

Exploring the Social Functions of Language and Its Relationship with Society Among English Major Students

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 30 March 2025 Reviewed: 3 April 2025 - 30 May 2025 Accepted: 15 June 2025 Published: 26 June 2025	<p>Purpose This study aims to identify and analyze the main functions of language in social interactions and to explain the relationship between language and society as perceived by English department students.</p> <p>Methodology The research employs a qualitative approach with Halliday's theory of language functions and the sociolinguistic perspectives of Wardhaugh and Holmes as its theoretical framework. Data were collected through observations and interviews with students to understand language use in social contexts and the influence of social factors on their language practices.</p> <p>Results/Findings The findings reveal that students use various language functions such as expressive, informative, and interactional according to social context, but their awareness of sociolinguistic factors remains limited. This emphasizes that mastery of linguistic forms alone is insufficient without understanding the social contexts that influence language use.</p> <p>Implications The practical implication of this research encourages enhancing the English language curriculum by incorporating awareness of language functions and social factors in order to develop students' communicative competence more comprehensively and effectively in various social situations.</p>
Keywords: Social functions of language; Sociolinguistic; Relationship between language and society; English major students	

1. Introduction

Language is a fundamental element of human communication that transcends mere information exchange; it plays a central role in expressing emotions, maintaining relationships, and shaping social realities. Halliday (1978) argues that language functions as a social semiotic system, meaning that every act of communication is tied to social purposes and social settings. This view highlights that language use is inherently functional and context-dependent, where speakers choose their words not only based on meaning but also to fulfill specific social roles.

In the field of English language education, particularly among English major students, mastering the linguistic forms alone is not sufficient. Students must also acquire communicative competence, which includes understanding when, why, and how to use language appropriately in different social contexts. According to Saville-Troike (2003), communicative competence integrates grammatical knowledge with pragmatic and sociolinguistic understanding, emphasizing the role of social norms in shaping language use.

One of the key theories supporting this research is Halliday's Theory of Language Functions. Halliday (1978) identifies several fundamental functions of language, including the instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal,

heuristic, imaginative, and informative functions. Each function illustrates a different way in which language operates within social interactions. For example, the interactional function refers to the use of language to build and sustain social relationships, which is essential for effective communication among individuals and groups.

In addition to understanding language functions, it is crucial to examine the intricate relationship between language and society. Sociolinguistics, as explained by Wardhaugh (2010) and Holmes (2013), explores how language both shapes and is shaped by social structures, cultural practices, and group identities. Language variation, language choice,

code-switching, and style-shifting are some phenomena that illustrate the influence of societal factors on language behavior. As Holmes (2013) points out, speakers often adjust their language based on social variables such as status, ethnicity, gender, and age, demonstrating the dynamic interaction between linguistic practices and social life.

Given the global role of English today as a lingua franca, English major students are increasingly expected to adapt their communication styles to diverse social contexts. However, observations indicate that many students still have limited awareness of the social functions of language and the influence of societal factors on language use. This lack of sociolinguistic sensitivity could impede their ability to communicate effectively in varied social environments.

Therefore, this research employs Halliday's Functional Theory of Language and Sociolinguistic Perspectives from Wardhaugh and Holmes as the theoretical framework to explore:

(1) the main functions of language in social interaction among English major students, (2) the relationship between language and society as perceived and experienced by them.

The results are expected to contribute both to the theoretical development of sociolinguistics and to the practical enhancement of communicative competence among English major students.

1.1. Problem Statements

According to the research background that has been explained, there are two research questions that the researcher formulates:

1.1.1. What are the main functions of language in social interaction among English major students?

1.1.2. What is the relationship between language and society as perceived and experienced by English major students?

2. Literature review

2.1. Previous study

As a consideration for conducting this research, researchers will use several studies that have been conducted by other researchers. Researchers found several studies that have a focus part such as the same method or theory as the research that is the source in this study. Thus, the author can find differences and similarities in this research. In connection with this, researchers found several previous findings related to this research, as follows:

Batubara et al. (2024) discusses the science of sociolinguistics, its object of study, language and social relations, language and society relations, the impact of changes in society on language, which emerged at the intersection of linguistics with sociology. This article uses descriptive methods to outline how language functions as a social phenomenon, including its practical applications and social implications (e.g., in bilingual communities). It relies on the principles of sociological research to study language as a social event, emphasizing communication, etiquette, and social interaction. Overall, the article emphasizes how language operates within societal contexts and the significance of sociolinguistic research in understanding these dynamics in contemporary times, particularly against the backdrop of globalization and technological advancements.

Dang & Nguyen (2021) investigates the relationship between sociolinguistics and language teaching. Some social factors, such as situation, context, and social setting, that has roles in language teaching. It describes the main factors that influence linguistic choices and explains how well contemporary teaching can take account of them. It also investigates obvious variations in the use of language by people belonging to various facets. This article is grounded in sociolinguistic theory, which explores how language use varies across different social groups, influenced by factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status. The theory examines how language learners navigate language use in social

contexts, emphasizing the importance of teaching students not only grammar rules but also the sociocultural components of language. This article draws on the idea that effective communication is more than just knowing vocabulary and grammar. It includes understanding the social context in which the language is used.

Bedadda (2023) explains the relationship between linguistics and people's tendencies in language. Beginning with a discussion of the emergence of modern linguistic studies, the article describes the emergence of sociolinguistic studies, the differences between sociolinguistics and sociology of language, approaches in

sociolinguistics, and ends with a description of the principles in sociolinguistic research. The study used here is entirely a literature study, and the result is a cumulative theoretical description. In the article, several theories and methods are presented in sociolinguistic studies, including the theory proposed by Labov and Mac Mahon, which focuses on how language variation emerges and changes within a social context. According to Anthony's view, the research approach in sociolinguistics is a set of assumptions about language, society, and sociolinguistics. These include questions such as “who speaks to whom and when, and for what purpose”.

2.2. Pertinent ideas

2.2.1. *Functions of language in social interaction among English major students*

Language plays a crucial role in shaping social interactions, particularly among English major students who are often immersed in both academic and social contexts where language serves various functions. According to Halliday (1978), language functions include instrumental, regulatory, informative, heuristic, interactional, and personal, all of which contribute to students' social interactions. English major students, being deeply engaged in language learning, tend to participate in diverse forms of communication, ranging from formal academic discourse to informal social exchanges. In this context, language serves not only as a tool for academic success but also as a means of building social networks and constructing identity within the university environment, as noted by Hyland (2006). These students use language to connect with peers, negotiate meanings, and develop social identities in both formal and casual settings. Furthermore, since English majors study language in depth, they are frequently exposed to various cultures and social practices, making language a medium for expressing cultural values and ideologies, which ultimately shapes their interactions and perceptions in society (Kramsch, 1998).

2.2.2. *Relationship between language and society as perceived and experienced by English major students*

Language is deeply intertwined with the social structures, norms, and values of the society in which it is spoken. English major students are likely to perceive language as a reflection of societal dynamics, including power relations, social hierarchies, and cultural values. According to Fairclough (2001), language is not merely a tool for communication but also a social practice that constructs and reflects the social world. For these students, the language they use may be closely linked to their sense of self and their position within broader social contexts. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that language is a key factor in constructing social identity, enabling students to align with particular groups or communities based on shared linguistic norms and practices. Moreover, the relationship between language and society is dynamic, with societal changes influencing language use. English major students may experience firsthand how societal shifts, such as globalization, technological advancements, and political movements, affect language in both local and global contexts. They also often reflect on how societal issues like gender, race, and class are mediated through language in their academic and social environments.

2.3. Sociolinguistics

Odilov (2022) defined sociolinguistics as the science that investigates the aims and functions of language in society. It attempts to explain how language differs from one context to another across geographical borders and how people in one context communicate with people in other languages based on the sociocultural contexts, and how the learners can communicate in one context with others.

Jovanovsk (2021), sociolinguistics is the interaction between language, culture, and society. Depending on the focus, virtually any study of language implicates a social connection because, without this human component, language itself would not exist. The language is linked to the interaction between language and culture, language and social phenomena. Sociolinguistics is the study of the link between language and society, of language variation, and attitudes about language. It is supported by Jin (2023), defined as a study of the relationship between language and social factors such as class, age, gender, and ethnicity.

Whereas Bell et al. (1997) said it is a branch of anthropological linguistics that examines how language and culture are related, and how language is used in different social contexts. The study of stylistic and social variation of language (Wardhaugh, 2010). The study of language concerning its socio-cultural context (Baccini, 2009). Sociolinguistics is the study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context on the way language is used (Bell et al, 1997). In all these definitions, it is clear that sociolinguistics is a discipline that makes a link between sociology and linguistics. It is a branch of sociology, and as a concept, it is concerned with how language use is a requirement.

Every society has its linguistic codes that are acceptable for interaction (Odilov, 2022). Sociolinguistics shows how groups in a given society are separated by certain social variables like ethnicity, religion, status, gender, age, and level of education, and how adherence to these variables is used to categorize individuals in social classes (Jovanovsk, 2021). The social study of language is a modern linguistic paradigm because it was the modern linguist who first acknowledged and accepted that language, by its nature, is a totally social phenomenon (Bell et al., 1997).

All definitions mentioned above demonstrate that sociolinguistics is related to language use and society's response to it. Studying sociolinguistics can enhance our perspective related to language with the phenomenon. The basic premise of sociolinguistics is that language is varied and ever-changing. As a result, the language is not uniform or constant. Rather, it is varied and inconsistent for both the individual user and within and among groups of speakers who use the same language. Hence, sociolinguistic phenomena cannot be separated from discussing teaching language because when we want to know more about language, we learn it with all of the issues, including relationship styles, users, the time, and socioculture.

2.4. Sociolinguistic approaches

At least, there are three approaches to sociolinguistics: (1) de Saussure approach. Fishman stated that connotation and a variety of language are associated with speech and individual, not by language and society. The success of communication because of uniformity and homogeneity in society that uses the same symbols; (2) the approach was pioneered by William Labov, which emphasized language varieties. The misconception between speakers occurs because they do not have an equal sociocultural background. (3) Stylistic variety approach. The speakers use the language varieties in communication adapted to the situation (Coupland et al., 2016).

The major study of sociolinguistics is divided into two: micro sociolinguistics and macro sociolinguistics. Micro sociolinguistic refers to study of the language phenomenon in social context symbolized by micro factors, its scope of interpersonal communication (person to person) Three main principles of interaction between individual in a group: (1) attainment interaction of communication; (2) acquisition and modification communicative competence; and (3) language attitudes.

Macro sociolinguistics tends to study sociolinguistic phenomena, including wider variables, population, language deployment, or the continuity of language. it refers to bilingualism, language attitudes, planning, variety, choice, accent, shift, accent, education, etc. Three major terms are noteworthy in macro sociolinguistics as follows: (1) language contact; (2) language conflict; (3) language and social change.

2.5. Language teaching

American psychologist, Steven Pinker, describes language as something so closely tied to human experience that it is almost impossible to imagine human life without it. Language is the communication system used by humans everywhere. This interpersonal communication system allows humans to convey messages to others in a way that no other species can. According to Fasold, language is used to make statements about one's own identity, about oneself in relation to the listener, and to define the situation in which the language itself is used. Blundell, Ninsiana (2018) state, we only speak or write with one purpose: to help someone see our point of view, perhaps or to ask their advice or to reach an agreement with them. Functional use of language is not only based on specific language structures or grammar rules, but how we understand the context and use language to fulfill that purpose.

Teaching can be defined as an interaction between the teacher and the taught as far as it is related to the imparting of the knowledge to the students, to cover almost every aspect of education which the students are expected to learn from a teacher and which the teacher will teach them using all the teaching techniques and aids available to teach.

Language teaching is the process of transferring the language its the phenomenon, from the teacher to learners. It should serve as a guide to obtain all aspects of language. It may cover all facets of language, such as social, cultural, lexicon, syntax, etc. Language teaching related to society and culture is studied in sociolinguistics. It dissects the language related to social factors such as class, age, gender, and ethnicity; therefore, the language users can apply it in an appropriate way. It focuses greater attention on the Social Nature of Learning English as a second/foreign language rather than on students as separate, decontextualized individuals. To understand and promote learning, we look not only at individuals but also at the people who make up their world and the connections between them. These people include not only teachers, but also peers and others, such as administrators and people in the outside community. Cooperation is valued over competition without excluding the latter completely. When students collaborate, they all play leadership roles.

Contrary, in the present, the teacher in teaching language in primary, junior, and senior high school often neglects the sociolinguistic field, especially in foreign language teaching. They tend to teach it mostly relate to how the students able to use grammar and words, local society, not the target language society, therefore, the students more focus on how to arrange the words/ sentences to be a good sentence/paragraph and speak with local accent that sometimes unacceptable of the target language. Related to language teaching, the teacher should consider the individual factors of learners, three of which are age, social, and educational context.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore how language functions in social interaction. This qualitative approach is suitable because it allows for an in-depth analysis of communication patterns, social meanings, and the role of language in various contexts. The research utilizes two primary methods. First, discourse analysis, which focuses on understanding communication patterns, conversational structures, and power relations in language use by examining both spoken and written discourse, including conversations, social media interactions, and formal communication. Second, ethnographic observation, which involves direct observation of real-life social interactions to understand language use in its natural context and helps analyze how individuals communicate in everyday life and how social norms influence language choices.

3.2. Participants

This study employs purposive sampling, selecting participants based on their relevance to the research topic. The participant criteria include individuals aged 20 to 50 years to ensure variation in communication styles and represent diverse social backgrounds, such as students, professionals, and social media users. Additionally, participants are actively engaged in social interactions both in-person and online. The sample size consists of approximately 10 to 15 individuals for interviews, alongside several social groups observed for ethnographic purposes.

3.3. Data collection

This study employs multiple data collection methods to obtain comprehensive and reliable data. First, observation is conducted through both participant and non-participant approaches. Participant observation involves the researcher actively engaging in social interactions to observe language use from an insider's perspective, while non-participant observation entails observing interactions without direct involvement to ensure unbiased analysis. These observations occur in diverse social contexts such as informal conversations among family, friends, or community members, workplace communication, and digital platforms like social media and messaging apps. Key aspects observed include word choice, speech styles, tone, gestures, body language, conversational structures, and social responses. Second, semi-structured interviews are conducted with individuals from various social and cultural backgrounds, providing flexibility to explore key topics while maintaining focus. Sample questions include how participants adjust their language depending on their audience, the influence of language on social interactions, differences in communication across formal and informal settings, the impact of cultural background, and language use in showing politeness or respect. Third, document analysis is used to examine written and spoken texts, such as social media conversations, chat messages, interview transcripts, real-life conversation transcripts, news articles, and advertisements. This analysis aims to identify linguistic patterns and their social implications in public communication.

3.4. Data analysis

The collected data is analyzed using two main techniques. First, thematic analysis is applied to identify recurring themes related to language use and social interaction. This process involves several steps: initially reading and understanding the data to gain a general overview, then identifying key themes such as communication strategies, social identity, and language adaptation, and finally interpreting the findings to relevant linguistic and sociological theories. Second, discourse analysis is employed to focus on the structure of language and the social meanings embedded in communication. This technique examines how language reflects power relations, social status, and interpersonal relationships. Examples of such analysis include exploring how people use language to express politeness or authority and investigating how social media influences and alters communication patterns.

3.4. Ethical considerations

The study adheres strictly to ethical research guidelines to ensure the protection of participants and maintain research integrity. First, informed consent is obtained by providing participants with detailed information about the study before their involvement, and they are assured the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Second, confidentiality is maintained by keeping participant identities private and ensuring that personal data is not shared or used beyond the purposes of the study. Third, anonymity is preserved by excluding real names or any identifying details in the final report. Lastly, the study upholds research integrity by conducting data collection and analysis objectively and without manipulation. This comprehensive methodology, combining observation, interviews, and document analysis, ensures a thorough exploration of how language shapes social interactions and provides valuable insights into communication patterns and their social implications.

4. Results

Researchers have analyzed language in social interactions among graduate students at Makassar State University revealing how language is used to construct meaning, express identity, and negotiate relationships in academic and informal settings. Students often switch between formal academic discourse and local or informal language depending on context, audience, and purpose. This code-switching reflects their linguistic competence and sociocultural awareness. The study also highlights how interactional strategies-such as politeness, turn-taking, and topic management-play an important role in establishing academic collaboration and maintaining peer relationships. This research only took a few postgraduate students at Makassar State University because for several reasons it was not possible to conduct interviews with them. Participants were selected using a commodity sampling technique where selection was based on the availability of the participants under study (Mackey and Gass, 2005).

4.1. What are the main functions of language in social interaction among English major students?

The researchers have identified from the interview results that some postgraduate students at Makassar State University have an understanding of the main function of language in social interaction among college English majors. Nowadays, students often switch between formal academic discourse and local or informal language depending on the context, audience, and purpose in various daily life activities, including in learning English in college.

4.1.1. *Interactional function*

All participants suggested that the interactional function of language among students is not only as a means of communication but also as a means of building social relationships that support academic success and positive social interactions. Language is used to foster social relationships and form social identities between students, the phenomenon of code-switching and code-mixing often occurs to show social closeness or familiarity (Holmes, 2013).

Student 1

"For me, language affects the way I build relationships and show my attitude".

Student 1 argues that language as a means of maintaining interpersonal relationships and affirming social attitudes (interactional function).

Student 2

"Language shapes how I relate to others. The words I choose, the tone of my voice, and the way I express my emotions can either strengthen relationships or create misunderstandings. For example, being able to express gratitude, sincerely apologize, or make a joke at the right time can help build relationships".

Student 2 pointed out that language is used to create and strengthen social connections.

Student 3

"Of course, language greatly influences me in social interaction. Interaction is impossible without using language. In this case, the more you understand and master the language, the wider and more diverse your social interactions will be".

Student 3 emphasized the importance of language in expanding social networks and adapting across contexts.

Student 4

"Language greatly influences my social interactions because through language, I can show my attitude, feelings, and intentions. The choice of words and tone of voice can determine whether an interaction goes smoothly or not. Polite and clear language usually makes communication more effective"

Student 4 highlighted the role of language in regulating the smoothness and quality of social interactions.

Student 5

"Language helps me connect with different groups; it builds trust when I speak Bugis with fellow Bugis speakers and shows professionalism when I use formal English or Indonesian".

Student 5 stated that the function of language is as a tool to bridge social relations in various communities.

4.1.2. *Personal Function*

While the students were aware of the function in social interaction, they also brought up the function in personal terms in everyday life. Some felt that in the context of the personal function of language among students, language is used as a means of expression. Students use language to express feelings, opinions, and personal identity in both academic and informal contexts (Brown, 2007).

Student 1

"I adjust my language based on age, status, and relationships..."

Student 1 demonstrates self-awareness and expression of personal identity in language use.

Student 2

"I also pay attention to tone of voice, gestures, and even the topic of conversation".

Student 2 argues that language is a means of self-expression that considers social and personal contexts.

Student 3

"The point is to understand each other's intentions on the topic".

Student 3 feels that language becomes a medium of expression of intention and a desire to be personally understood.

Student 4

"Through language, I can show my attitudes, feelings, and intentions".

Student 4 responds very clearly to personal functions and expresses attitudes and emotions in interactions.

Student 5

"Language builds trust when I speak Bugis with fellow speakers..."

Student 5 feels that language is a representation of cultural identity and personal self-confidence.

4.2. What is the relationship between language and society as perceived and experienced by English major students?

The researchers have discovered from the interview results that English major students at Makassar State University perceive language and society as deeply interconnected. Students recognize that language use often shifts based on the surrounding social context and the cultural background of the speakers. These perceptions influence the way they communicate both inside and outside academic settings.

4.2.1. *Language adjustment based on social context*

All participants emphasized that language is frequently adjusted depending on the social context in which communication takes place. Students reported modifying their language based on the level of formality, relationship with the listener, and the setting (e.g., classroom, peer group, or public interaction). These adjustments help them manage impressions, maintain politeness, and ensure effective communication.

Student 1

"I adjust my language based on age, status, and relationship with the person I am talking to, and adapt to the conditions and context".

Demonstrates a high awareness of sociolinguistic adaptation in response to social structures. This reflects an understanding of how language is shaped by context.

Student 2

"I adjust my language based on relationship, age, and social status... I also pay attention to tone, gestures, and even the topic of conversation".

Shows a strong understanding that communication involves both verbal and non-verbal elements, influenced by social factors.

Student 3

"I try to make the conversation mutually understandable... if speaking English, I adapt... and use body language if needed".

Emphasizes cross-linguistic and intercultural adaptation, highlighting the use of both verbal and non-verbal strategies for effective communication.

Student 4

"When speaking with lecturers or older people, I use more formal and polite language... with peers I use more relaxed and informal language".

Clearly distinguishes communication styles based on social hierarchy, reflecting the social control function of language.

Student 5

"I adjust my language depending on who I talk to—Bugis with family, Indonesian with most people, and English in academic settings".

Demonstrates strong multilingual flexibility, using language as a tool to navigate different social domains.

4.2.2. *Influence of cultural background on language practice*

Participants also noted that their cultural background strongly influences their language practices. Some expressions, politeness strategies, and conversational styles are shaped by their upbringing and community norms. This cultural influence is often evident in multilingual interactions and when using local languages or dialects alongside English.

Student 1

"My culture teaches me to speak politely, especially to those who are older".

Reflects internalization of cultural values through polite speech as a social norm in communication.

Student 2

"In my culture... I use honorifics or formal titles... I tend to be indirect when giving criticism... cultural values influence my word choices and even body language".

Shows a deep awareness of how culture shapes both pragmatic and ethical aspects of communication.

Student 3

"As a Bugis person... I always include the word 'Tabe' as a sign of respect".

Local language is used as a cultural symbol and a tool of respect, reflecting cultural practices embedded in daily speech.

Student 4

"In my culture, it's important to show respect to older people... I tend to use polite language and control my body posture".

Culture serves as a guideline in selecting polite language strategies and respectful behavior.

Student 5

"My Bugis background teaches me to be respectful... which is reflected in my word choices and tone".

Explicitly highlights the connection between cultural values and verbal expressions, including tone and communication style.

Based on the classification above, it can be concluded all respondents adjust their speech based on social context, such as age, status, and relationship. This shows a strong sociolinguistic awareness among English major students. Cultural background plays a crucial role in shaping their communication patterns. Values like respect for

elders, the use of traditional greetings (such as 'Tabe'), and indirect communication styles reflect the deep influence of local culture on language practices.

5. Discussions

The results show that language is important for social interaction and self-expression among postgraduate English majors at Makassar State University. The participants showed a keen understanding that language is a vital tool for establishing and preserving social relationships in addition to being a tool for communication. This lends credence to Holmes' (2013) theory of language's interactional function, according to which code-switching and code-mixing are tactics used to convey social intimacy and negotiate diverse social situations. As a reflection of their sociolinguistic proficiency and cultural awareness, students dynamically modify their language according to the interlocutor, the formality of the situation, and the goal of the discussion.

This research also emphasizes how language has a personal purpose, as students use it to communicate their identities, feelings, and attitudes. In line with Brown's (2007) statement that language serves as a medium for individual expression, participants such as Ms. Asfira and Mr. Hasrun highlighted the importance of language in expressing self-identity and cultural affiliation. Students' metalinguistic awareness and adaptive communicative competence are further demonstrated by their ability to modify language according to their age, status, and closeness of relationship.

All things considered, language serves a variety of purposes for these students, allowing them to affirm their cultural and personal identities while also fostering social ties. This dual function of language emphasizes how crucial it is to develop communicative abilities in higher education settings that are both personally meaningful and appropriate for the context.

The findings in this section show that students majoring in English at Makassar State University have a high sociolinguistic awareness of the relationship between language and society. This relationship is reflected through two main aspects, namely language adjustment based on social context and the influence of cultural background on language practices. First, regarding language adjustment based on social context, the students showed that they were able to adjust their language style according to the interlocutor, social status, age, and conversational environment. This supports Holmes' (2013) theory that language and speech style choices depend on the social context, such as interpersonal relationships and social structure. Students actively practice verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that demonstrate linguistic flexibility, such as the use of formal language when speaking with lecturers, and informal language when interacting with peers. In addition, the use of body language, tone of voice, and topic selection are also adjusted to create effective and polite communication. Second, regarding the influence of cultural background on language practice, the students stated that their culture shapes the way they communicate, both in word choice, delivery style, and non-verbal behavior. This is in line with Duranti's (1997) view that language is a reflection of culture, and that one's language practices cannot be separated from the cultural values internalized since childhood. For example, the use of the word "Tabe" in Bugis culture is a symbol of respect, while indirect strategies in delivering criticism reflect the value of social harmony in the local culture.

Both findings confirm that English majors not only study language as a linguistic system, but also understand the social and cultural functions of language. They show high cross-cultural adaptability and pragmatic awareness, which are essential for successful communication in various social and academic situations. This shows that their command of English is not only structural, but also communicative and contextual.

Thus, it can be concluded that students view language as a dynamic social tool, which is influenced by and at the same time shapes society. This is particularly relevant in foreign language learning, where an understanding of the social and cultural context is key to effective and meaningful language use.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the social functions of language and its relationship with society among English major students at Makassar State University. Based on the analysis of data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, it can be concluded that students demonstrated a strong understanding of how language functions within social life. Language is not merely used as a medium for conveying information, but more importantly, as a tool to build, maintain, and negotiate social relationships. The students were able to adjust their linguistic style depending on various social factors such as the status of the interlocutor, the nature of their relationship, and whether the situation was formal or informal. In practice, students frequently employed code-switching and code-mixing as strategies to indicate social closeness, politeness, or professionalism. These findings support Halliday's theory on the interactional function of language and Holmes's concept of sociolinguistic competence (Hartika & Ardianto, 2024; Korneeva et al., 2019).

Furthermore, language also serves a significant personal function for the students, particularly in expressing identity, emotions, and attitudes. The participants exhibited a high level of awareness in choosing their words, tone,

and nonverbal expressions, depending on both personal and social contexts. This reveals that they possess not only linguistic knowledge but also an understanding of how language is shaped by and shapes the social and cultural environment.

Additionally, the study shows that students recognize the deep interconnection between language and society. They acknowledged that cultural background, especially local values such as those rooted in Bugis culture, greatly influences their language practices. Values like showing respect to elders, using polite expressions, and employing indirect communication strategies are embedded in their daily language use (Tareche, 2023). This indicates that the students possess a strong sense of sociolinguistic awareness, which helps them communicate effectively and adaptively in various social settings, both locally and globally.

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the importance of developing sociolinguistic competence alongside linguistic proficiency in English language education. English major students need not only structural knowledge of the language but also social and cultural sensitivity that enables them to use language appropriately, meaningfully, and effectively in real-life communication.

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