; Robin, 2008). The proliferation of digital technologies and social media platforms has led storytelling practices to change from traditional orality and literacy practices to digitally mediated environments. In this changing scene, language is central to the representation and interpretation of identity, especially in multilingual and postcolonial contexts (Norton, 2013). The paper is an attempt to analyze this nexus in terms of language, identity politics and English digital storytelling practices with a particular reference to South Punjab--- a region that is linguistically diverse, socioeconomically marginalised with multiple cultural identities.

South Punjab has a variety of local languages, such as Saraiki, Punjabi and Urdu which operate on differentiated power dynamics with English. English language is vested with the

status of a medium of instruction, social elevation and cross-national communication in Pakistan (Rahman, 1999; 2010). In digital storytelling, text is not merely a device to pass across information, and it is symbolic through which individuals develop modern and educated world-aware identities. In fact, English online narratives in South Punjab provide a prominent place through which local consumers can traverse the regional identities and global linguistic and cultural discourses (Pennycook, 2010).

Language and identity cannot be separated because language use is not only the membership of a social group but life ideological orientation and perspectives to the future (Norton, 2000). This relationship is heightened dynamic, user-generated multimodal environment in which narratives can be told in only linguistic forms and then brought to life with the blending of the visual, aural and written postage (Kress, 2010). South Punjab storytellers use digital media (on platforms including YouTube, Facebook and Instagram; in educational software) to develop narratives that simultaneously reflect local experiences of culture and global narrative templates. These practices problematise issues of authenticity, representation and the symbolic capital of English in digitally mediated spaces (Bourdieu 1991).

However, little scholarly consideration has been paid to the regional context; for South Punjab particularly, literature is almost non-existent in terms of digital storytelling. A body of writing exists on urban centres or Global North, which tends to ignore how marginalized or peripheral communities take up English and digital media in order to make their voices heard as a way of becoming visible (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). This research aims to fill this gap by exploring what role English plays in digital storytelling activities in South Punjab, and how these activities intersect with constructing and negotiating individuals'/communities' identity/ies.

By placing English digital storytelling on a local sociolinguistic and cultural landscape, this study enriches more general debates about language, identity, and digital literacies in postcolonial communities. It also illustrates that digital storytelling is not a neutral means of narrating but is instead a social practice individuals use to construct identities and negotiate relationships involving power in an ever more digitally interconnected world (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Significance of Study

The research has enormous academic and social and practical implications in that it enquires about the connection between the language identity, and ELT digital storytelling practices in ignored South Punjab. Focusing on a linguistically and culturally diverse region that has received comparatively little research, the study will be filling a major gap in sociolinguistic and applied linguistic literature, particularly post-colonial and Global South.

Theoretically, the study would add to the bodies of knowledge in the field of language and identity because it would place digital storytelling in a poststructuralist paradigm. It develops previous theatricalizations of identity formation (Norton, 2013; Darvin and Norton, 2015) by demonstrating how the digital platforms are the places where individuals actively negotiate the linguistic resources and other power relations and social positioning. It is expected that the findings will add to the knowledge base on the subject of multilingualism, symbolic capital, and identity enactment in digitally enabled environments.

Empirically, this research will provide the local data about South Punjab that is otherwise marginal to the national and international research. The work traces how English is being borrowed by the indigenous languages, including Saraiki, Punjabi and Urdu, in new digital narratives, which shows how complicated linguistic practices speakers use to establish their presence and control. Such emphasis on the area is made achievable by offending mature urban-centric histories and provides a more sophisticated view of the relationship between

peripheral communities and digital technologies, on the one hand, and the global languages, on the other hand. There are also academic implications of the research of language teaching and informal education of digital literacy. Learning what the learners are creatively doing in the digital domains in English can assist to formulate the curricula design, the instructional practices and evaluation activities that may appreciate the importance of identity and multimodal communication. This will help inform educators and policy makers in their attempt to incorporate digital storytelling in teaching English language as a learning medium in their quest to improve learner engagement, critical thinking and inclusive language pedagogy.

The paper is concerned with digital narration of stories as a type of advocacy and social, cultural representation. The paper will focus on how the marginalized voices end up on the side of asking questions of the verisimilitude, desire, and belonging to the internet society by examining the usage of English language to tell their stories with themselves and the community, by the people of South Punjab. This has an impact on the argument of linguistic inequality, digital inclusion and culture sustainability in Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

The present work is contextualized with the poststructuralist understanding of identity and investment as presented by Norton (2000, 2013), which is a holistic approach that allows introducing the complexity of language use, power, and identity within the social practice. Norton (2000, 2013) views identity as multiple, dynamic and social constructed and claims that people enact their identity through language in different social, historical and institutional spaces. Language in this sense acts as a resource not just for communication, but also for staking out legitimacy, declaring affiliation and jockeying for power. This framework is centred on the concept of investment that accounts for the reasons for which individuals invest in certain languages according to material and symbolic resources they expect to reap from it, education, social mobility, prestige, global reach and so forth. In South Punjab, English is a high-status linguistic resource that is linked to modernity, education, and transnational connectivity; therefore, the digital storytelling in which young people engage can be considered an act of investment in desired identities and imagined futures. Digital platforms add another dimension to this process, as new spaces are opened up for articulating and performing identities beyond the local, which enables storytellers to construct themselves as educated, worldy-wise and politically relevant while also negotiating local cultural formations. Therefore, Norton's theory provides the most applicable and strongest theoretical frame in which to examine of how digital storytelling functions as a site for constructing identity, aspiration and agency through English in South Punjab.

Research Objectives

i. To examine how English is used in digital storytelling practices by individuals in South Punjab.
ii. To Investigate the interaction between English and local languages (Saraiki, Punjabi, Urdu) in digital storytelling contexts.

Research Questions

i. How is English used in digital storytelling practices by individuals in South Punjab?
ii. How does English interact with local languages (Saraiki, Punjabi, and Urdu) within digital storytelling contexts in South Punjab?

Literature Review

Studies of language and identity have time and again highlighted the central importance of language as a resource where individuals can negotiate the various aspects of their social identities. Poststructuralist researchers claim that identity is not monolithic, but fragmented

and negotiated through social interactions and power (Norton, 2000, 2013; Pennycook, 2010). Multilingual research has proven that speakers are selective in their language choice so as to locate themselves and be located within certain social groups, as well as to gain access to symbolic and material resources (Bourdieu, 1991). In post-colonial communities, English can be or has been a status and mobility language, leading to ideas about how speakers consider themselves and their others (Rahman, 2010). These studies offer a conceptual scaffold from which we can appreciate why English features prominently in identity making, especially when linguistic hierarchies coincide with socio-economic disparities.

Digital storytelling as a multimodal practice that can afford identity performance in online spaces has received attention in the literature (Androutsopoulos 2013). To express personal stories in a different and engaging manner, digital storytelling combines linguistic, visual and auditory modalities (Lambert, 2013; Kress, 2010). It has been quite established that new media afford the marginalized to make themselves heard and challenge dominated narratives (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). The articles that concentrate on the language of digital storytelling refer to the ways in which speakers use English to communicate with more people and how they locate their speech within global discourses and rely on the use of local languages to stay culturally authentic (Robin, 2008; Pennycook, 2017). These results highlight the importance of digital storytelling as a locus for language selection and identity interplaying.

The technique of telling a story utilizing current technology has been significantly changed by stories presented via the lens of modern digital media (Zort et al., 2023). The world wide web and other media formats have changed as a result of modernization, allowing for the telling of stories in several dimensions. Thus, unlike a traditional film or book, digital narratives provide the audience with both words and visuals, as well as sounds and the opportunity to pick the story's route (Hales, 2020). This progress may be observed in the usage of web series and interactive fiction, which have abandoned the linear storytelling model. This allows viewers to participate in the creation of the storyline and direction of the story to some level, transforming the audiences into co-creators. As a result, digital storytelling is gradually replacing traditional storytelling forms since it enables the audience to connect more personally and actively with the storyline (Plotnikova & Pirogova, 2023).

Although academic studies have been conducted to examine oral tradition and how new media has influenced all forms of tales, the core role of the new media narrative, including current Web series and interactive fiction, has received little attention. The majority of previous study divides media material between conventional and new media, cinema and television, or digital media, with little discussion of how new media forms are altering narrative processes (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2022).The dynamics of digital representations and narratives, particularly the potential of interaction, have not been well examined in terms of how they alter the concepts of writer/artist and reader/consumer. This gap represents the capacity to investigate how new kinds of audience, participation, agency, and cooperation emerge via digital tales, as well as how all of these aspects influence story structure and ultimate outcomes (Marshall et al., 2023).

While there is a considerable body of work on language, identity and digital storytelling, there has been little interest in marginalized regions such as South Punjab. Current research in Pakistan is mostly centred on urban centres or educational institutions and often fails to take into consideration how people at the periphery appropriate English language in the non-formal and digital spaces (Rahman, 1999, 2010). Finally, it fails to investigate the mediation of English and indigenous languages in online storytelling and how this contributes to

identity production. These void underscores the necessity to conduct localized inquiries in English digital storytelling practices from South Punjab where linguistic diversity, regional peripheriness and spiraling involvement in digitized stimuli collide. This article aims to help to fill this gap by offering specific insights into how language and identity become constructed through English digital storytelling in the relatively unexplored area.

Research Methodology

Research Design

In this paper, the author adopts a qualitative research design to learn how language and identity are produced by the English digital storytelling in South Punjab. A qualitative process will be appropriate because this study will seek to have a good feeling of the idiomatic choices, narrative practices, and identity-strategizing of the participants in a sociocultural context. The paper is interpretive and uses both narrative inquiry and discourse analysis as a way of exploring sense-making in digital narratives.

Research Approach

The study follows a poststructuralist and an interpretivist approach and views language and identity as contextual and social in nature. By doing so, the effect of power relations, ideology and symbolic capital on language use in digital storytelling could be critically analyzed. It is anchored on the model of the examination of linguistic and multimodal elements that are utilized by the storytellers to perform identities online.

Research Context

The study is carried out in South Punjab which is a linguistically varied area of Pakistan with Saraiki, Punjabi, Urdu and English being the languages. The area is a prime backdrop to analyze digital storytelling habits because more people have access to social media and digital portals, which has made people broadcast their stories without limiting it to conventional borders. The research concentrates on digital stories generated and exchanged on websites like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and digital learning platforms.

Participants and Sampling

The participants were consisting of people of South Punjab who will actively produce or distribute digital stories in English or a mixture of English and local languages. The participants are selected through a purposive sampling method in order to choose those that are relevant to the research objectives. The sample will include digital storytellers (students, content creators, educators) to make them diverse in terms of age, gender, and social background.

Data Collection Methods

Various qualitative approaches are used to collect data so that they are rich and credible:

i.   Digital Story Analysis

The social media is used to gather a corpus of sampled English digital stories. The language choice, narrative structure, and multimodal characteristics are examined in these stories.

ii.   Field Notes and Observations.

Observational notes are kept to document contextual data concerning digital practices and engagement of the participants.

Data Analysis

The data is analyzed using the thematic analysis and the critical discourse analysis (CDA). The lexical choices, voice of the story, the linguistic features of the code-switching are addressed in correlation with the visual and audible features. Norton theory of identity and investment is a guideline to the analysis such that the use of language is a sign of identity negotiation, power relations and aspirations. Multimodal analysis does the interpretation of non-linguistic elements in the process of meaning making.

Ethical Considerations

The study follows ethical behavior. They are all informed and obtained, and anonymity and confidentiality are ensured by ensuring that pseudonyms are used. The subjects are informed that they are free to withdraw from research. Digital material available is used carefully and ethics of online research put into consideration.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DATA INTERPRETATION

This study employs purposive sampling to select three digital vlogs that meaningfully represent language use, identity performance, and English digital storytelling practices in South Punjab. The selection process prioritized vlogs that (a) were created by local South Punjab content producers, (b) demonstrated clear multilingual interaction among Saraiki, Punjabi, Urdu, and English, (c) combined spoken narration with visual and aural storytelling, and (d) foregrounded regional culture, lifestyle, or social values.

From a larger pool of available content, three vlogs were chosen for close qualitative and multimodal analysis. The first vlog, ساؤتھ پنجاب دے لوک رواج (*Folk Traditions of South Punjab*), documents wedding rituals, folk music, and communal celebrations. The second vlog, ساؤتھ پنجاب دا روزمرہ جیون (*Everyday Life in South Punjab*), captures routine village activities such as morning markets, tea gatherings, and domestic labor. The third vlog, ساؤتھ پنجاب دے نوجوان (*Youth of South Punjab*), focuses on young people's aspirations, education, and digital engagement.

Together, these vlogs provide diverse yet complementary perspectives on how regional identity is narrated, visualized, and negotiated within online spaces.

Data Sources and Units of Analysis

Each selected vlog is treated as a **multimodal communicative unit**, allowing the analysis of identity construction across multiple semiotic modes. The study examines:

- **Verbal mode**: the use of Saraiki, Punjabi, Urdu, and English, focusing on language preference, shifts, and pragmatic functions.
- **Visual mode**: framing, camera movement, settings, clothing, and facial expressions that convey cultural meaning.
- **Aural mode**: background sounds, folk music, silence, and ambient noise contributing to emotional resonance.
- **Gestural mode**: bodily movement, gaze, posture, and interaction among participants.
- **Symbolic mode**: objects and practices such as traditional dress, village spaces, youth gadgets, and communal rituals.

Data preparation involved verbatim transcription, selective translation, screenshot documentation, and analytic memos for each vlog.

Procedure

The analysis followed a systematic, multi-phase approach. First, the spoken content of each vlog was transcribed, with special attention to code-switching points and culturally loaded expressions. Second, visual sequences were examined frame by frame to identify symbolic imagery, camera positioning, and embodied action. Third, the soundscape was analyzed to determine how music, natural sounds, or conversational noise reinforced cultural themes.

Thematic coding was then applied to all datasets to identify recurring identity markers such as tradition, youth aspiration, belonging, and digital modernity. Each vlog was analyzed independently before cross-vlog comparisons were conducted to highlight similarities and contrasts in identity construction.

Analysis of Vlog 1

Folk Traditions of South Punjab – ساوَتھ پنجاب دے لوک رواج

This vlog foreground's collective identity through the lens of traditional celebrations. The narrator speaks predominantly in Saraiki, occasionally shifting to Urdu when explaining rituals to a wider audience. Saraiki functions as an insider code, signaling shared cultural knowledge and emotional closeness, while Urdu acts as a bridge language for broader comprehension.

Visually, the vlog emphasizes vibrant colors, rhythmic movement, and close-up shots of hands clapping, feet dancing, and faces smiling. The repeated focus on communal participation reinforces the idea that identity in South Punjab is socially grounded rather than individually defined. Background folk music, played on regional instruments, further anchors the narrative in local tradition.

English appears minimally, mainly in greetings or platform-related phrases such as *welcome back* or *subscribe*, suggesting that English is used instrumentally rather than symbolically. In this vlog, identity is framed as inherited, shared, and sustained through ritual practice.

Analysis of Vlog 2

Everyday Life in South Punjab – ساوَتھ پنجاب دا روزمرہ جیون

The second vlog shifts attention from ceremonial culture to ordinary daily practices, highlighting how identity is embedded in routine life. The vlogger alternates between Punjabi and Saraiki, with short English phrases used to narrate transitions or summarize scenes.

Visuals include early morning market scenes, women preparing meals, elders conversing at tea stalls, and children walking to school. These everyday images construct a narrative of continuity and stability, presenting South Punjab as a space of lived experience rather than spectacle.

The soundscape—vendors calling out prices, cups clinking, casual laughter—creates an atmosphere of familiarity and belonging. Gestures such as shared tea, nods of greeting, and relaxed body posture signal social cohesion. English functions here as a stylistic addition, often used to label scenes (e.g., *morning routine*, *village life*), subtly aligning local life with global digital genres.

Analysis of Vlog 3

Youth of South Punjab – ساوَتھ پنجاب دے نوجوان

The third vlog introduces a generational perspective, focusing on youth identity and aspiration. Unlike the previous vlogs, this one features a higher frequency of English, especially when discussing education, career goals, and technology. However, emotional reflections and personal anecdotes are expressed in Saraiki or Punjabi, indicating that local languages remain central to self-expression.

Visually, the vlog blends village settings with modern elements such as smartphones, motorcycles, and college campuses. This contrast symbolizes a hybrid identity—rooted in regional culture yet oriented towards mobility and progress. English here indexes ambition, modernity, and future-oriented thinking, while Saraiki and Punjabi anchor the speaker in local belonging.

The vlog challenges stereotypes of South Punjab as static or backward by presenting youth as digitally aware, articulate, and confident. Identity emerges as negotiated rather than inherited, shaped through education, language choice, and online visibility.

Discourse Analysis Framework

The analysis is guided by the following dimensions:

1. **Contextual positioning** – speaker background, intended audience, and platform affordances.

2. **Language choice and switching** – functional distribution of Saraiki, Punjabi, Urdu, and English.
3. **Cultural representation** – rituals, routines, and generational values.
4. **Narrative stance** – how speakers position themselves in relation to tradition and change.
5. **Multimodal cues** – visual, aural, and embodied resources supporting identity claims.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the author presents the study findings with references to the research objectives and research questions based on the research problem of the use of English and its contact with the local languages in digital storytelling use in South Punjab. Qualitative evidence of the strategy of using multilingual resources to form meaning, identity and digital presence is offered in the analysis of three selected vlogs.

Discussion on Research Objective i

To examine how English is used in digital storytelling practices by individuals in South Punjab.

The results reveal that there are minimal, strategic, and contextual uses of English in digital storytelling practices. Instead of being a dominant language of narration, English is primarily used in platform-based discourse (introductions, openings and calls to action) and abstract contemplation, and prospective topic matters such as education, technology and aspiration.

Throughout the vlogs, English is utilized to give content a structure that is compliant with digital standards on an international level and at the same time retain a local-based storyline. The fact that it exists indicates that people are digital literate and contemporary, and creators can place their stories in wider online genres without losing regional authenticity. Accordingly, English is a facilitating communicative means that increases visibility and accessibility, and not as part of the ruling medium of expression.

This observation is a direct answer to the initial research question in that it shows that the digital storytelling in South Punjab is functional, symbolic, and instrumental such that it is not that it supersedes the local languages but rather supports them.

Discussion on Research Objective ii

To explore the process of English and local languages (Saraiki, Punjabi, Urdu) interacting in the digital storytelling setting.

The English-local language contact in the vlogs under examination is indicative of an intentional code-switching tendency and code mixture. The narration of emotions, explanation of culture, and assertions of belonging is dominated by the Saraiki and Punjabis, and rarely Urdu is used as a language of compromise to understand national interests on the larger scale. English, in comparison, is presented at certain points in which the digital, technical, or abstract senses are needed.

This is an interaction that is not accidental or casual, but it shows how the roles of language are functionally distributed. Local languages are full of cultural richness and identity; meanwhile, English will help to communicate with online platforms and external audiences. These languages do not compete, instead they live in a complementary relationship, vloggers can operate in both local and global communicative space.

The results, therefore, verify that the digital storytelling of South Punjab that is observed in multilingual interaction is a form of linguistic negotiation and not linguistic displacement, which served the second purpose of the research.

Discussion on Research Question i

How is English used in digital storytelling practices by individuals in South Punjab?

As it can be analyzed, the English language is mostly used in:

connection and communication with the audience via digital platforms, distilling or categorizing information, articulating contemporary or idealistic thoughts.

There is seldom the deep emotional narrative or culture narration in English, and they still continue to be rooted in Saraiki and Punjabi. Such a trend shows that English is used as a contextual and pragmatic tool, which serves the digital format instead of defining the narrative. Thus, English in the vlogs in South Punjab can be characterized as selective and role based.

Discussion on Research Question ii

How does English interact with local languages (Saraiki, Punjabi, and Urdu) within digital storytelling contexts in South Punjab?

The English language is in contact with the local languages in the form of intentional code-switching where the foreign language serves a specific communicative role. Saraiki and Punjabi create intimacy, authenticity, and grounding in the culture; Urdu increases the scope in the national environment; and English helps relate the story to the digital conventions on the global level.

This stratified engagement helps vloggers to strike a balance between cultural conservation and online engagement. The results show that English does not affect local linguistic hierarchies but becomes part of them and develops into a multilingual narrative ecology where identity is dynamically constructed.

Integrated Interpretation

In accordance with the research objectives as well as research questions, the results indicate that English digital storytelling in South Punjab is marked with functional multilingualism. English has been found to expand reach and modernity at the expense of regional languages that have been at the heart of meaning making and expression of identities. Digital stories therefore come out as one of the areas in which language communication is based on adaptation, agency and continuity of culture than linguistic loss.

References

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.

Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 35*, 36–56. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000191

De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2012). *Analyzing narrative: Discourse and sociolinguistic perspectives*. Cambridge University Press.

Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge.

Lambert, J. (2013). *Digital storytelling: Capturing lives, creating community* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Longman.

Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.

Pennycook, A. (2010). *Language as a local practice*. Routledge.

Pennycook, A. (2017). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. Routledge.

Rahman, T. (1999). *Language, education, and culture*. Oxford University Press.

Rahman, T. (2010). Language ideology, identity, and the commodification of language in Pakistan. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 14*(2), 233–258. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2010.00440.x

Robin, B. R. (2008). Digital storytelling: A powerful technology tool for the 21st-century classroom. *Theory Into Practice, 47*(3), 220–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840802153916