Generational Perspectives on Language Attitudes and Linguistic Identity in a Multilingual Community: The Case of Orange Walk, Northern Belize

Rini, Luisa

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Abstract: Belize is characterised by extensive multilingualism, with over ten languages spoken nationally; this study centres on Spanish, English, and Belizean Kriol. While previous research has recognised multilingual practices as central to Belizean language use, the intergenerational dynamics between language attitudes and linguistic identity remain insufficiently examined. This study explores how language attitudes and practices inform generational perceptions of linguistic identity in Orange Walk, Northern Belize. Forty-eight participants, aged 18 to 65, engaged in paired, recorded discussions addressing their language practices, identity, perceptions of language prestige, and generational similarities and differences. Additionally, they completed a linguistic portrait, which was discussed in the recordings. Finally, participants completed a demographic questionnaire to provide contextual information about their age, background, and language use. The findings indicate that multilingualism is normative in Orange Walk, yet remains contingent on context, interlocutor, and age. Moreover, the relationship between language and identity emerges as highly personal, multifaceted, and dynamic. These results offer valuable insights for future research on the interplay of language and identity in multilingual communities, with particular relevance for multilingual identity theory and sociolinguistic studies in comparable settings.

Key words: Language Attitudes, Language Practices, Linguistic Identity, Multilingualism.

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1. Introduction

Europe is often perceived as linguistically diverse and celebrated for its unique blend of many languages. However, this perception reflects a Eurocentric approach to languages that is embedded in European and Western discourses (Mikosz, 1998). Such a perspective treats European languages (e.g. English, French, Spanish, etc.) as "legitimate" ones and undermines other non-European languages (Medina, 2024). A Eurocentric view interprets the world from a European or Western point of view (Mikosz, 1998; Medina, 2024), often assuming that European norms are universal benchmarks to which other contexts should be compared. When multilingualism is examined through this Eurocentric lens, it obscures the existence and significance of diverse linguistic realities both beyond and within Europe. Medina (2024) argues that such Eurocentric biases persist in contemporary linguistics, where research and assessment practices frequently privilege monolingualism and dominant European languages (*CoARA*, n.d.). Even if in practice Europe is multilingual, ideologically, Europe is still linked to monolingual biases: the idea that speaking one language is the norm, and that speaking multiple languages is unusual. This ideological stance is rooted in historical and institutional factors, leading to a disconnect between reality and policy discourse (Grover, 2023). This bias leads to the assumption that one language matches one fixed identity. However, in many countries, it is normal to speak multiple languages. Therefore, it is essential to critically examine and challenge these biases when discussing multilingualism.

In fact, linguistic diversity is even more pronounced in other regions of the world, where a single country may be home to hundreds of languages. For example, Papua New Guinea has 840 spoken languages, Indonesia 711, and Nigeria 517 (*Glottolog 5.2* -, n.d.). The sheer number of languages within these individual countries is particularly notable when contrasted with Europe, which has 24 official languages and approximately 200 languages spoken across the continent (European Union, n.d.; Pearce, 2024). In such highly multilingual societies, frequent cross-linguistic interaction among speakers fosters environments that are especially conducive to multilingual language practices (Kik et al., 2021).

While this illustrates global linguistic diversity, a small country like Belize also serves as an interesting example of multilingualism. Despite its modest size and location in Central America, bordering Mexico and Guatemala, Belize is home to around ten languages spoken by its population: English is the official language, while Spanish and Kriol are also spoken by the majority of Belizeans. Additionally, several Mayan languages, such as Mopan Maya and

Q'eqchi' Maya, are present, along with a few immigrant languages, including Hindi and Chinese (Gómez Menjívar & Salmon, 2017).

To further clarify what it means for a country like Belize to be multilingual, it is important to define the concept itself. A multilingual individual is defined by Siebenhütter (2023, p.2) as "someone who regularly uses two or more languages in everyday life, and switches between languages depending on the situation, partner, and topic of the conversation."

Thus, multilingualism is not only about the number of languages spoken but how they are used in daily life and how they interact. Multilingualism provides insight into the linguistic landscape, capturing the "what" of language use. In the context of this study, multilingualism serves as the backdrop, encompassing language practices, language attitudes, and linguistic identity.

Language practices refer to the actual use of languages in daily life, representing how linguistic behaviour occurs. In Belize, these practices are diverse and complex and include phenomena such as code-switching (CS), where speakers alternate their languages or dialects within a single conversation, often to express identity or adapt to the social context (Bullock & Toribio, 2009). It is a powerful tool for navigating social dynamics. For instance, a Belizean might begin a sentence in English when discussing formal topics like school or work, then switch to Belizean Kriol or Spanish when expressing personal feelings or speaking with friends:: *"Con tus papas español, con tus amigos Kriol, or English depends which friends, con tus superiors English"*. Another practice is language choice (the selection of a particular language for specific contexts or situations) (Medina, 2020). Finally, language maintenance or shift describes how some communities actively preserve their heritage languages, while others experience a transition toward different languages over time (Potowski, 2013).

Language attitudes refer to individuals' perceptions and evaluations of different languages or speech varieties. These attitudes can be positive, negative, or neutral, and they influence how individuals use language, including which languages people choose to speak, with whom, and in which contexts (Holtgraves et al., 2014). Language attitudes shape language practices. Community perceptions of particular languages often determine how frequently and in which contexts these languages are used. Importantly, language attitudes play a crucial role in processes of language maintenance or shift; positive attitudes can support the preservation of a language, while negative attitudes may contribute to its decline.

Linguistic identity refers to how language shapes individuals' sense of self and belonging, particularly as they navigate multiple languages (Siebenhütter, 2023). It represents the "why" behind multilingualism, capturing the social meaning behind and personal significance attached to language use. Language practices and attitudes can be understood as a performance of identity, as discussed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) and Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1987). At the same time, linguistic identity is not only performed but also constructed through language use; it is a dynamic process in which identity both shapes and is shaped by language practices and attitudes (Siebenhütter, 2023; Schneider, 2025).

Lastly, age is used as a lens to observe this multilingual context. In Belize, as in many multilingual societies, older and younger generations may have different experiences with language due to changes in education, migration patterns, exposure to media, and shifting cultural values (Holmes, 2013). For example, older speakers may have grown up using Spanish or Mayan languages at home, while younger generations might be more exposed to English and Kriol through schooling and popular culture (Balam, 2013; Balam, 2016; Balam & Prada-Pérez, 2017; Schneider, 2021). Furthermore, research shows that the age at which an individual is first exposed to a language has an impact on their language abilities and which language they feel more comfortable using (Kovelman et al., 2008). Thus, considering age provides insight not only into which languages are spoken but also into how patterns of language use may vary across generations.

Previous research in Belize demonstrates that switching between English, Kriol, and Spanish is a routine aspect of daily communication, with CS serving as a linguistic norm (Balam, 2016; Schneider, 2021). This linguistic diversity encompasses not only the languages spoken or mixed, but also the attitudes speakers hold toward these languages.

Belizean multilingualism has its origins in a complex history shaped by colonisation and migration, resulting in the coexistence of English, Spanish, Kriol, and various Mayan languages. Multilingualism has existed in Belize since before the colonial era, particularly through the presence of multiple Mayan languages. In recent decades, increased mobility, advances in communication, and the growth of tourism have contributed to the rise of Spanish/English bilingualism and Spanish/English/Kriol trilingualism, especially in Northern Belize (Balam et al., 2014). These languages coexist at both the community level (such as in schools, churches, and markets) and the individual level, where speakers select and mix languages according to context. For example, market vendors may use Spanish, church services may be conducted in English, and shopkeepers might address customers in Kriol.

Within these varied interactions, one individual can still decide to mix Spanish and English in one sentence.

Compared to its neighbouring countries, where colonial languages also interact with local indigenous languages, Belize stands out for the widespread and socially accepted nature of CS. Indeed, in many Latin American countries (such as Mexico), indigenous languages are present but often stigmatised, and children are educated almost exclusively in Spanish, which discourages multilingual practices (Sánchez, 2018). In contrast, research consistently shows that CS in Belize is not only common but also positively valued and integrated into daily life, reflecting a unique sociolinguistic environment where fluid and normalized CS occurs among dominant languages (English, Kriol, Spanish) as well as minority languages (Mayan languages, Garifuna and Mennonite German) alike (Balam, 2013; Schneider, 2021) (Administrator, 2024; Minority Rights Group, 2024). This acceptance and normalisation of CS distinguishes Belize's multilingual context from those of its neighbours, where language hierarchies and monolingual biases are more pronounced.

This study focuses on the district of Orange Walk in Northern Belize, where Spanish is the most spoken language, while English and Kriol serve as lingua francas (The Statistical Institute of Belize, 2010). This trilingual environment is distinct from Southern Belize, where Garifuna and Kriol are more prevalent. As such, Orange Walk offers a unique setting to analyse the interactions between English, Spanish, and Kriol. Importantly, language use and attitudes are dynamic and often shift across generations (Holmes, 2013).

The central aim of this study is to explore how language practices and attitudes influence identity across different age groups in Orange Walk, Northern Belize. Specifically, it seeks to address the following research question:

Do relationships exist between current language practices, language attitudes and linguistic identity across ages in Northern Belize (Orange Walk)?

If so, the study further investigates:

- How do speakers, across ages, explicitly describe their attitudes toward local languages? *(addresses age differences and language attitudes)*
- Do self-reported attitudes translate into or align with actual language practices? *(connect language attitudes and language practices)*

- Do speakers associate specific language(s) or language practices with their linguistic identity? *(links language practices and attitudes to linguistic identity)*
- Are there differences between age groups in self-reported attitudes and identity associations? *(focuses on generational differences in language attitudes and linguistic identity)*

To explore the theme of how multilingual practices and attitudes relate to linguistic identity across generations in Belize, we recorded guided conversations between two participants, asked them to complete the Language Portrait experiment and a demographic survey.

The study is structured as follows: (1) exploring previous research, what we know about multilingualism and language practices in Belize, this includes an overview of language varieties and identity in Belize and identity construction through language; (2) explain the methodology; (3) expose the results and (4) discuss the findings : (a) multilingual language practices as normative practices, (b) contextual and generational variation inattitudes and practices, (c) stability in change: identity across generations and (d) intergenerational shift: english's rise and the future of multilingualism.

This research holds significance on multiple levels. At the policy level, its findings can inform language and education strategies in Belize, ensuring they more accurately reflect the country's multilingual realities. From a theoretical viewpoint, the study challenges monolingual biases and Eurocentric frameworks by foregrounding the fluid and dynamic nature of multilingualism in Belize.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Linguistic History and Diversity in Belize

Belize's historical roots date back to the Maya civilisation, which prospered for centuries before gradually declining from the 10th century onwards (Balam, 2013, 2014, 2016; Balam et al., 2020). After a long period following the decline of the Mayan civilisation, European colonisation started in the 17th century. Although the Mayan civilisation declined, many Maya communities continued to live in what is now Belize through the 16th and 17th centuries (Balam, 2013, 2014, 2016; Balam et al., 2020). Though the Spanish did not colonise this region, they began expeditions in the region in the 16th century, but faced strong resistance

from the Maya. For this reason, Spanish influence was present through missions, settlements and military campaigns, in their attempts to colonise Belize. This continued throughout the 17th century, with attempts to spread the Catholic religion among the Mayas. British colonisers established territory to exploit the local forests, and extracting wood became the cornerstone of their economy. As a result, the British brought many enslaved Africans to Belize to work in the forestry industry. These population movements laid the foundation for a society shaped by Mayan, African, and European traditions. In the mid-20th century, the worldwide movements for decolonisation and civil rights started to echo in Belize, and political and social activism gained importance, pushing towards a bigger autonomy. Independence was declared on the 21st of September 1981 (Balam, 2013, 2014, 2016; Balam et al., 2020). It marked the start of an effort in Belize to establish a governing system reflecting its unique cultural composition.

This laid the groundwork for Belize's current blend of Indigenous (Maya), African (enslaved populations), and European (British colonial) influences, as well as groups like Spanish-speaking Central American migrants and other ethnic groups (e.g., Garifuna, Mestizo, Belizean Kriol) (Balam, 2013, 2014, 2016; Balam et al., 2020). A symbolic result of this is seen years later, in 2025, when Belizeans chose to replace the monarch's portrait from their currency with national heroes who fought for their independence, such as George Price and Philip Goldson (Duncan & Novelo, 2025).

These considerations prompt deeper reflection on the nature of Belizean identity. What does pride in Belize's independence reveal about how identity is constructed? How are Belizean identities defined, and to what extent are they connected to language? As previously noted, Belize is characterised by a rich tapestry of cultures and languages, with diverse communities interacting within a multilingual and multicultural society. This dynamic environment may contribute to the emergence of multicultural identities (Balam, 2014).

To fully understand these dynamics, it is essential to contextualise each language within Belize's historical and social landscape. English emerged as the dominant language during the colonial era, a legacy of British rule that established English as the official language and the primary medium for education, government, and media. However, Belize's proximity to Hispanic nations and successive waves of migration introduced Spanish into everyday life, particularly after the arrival of Maya and Mestizo populations following the Caste War of Yucatán, which led to Spanish becoming the dominant language in Northern

Belize (Balam, 2013; Balam et al., 2020). English was historically prioritised in education, often at the expense of other languages. Today, however, there is a growing appreciation for Belizean Kriol, Spanish, and Indigenous languages, reflecting greater recognition of the country's multilingual heritage (Balam, 2013). The interaction of migration, cultural exchanges and historical events created a society where language marks identity, belonging and adaptation (Balam, 2014). Younger generations, in particular, may be reshaping linguistic practices, negotiating between tradition and modernity, as Belize continues to evolve as a dynamic, multilingual nation. This raises important questions about generational experiences: How do different age groups engage with language in a multilingual society?

2.2 Previous Research

2.2.1 Reframing Multilingual Practices: Local Perspectives in Belize Versus Western Sociolinguistic Interpretations

Existing research demonstrates that in Belize, multilingual language practices are deeply embedded in everyday life and are normalised as integral aspects of community interaction, rather than being marked or symbolic acts (Schneider, 2021). This stands in contrast to many Western sociolinguistic contexts, where multilingualism is often interpreted as a deliberate or symbolic practice, frequently analysed in relation to social identity, power relations, or group belonging (Toribio, 2009). In Belize, however, such practices tend to reflect a fluid approach to language use, challenging the notion that language alternation is inherently tied to identity marking or boundary-setting.. Rather than presuming that multilingual practices directly signify identity, this study investigates how Belizean speakers themselves perceive their linguistic practices and whether they see these practices as connected to their identities across generations. This approach is designed to critically engage with and move beyond external, often Eurocentric, biases that may not adequately capture the lived realities of multilingualism in Belize.

2.2.2 Generational Language Practices, Attitudes and Identity in Belize

Belize is characterised by its linguistic diversity, with English (the official language), Belizean Kriol, Spanish, and Mayan languages all playing significant roles in society. This study focuses on English, Belizean Kriol, and Spanish, as they are central to identity negotiation in Orange Walk. Within English itself, Belizean speakers navigate different varieties. What will be referred to as "Belizean English", a local variety of English that has phonological, lexical and syntactic features setting it apart from both American and

Caribbean English varieties (Balam, 2013). Nonetheless, Belizean English has been shaped by historical and regional influences from Caribbean English, a collection of English varieties across the anglophone Caribbean, each moulded by African, European, and indigenous languages (Nero, 2000), and American English, the variety spoken in the United States (Novari et al., 2021).

Generational differences are evident in English use. Younger Belizeans increasingly favour English, especially in professional and online spaces, where American English is often associated with modernity, adaptability, and social mobility (Schneider, 2021; Seitz, 2005). Meanwhile, older generations may retain features of Caribbean English, using it to express solidarity with regional cultural roots and pan-Caribbean identity (Bonner, 2001; Balam, 2014). These generational shifts in language choice reveal how English can simultaneously signal both global connectedness and local belonging, depending on the context and the speaker.

Additionally, Belizean Kriol serves as a powerful link between local identities and national belonging. Its informal, conversational use reinforces local pride and national belonging (Seitz, 2005). Kriol is often used across generations in daily interactions, but older speakers may code-switch more frequently between Kriol, English, and Spanish, reflecting both linguistic flexibility and rootedness in multilingual practices (Balam et al., 2020).

Spanish, meanwhile, is closely tied to ethnic and cultural heritage, introduced to Belize through immigration from neighbouring countries. While Spanish has deep roots in the region due to migration from neighbouring countries, it is sometimes stigmatised. Some Belizeans describe their Spanish as “ugly” or “broken,” which may contribute to a reluctance to fully embrace it as part of their linguistic identity (Balam & Prada-Pérez, 2017). Among younger speakers, there seems to be a declining interest in Spanish, as English is often viewed as more practical or prestigious. These attitudes may contribute to a weakening of Spanish’s role as a language of identity among younger generations.

A central question emerges: How do generational and social factors shape language use and linguistic identity in Belize? Most studies on language shift and identity focus on immigrant contexts, especially in the United States and Europe, where younger generations often navigate tensions between heritage and dominant societal languages (Bullock &

Toribio, 2009). But what happens when these negotiations take place within a single multilingual country like Belize?

This study explores that question by examining intergenerational differences in everyday language use in Orange Walk. Language use within households emerges as a key factor: in Belize, multiple languages are often spoken daily at home, including Mayan languages, Kriol, and Spanish. Research from other multilingual contexts, such as Nahuatl in Mexico (Gomashie, 2023) and Vietnamese-Australian bilingual families (Tran et al., 2023), highlights the importance of parental language input and home practices in supporting linguistic diversity. These insights raise important questions: Are younger Belizeans shifting away from Spanish, Kriol, or local English varieties primarily due to societal pressures, or does the family still serve as a stronghold for these languages? How do home and public language practices interact to shape long-term language retention?

Lastly, the interplay between language attitudes, generational experiences, and the social contexts in which languages are used offers a complex, evolving picture of linguistic identity in Belize. Rather than being fixed or uniform, these identities are negotiated through shifting preferences, contexts, and emotional attachments to specific languages. This highlights the need to examine not only which languages are used, but also how and why speakers relate to them across generations.

In short, multilingualism is the norm in Belize, shaping everyday communication and social interaction. Code-switching, language selection, and language maintenance result from Belize's multilingual environment, but they also serve as potential markers of identity. Additionally, language attitudes, defined as the beliefs and feelings individuals hold about various languages and language practices, play a crucial role in this dynamic. Thus, this review examines how language practices, multilingualism, and language attitudes interact to shape linguistic identity in Belize and considers how these relationships may differ across generations (see Appendix K for a detailed table on how the main concepts interact).

2.3 Identity Theories in Multilingual Contexts

2.3.1 Defining Identity

Identity refers to our sense of who we are, but it is a highly subjective, broad, and complex concept. As Seitz (2005, p. 3) notes, identity is not fixed; it evolves in response to social,

historical, and geographical contexts. It is shaped through interactions with others and is defined by the dynamic relationship between the "self" and the "other."

Siebenhütter (2023, p. 2) traces the term to its Latin root, *identitas*, which encompasses three core meanings: (1) authenticity, (2) selfhood, and (3) agreement. Identity, therefore, comprises multiple layers, including beliefs, personality traits, appearance, and modes of expression.

This study focuses specifically on linguistic identity: how language influences individuals, shapes their sense of belonging, and contributes to the self as they navigate a multilingual environment (Siebenhütter, 2023).

2.3.2 Language, Identity Construction, and Multilingual Practices

This section explores the role of language as a fundamental component of identity, drawing on established sociolinguistic frameworks (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1987; Siebenhütter, 2023). Sociolinguistic variation, how individuals modify their speech based on context, interlocutor, and setting, serves as a key mechanism for expressing and negotiating identity. In Belize, for example, code-switching and other multilingual behaviours are normative aspects of daily communication. In contrast, in contexts such as the United States, where multilingual communities like the Latin American population exist, language use tends to be more compartmentalised and structured (Balam, 2016).

a. "Acts of identity"

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1987) describe language use as both performative and intentional, encapsulated in their concept of "acts of identity," where individuals use language to signal social affiliations and negotiate their position within communities. In multilingual contexts such as Belize, practices like code-switching can be seen as active negotiations of identity, reflecting both local and global influences.

The performative nature of language means that speakers may strategically choose how and when to use certain languages or varieties to project, align with, or distance themselves from specific social identities. These choices are not made in isolation; rather, they are shaped by a combination of internal factors (such as personal identity, emotions, and

sense of belonging) and external pressures (such as social norms, expectations, interlocutors, and the communicative setting) (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1987, p. 23).

In line with Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's notion of "acts of identity," multilingual language use in Belize can indeed be interpreted as a form of identity negotiation, where speakers make deliberate linguistic choices to signal social affiliations. For instance, the use of Belizean Kriol often conveys local belonging and cultural pride (Seitz, 2005), while English is typically associated with prestige and authority, particularly in professional or formal settings (Bonner, 2001).

These ideas resonate with the linguistic landscape in Belize, where linguistic choices among different generations reflect ongoing negotiations of identity shaped by exposure to diverse cultural and linguistic systems. For instance, younger Belizeans, who are increasingly exposed to American English through media and global communication, may adopt features of American English to express alignment with broader, more global identities (Crystal, 2003). On the other side, elderly generations could be using more Belizean Kriol or Spanish to manifest their cohesion with local traditions. For example, the fact that Belizean Kriol is more frequently used in informal or community situations might represent a feeling of cohesion, integration and pride concerning the Belizean Kriol cultural and linguistic patrimony in Belize (Balam, 2013). This study examines how participants conceptualise their own identities, asking what factors contribute to their sense of self and how language use reflects and shapes these identities.

It is important to recognise that linguistic identity is also influenced by additional factors, such as social class, which can affect exposure to certain languages, as well as the degree of comfort and proficiency individuals have with various language varieties, factors often shaped by familial and societal influences (Romaine, 2000). Drawing on Balam (2013), this research further investigates whether generational shifts in attitudes toward language use or pressures to conform to linguistic norms in professional contexts are evident. Their model raises critical questions about the extent to which language functions as a performative tool for identity construction in Belize, particularly across different generations.

b. Indexicality and Relationality Principles

Furthermore, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) propose a framework for analysing identity in linguistic interaction, built around five principles: emergence, positionality, indexicality,

relationality, and partialness. This study focuses particularly on the principles of relationality and indexicality, as they are especially relevant for understanding multilingual practices and identity in Belize. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), identity is inherently relational and fluid, constructed through interaction and shaped by oppositional pairs such as local/global or authentic/artificial (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p.598). The principle of relationality highlights that identity is not a fixed attribute but is produced through ongoing social negotiation and interaction. This study examines how and if Belizeans use multilingual practices to establish such relational distinctions. Additionally, according to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), context strongly shapes language and identity. Indeed, for them, identity is not an innate characteristic, but something shaped by social and cultural processes. Language choice does not reflect simple individual characteristics but is profoundly influenced by the social and cultural context in which they are, which refers to what they call the "Indexicality principle" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p.593). When people switch from one language to the other, they engage in a process of identitarian construction that is shaped or characterised by the social roles, expectations and cultural norms they encounter (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Furthermore, Bucholtz and Hall (2005, pp. 598–605) conceptualise relationality through axes such as Similarity/Difference, Genuineness/Artifice, and Authority/Delegitimacy. In the Belizean context, language use provides insight into how speakers align themselves with or distance themselves from various cultural groups.

An effective way to explore potential generational differences in Belize is through this relational dimension of identity. For example, the use of Belizean Kriol or Spanish in informal settings often conveys authenticity and a genuine sense of self, while the use of English in formal situations may be perceived as a more artificial performance, motivated by social expectations. These linguistic choices also reflect underlying power dynamics; English, for instance, is frequently associated with authority and prestige in professional environments, shaping how speakers are perceived (Bonner, 2001). This study examines whether such patterns hold true across different generations, positioning Belize as a compelling example of layered and hybrid identity construction. While Bucholtz and Hall's relational concepts are valuable for analysing these dynamics, they may not fully encapsulate the fluid and dynamic nature of language use in Belize, where multilingualism is the norm and boundaries between languages are often blurred. To better address this complexity, the following section introduces Schneider's (2025) notion of "liquid languages" and

Siebenhütter's (2023) approach to linguistic identity, offering alternative frameworks for understanding the Belizean sociolinguistic landscape.

2. 3.3 From Performed to "Liquid": Rethinking Identity through Belizean Multilingualism

Theories by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) and Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1987) have contributed to our understanding of language and identity, emphasising its performative, relational and context-dependent nature. However, these models might be too rigid to fully capture the linguistic reality in Belize, where CS occurs in a more fluid, habitual, and often unconscious manner(Balam, 2016; Schneider, 2021). In Belize, language switching is part of everyday communication rather than a deliberate or strategic act. Consequently, identity in Belize is not centred around fixed roles or carefully constructed performances, but rather on continuous, flexible expressions of belonging and self-understanding. To address these limitations, Schneider (2025) extends these thoughts by saying that in highly multilingual contexts, languages are "liquid", always changing and shaped by a multitude of evolving factors. In Schneider's (2025) model, identity is also 'liquid': boundaries are not only negotiated but frequently blurred or dissolved altogether. This challenges the notion that identity must fit into fixed categories and offers a more suitable framework for understanding Belize, where identity and language use are dynamic and intertwined. This raises the question: can we conceptualise identities in Belize as "liquid" identities, reflecting the constant, evolving nature of language and self in this multilingual context?

This study adopts Siebenhütter's more fluid and emic perspective on linguistic identity, contrasting with other models like Bucholtz and Hall (2005) and Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1987), discussed previously, that propose a performance-based, indexical model. This understanding underscores the inherent flexibility of identity and highlights how individuals adapt their self-presentation according to context.

We have defined identity and linguistic identity as they will be referred to in this study. However, some methodological considerations must be taken into account. When studying Identity, one needs to be aware of the possible conceptual and methodological challenges. As Beinhoff and Rasinger (2016, p.572) note, identity is a complex concept that tends to "signify too much, too little or nothing". This increasing interest in identity reflects the contemporary preoccupations around globalisation and intercultural contacts, facilitated by migratory movements and new technologies that modify the identity research environment

(Beinhoff & Rasinger, 2016, p.572). It is also important to understand that identity is multilayered. Identity is not just constituted of one aspect, but the intersection of many (Carbado et al., 2013). This study discusses the fluidity of identity through language use.

2.4 Aims of the study

2.4.1 Gaps in Literature

This study aims to fill key gaps in the literature by focusing on generational shifts in language use and identity construction, an area that has received limited attention. While existing studies have illuminated sociolinguistic models of language use in Belize, there is a notable lack of investigation into how linguistic attitudes and identity performance differ across age groups. This study examines how different age groups use and perceive the use of different languages in Northern Belize. By highlighting the performative and fluid character of identity, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how language practices both shape and mirror ongoing transformations within Belizean society.

There is also a significant need for further research on the role of Spanish as a marker of identity in Belize, particularly in the context of code-switching. While previous studies have established the importance of Spanish in Belizean society, particularly within Mestizo and Garifuna communities, there remains a gap in understanding how Spanish functions specifically as an identity marker. This study addresses this gap by comparing the use of Spanish with different varieties of English, offering new insights into how Spanish contributes to the construction of national identity in Belize.

2.4.2 Study description

The main aim of the present study is to explore generational differences in language attitudes in Orange Walk, Northern Belize, with a particular focus on how participants perceive and experience multilingualism and how these perceptions relate to their sense of linguistic identity Grounded in theories of language ideologies, identity construction, and multilingual language practices, the research adopts a qualitative approach, concentrating on English, Spanish, and Belizean Kriol. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

- How do speakers, across ages, explicitly describe their attitudes toward local languages?

- Do self-reported attitudes translate into actual language practices?
- Do speakers associate specific language(s) or language practices with their linguistic identity?
- Are there differences between age groups in self-reported attitudes and identity associations?

To answer these questions, the study analyses key themes such as the relationship between language and identity, the role of multilingual practices in identity expression, and how speakers use language to signal belonging. It examines intergenerational differences in language preference, stigma, and pride, identifying patterns in both language use and attitudes. The research also explores how language is used to navigate various social contexts, the motivations and circumstances behind language switching or mixing, and the influence of context on language choice. Additionally, it considers the impact of external perceptions and self-positioning, investigating how being judged or perceived by others shapes language behaviour and how individuals respond to these perceptions.

By providing an in-depth, community-based case study from a linguistically diverse but under-researched context, this study aims to contribute to sociolinguistic and identity research, offering new insights into everyday multilingualism in a postcolonial, multicultural society like Belize.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Context

This research took place in Orange Walk, a town located in Northern Belize, close to the Mexican border. Orange Walk is a predominantly Spanish-speaking area, with many people originally coming from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras (Balam, 2013). In this area, influences from Central American countries are more prominent, while Afro-Caribbean influences are more prevalent in other regions of Belize, though they are also present to some extent in Orange Walk (Balam, 2013). Orange Walk town, historically home to Mayan communities, retains a rich cultural and linguistic heritage shaped by its diverse population, including speakers of Belizean Kriol and English. While the Mayan presence was more prominent in the past, their influence persists in the town's cultural landscape. Thus, Orange Walk was selected as the field site for both practical and academic reasons. Because I

had already established contact in the region, I was better positioned to connect with participants and access diverse communities. Moreover, the town's linguistic ecology, where Spanish plays a more dominant role compared to other areas, offered a unique opportunity to explore how Spanish, English, and Belizean Kriol intersect in everyday communication.

Today, Orange Walk is characterised as modestly urban, reflecting both its historical roots and contemporary demographic composition (Balam, 2013; Census, 2022). The participants of this study had a variety of jobs, including teachers, project coordinators and delivery workers. Culturally, Orange Walk, much like Belize, is marked by multilingualism and multiculturalism. People often switch between Spanish, English, and Kriol, occasionally incorporating Mayan or Garifuna words.

Map of Belize (WorldAtlas, 2023)

3.2 Data Collection

Participants were recruited through local contacts in Orange Walk and by visiting various community spaces, such as a church, which further facilitated participant outreach. This study examines the multilingual context of Orange Walk through an age-based lens. Therefore, the inclusion criteria required participants to be 18+. Participants were between 18 and 65 years old, which enabled an analysis of linguistic patterns and shifts across age groups. Based on preliminary observations and findings, participants were categorised into three age groups: young adults (18–25), middle-aged adults (26–45), and older adults (56–65). Notably, there were no participants between the ages of 45 and 56, which is a limitation of the sample.

Participants always took part in pairs, typically friends, relatives, or colleagues, to ensure familiarity and avoid discomfort. The study was conducted following these steps:

(1) Informed consent and information sheet

The first step for participants was to read the study information. They were given the option to receive it in either English or Spanish (see Appendix D).

(2) Language Portrait activity

Once the participants familiarised themselves with the information brochure and signed the informed consent form, they were given a Language Portrait (*Language Portraits – Lost Wor(L)Ds*, n.d.) (see **Figure 1 and 2**). This activity involved selecting a different colour for each language they spoke and using those colours to fill in a human silhouette, visually representing their linguistic repertoire (see Appendix C for detailed instructions).

Figure 1

Blank Language Portrait

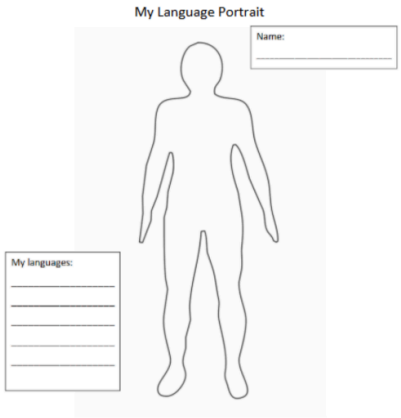
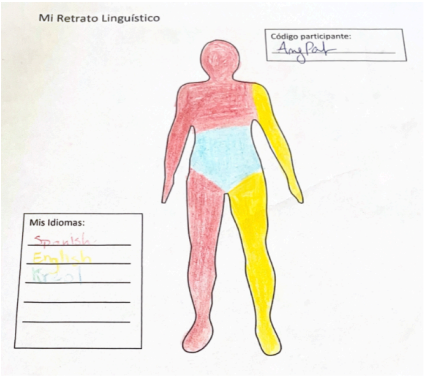


Figure 2

Example of a completed Language Portrait



(3) Introduction to questions

After completing their language portraits, participants were introduced to a set of open-ended interview questions. They consisted of five open-ended questions designed to explore participants' experiences and perceptions of code-switching, language choice, and language maintenance and shift (see Appendix A). They were presented to the participants, either in:

(i) A code-switched manner:

a. El primer question es si hacen experience situations donde tienen que usar multiple languages(e.g., Kriol, Spanish, English)? And, ina what situations se sienten mas comfortable haciendo talk de un specific language(e.g., Kriol, Spanish, English)?

b. Puede pensar de un situation where you mih have fih switch between languages para hacer fit in en un particular social group o setting? Please elaborate.

c. What makes you who you are? ¿Siente que language es un way de hacerlo express?

d. Cree que hay unos languages o styles de languages que son mas respected o prestigious en Belize? Why you think that is?

e. Han hecho notice differences inna how different generations de su family or community usan multi languages or code switching?

(ii) In English :

a. Do you experience situations where you have to speak multiple languages (e.g., Kriol, Spanish, English)? And, in what situations do you feel most comfortable speaking a particular language (e.g., Kriol, Spanish, English)?
b. Can you think of a situation where you had to/ or not switch between languages to fit into a particular social group or setting? Please elaborate.
c. What makes you who you are? Do you feel like language is a way to express it? Please elaborate on why.
d. Do you think there are languages or language styles that are more respected or prestigious in Belize? Why do you think that is?
e. Have you observed differences in the way different generations in your family or community approach multilingualism and code-switching?

(iii)In Spanish :

a. ¿Se encuentra en situaciones en las que tiene que hablar varias lenguas (por ejemplo, kriol, español, inglés)? Y, ¿en qué situaciones se siente más cómodo hablando en un idioma en particular (por ejemplo, kriol, español, inglés)?

b. ¿Se le ocurre alguna situación en la que haya tenido que cambiar o no de lengua para integrarse en un determinado grupo o entorno social? Explíquelo

c. ¿Qué le hace ser quien es? ¿ Cree que el lenguaje es una forma de expresarlo? Explica por qué.

d. ¿ Cree que hay lenguas o estilos lingüísticos más respetados o prestigiosos en Belice? ¿Por qué cree que es así?

e. ¿Ha observado diferencias en la forma en que las distintas generaciones de su familia o comunidad viven el multilingüismo y el cambio de código?

These questions were designed to explore the multilingual language practices of the participants in their daily lives, how these practices relate to their sense of identity, and how different generations navigate linguistic diversity. Participants had the choice between the questions in English, Spanish or written in a code-switched manner (that was written by one of the Belizean contacts in Orange Walk) (see Appendix A). This research aims to

understand the participants' interpretations of their language use, rather than imposing external analytical frameworks.

(4) Recorded paired conversations

After participants completed their language portraits and became familiar with the discussion prompts, audio recordings were conducted. Sessions lasted between 5 and 30 minutes, depending on how much participants shared. Participants were asked to engage in a "natural" conversation, acknowledging that the research setting might influence how natural it felt. The analysis of the portraits and recordings is therefore intertwined. It was clear they could speak any language, and multiple languages at a time. The recordings were done at home, work or school, making sure it was an atmosphere people felt comfortable sharing in. Nonetheless, we remained mindful that the environment could influence participants' responses, including their language choices.

(5) Demographic questionnaire

After the recording session, participants were asked to complete the final part of the study: a brief demographics questionnaire (see Appendix B). This questionnaire included 10 items covering general information such as age and gender, details about the languages they spoke, and questions addressing generational and regional variations in language use. Collecting this information allowed us to better understand each participant's background and provided valuable context for interpreting their responses.

3.3 Data Analysis

The next step involved the researcher transcribing the interviews into simple Word documents (see Appendix J for full transcripts and Appendix N for transcription conventions). This approach facilitated an inductive thematic analysis without relying on a predetermined coding framework (see Appendix N). The data was analysed as follows:

(1) Familiarisation with the data

The process began with a thorough reading of each transcript, during which key points, recurring words or expressions, and significant comments related to the interview questions were highlighted. Notes were made directly within the transcripts to help identify emerging patterns.

(2) Generating initial codes and searching for themes

The five open-ended interview questions naturally guided the analysis, as most participants' responses were organised around them. After reviewing all transcripts individually, recurring themes and similarities were noted across interviews. They were then compiled into summary sheets organised by interview question, providing a comprehensive view of how participants collectively responded to each question. After initial readings and highlighting of key comments and patterns, data from each transcript was sorted into preliminary topic-based categories. As coding progressed, recurring ideas and language patterns naturally began to cluster around five overarching thematic areas. These were: (1) Language use in daily life, (2) Personal identity reflections, (3) Language and comfort zone, (4) Language switching, and (5) Participants' perceptions of generational attitudes toward multilingualism and code-switching (see Appendix M).

For instance, when one participant said, "Con tus papas español, con tus amigos Kriol, or English, dependson which friends, con tus superiors English", this was initially coded as "language by context" and later grouped under the theme 'Language use in daily life.' Similarly, the statement, "I feel more comfortable speaking English with my friends", was coded as "comfort with English" and contributed to the theme 'Language and comfort zone' (see Appendix M).

Each theme name was selected to clearly reflect the central idea of the responses grouped within it, while maintaining close alignment with participants' own words and framing. For example, "Language and comfort zone" was derived from participants' repeated mentions of feeling more natural or fluent in certain settings or around specific people (see Analysis- 2.2.1.Language Choice in Daily Life: Context, Comfort, and Interlocutor). "Personal identity reflections" emerged from a range of deeply personal comments about how language use shaped or reflected who they are (See Analysis- 4. Multilingualism and Linguistic Identity and Appendix E, F and G).

The responses were then grouped by age category (young adults: 18–25; middle-aged adults: 26–45; older adults: 56–65). This step enabled the researcher to observe generational patterns and shifts in language use, identity perception, and attitudes toward code-switching and multilingualism. Quotes were compared across groups to identify similarities, differences, and possible explanations for those contrasts. The most illustrative or representative quotes were selected for inclusion in the main analysis; these were typically quotes that captured commonly shared ideas or conveyed insightful reflections on language use and life in Belize.

The Language portrait analysis is included in the thematic analysis of the interviews, as participants shared the description of their portraits in the recordings. These descriptions, especially when linked to the identity-related question, were treated as part of the thematic analysis. Particular attention was given to how participants explained their use of colours and the placement of each language in the silhouette.

Generational profiles were constructed based on these combined analyses (see Appendices E, F and G). Each profile reflected how participants in a specific age group responded to the core themes, including differences in multilingual practices, perceived prestige of languages, and identity expression.

All the data, video and audio recordings, consent forms, questionnaires, language portraits, transcripts, etc., were stored on a personal university OneDrive. After the thesis is completed, these files will be transferred to a shared research drive managed by the Crossing Language Borders Project (Crossing Language Borders, n.d.). Beyond the technical aspects of data collection, researching identity comes with conceptual and ethical challenges. The next section addresses these complexities.

Note on Appendices: Some supplementary materials, including transcripts, detailed data tables, and additional analyses, are available online as appendices. These can be accessed via the following link: https://osf.io/ckxty/?view_only=4a41b2c6881042ce995bb8200fa8f837. For reference throughout the thesis, appendices are labelled (e.g., Appendix A, Appendix B, etc.) and correspond to the documents available at the above URL.

Note on transcription and language use: All participant quotes (whether from oral recordings or written questionnaires) are presented verbatim, including non-standard grammar, spelling, or vocabulary. This decision was made to preserve the authenticity of participants' language use and reflect their natural multilingual practices, including code-switching and informal register. Grammatical "errors" (e.g., *hablemos* instead of *hablamos*) are therefore not corrected. These forms are viewed not as mistakes, but as part of participants' individual linguistic expression (see Appendix N).

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Lastly, while participation in this study was not expected to inflict any harm it was not expected to be a sensitive topic. There was a possibility that it could cause discomfort or

distress. The interview questions included personal questions about personal experiences with multilingual language practices, which might be triggering for some participants, causing them to be confused or anxious (Talaifar & Swann, 2018). It also included questions that required self-reflection on identity formation. Although self-reflection is generally beneficial, it can still lead to discomfort or confusion, requiring thoughtful and sensitive handling (Talaifar & Swann, 2018). As a researcher coming from a Western academic background and entering a Central American multilingual context, I remained aware of the possible biases and tried to always reflect on the following questions: Am I including all voices, especially those that have been ignored? Am I giving people real space to express themselves in their own ways? (Bradley et al., 2024).

Prior to the recordings, participants were required to sign a declaration of consent (see Appendix D). This document informed them about the research aims and the study topic, "Generational Perspectives on Language Attitudes and Linguistic Identity in Multilingual Orange Walk, Northern Belize." Although the subject matter was not inherently sensitive and no deliberately provocative questions were posed, I remained mindful that certain topics could still be triggering for some individuals. Participants were assured they could withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. They were also free to decline to answer specific questions and to share only what they felt comfortable disclosing. Additionally, all personal data collected during the interviews was handled with strict care. As outlined in the consent declaration, participants' data was securely stored and will be deleted after the final thesis report is submitted and the CLB project concludes. At no point have names or other identifying information been shared with anyone else, nor will such details appear in the written report; participants' anonymity is fully maintained.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic and Quantitative Insights into Language Use

4.1.1 Quantitative Data

The sample included participants from three age groups: 18-25, 26-45, and 56-65. As seen in **Figure 3**, there are almost an even number of participants for the first two age groups, with 20 (~43%) and 21 (~45%) participants in the two younger groups, but only 7 (~15%) in the oldest group. This discrepancy was taken into account in the analysis, as the smaller sample size makes comparisons with the older generation less representative.

Figure 3
Age Groups

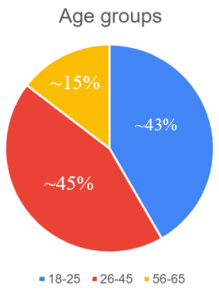
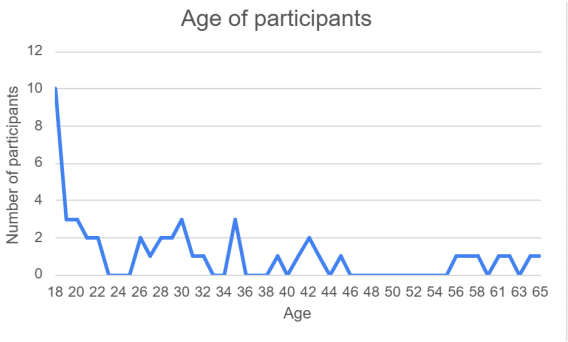
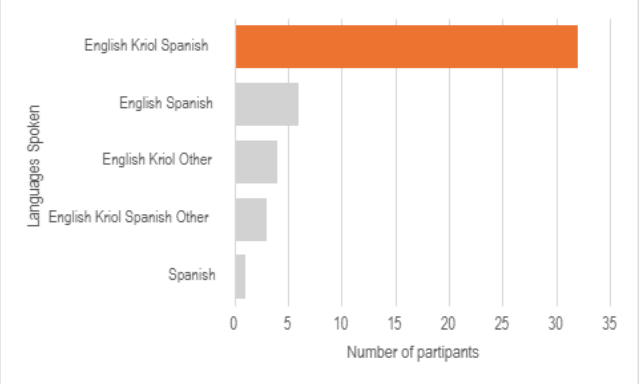


Figure 4
Age of Participants



The rest of the data presented is taken from the demographics questionnaires (see Appendix L for coded questionnaire answers). Of the 48 participants, only 46 were able to fill in this questionnaire due to time constraints. This means the following results are out of 46 responses. **Figure 5** shows the group of languages spoken by participants. As shown, 32 participants (~70%) reported speaking English, Kriol, and Spanish, the most common language combination (participants could write down any language they speak in the questionnaire), and only 1 participant affirmed being monolingual in Spanish. These results confirm that most participants are multilingual.

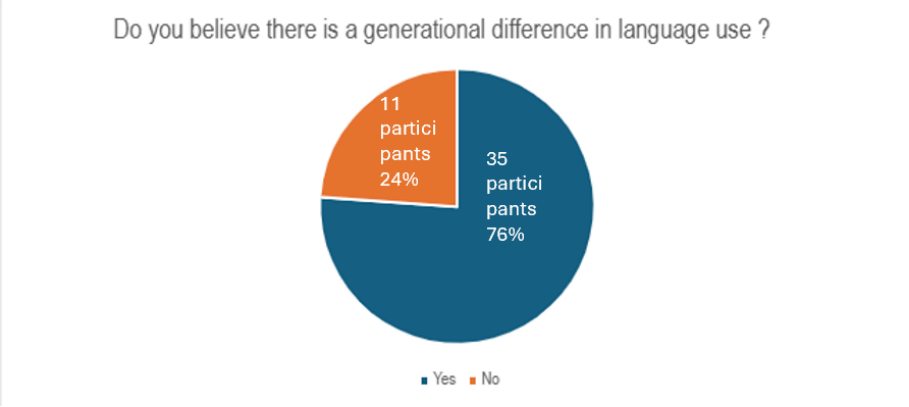
Figure 5
Languages Spoken by the Participants



In this questionnaire, participants were also asked to answer "Do you think your language use differs from that of your parents or grandparents?", with yes or no and then develop their answer in a short sentence. **Figure 6** shows that the majority of the participants answered "yes" (~76%).

Figure 6

Generational Differences in Language Use



In addition to these questions, the questionnaire and interviews also explored language use across different social contexts. Participants could mention in the questionnaire in what context they spoke each of the languages (English, Belizean Kriol and Spanish). It is important to note that out of the 46 participants who completed it, some participants mentioned multiple contexts per language, while others left certain contexts unspecified, so the total number of responses here does not correspond to the number of participants. The following settings were mentioned :

- Work/Formal/School
- Home/Family
- Social/Friends
- Everydaylife/Street

Table 1

Languages by setting

Context	Most Spoken Language	English Mentions	Belizean Kriol Mentions	Spanish Mentions
Work/formal/school	English	34	9	9
Home/family	Spanish	9	13	26
Social/friends	Belizean Kriol	4	14	4

Everyday life/street	Spanish	3	6	10

These findings indicate that English is predominantly used in formal contexts, Belizean Kriol is favoured in social interactions with friends, and Spanish is most commonly spoken at home and with family members. This pattern illustrates that while multilingual language practices in Belize occur naturally, they are still shaped by the specific context in which communication takes place (Schneider, 2021; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1987).

4.1.2 Intergenerational Reflections on Language Change

The majority of participants (35 in total) responded "yes" to the question "Do you think your language use differs from that of your parents or grandparents?". This raises the need to explore the reasons participants agreed or disagreed. Initially, it was hypothesised that age might influence responses, with older participants perhaps being less likely to perceive differences between their own language use and that of previous generations. However, the data showed that negative responses ("no") were evenly distributed across age groups (see **Figure 7**). This raises important questions: What reasons led some participants to respond "no," and what motivated the majority to answer "yes"?

Figure 7

Number of participants who said "no" per age group- "Do you think your language use differs from that of your parents or grandparents?"

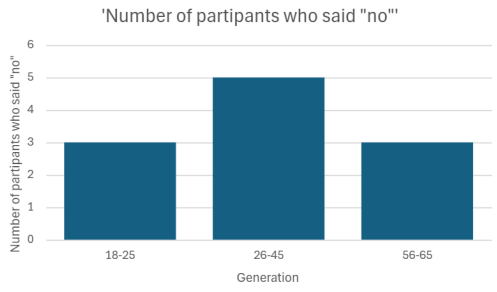


Figure 8

Number of participants who said "yes" per age group- "Do you think your language use differs from that of your parents or grandparents?"

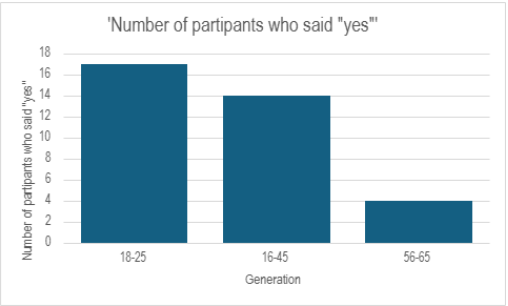


Table 2

Participant responses by age group to language difference question

Age Group	Yes	No	Total
18–25	17	3	20
26–45	14	5	19
56–65	4	3	7

For an overview of the answers, see Appendix H. For the "yes" answers, some themes emerged. Many participants noted that their parents or grandparents primarily spoke Spanish or Mayan languages, while they themselves tend to use more English or Kriol. Secondly, they used generational change as the reason, including differences in values or social norms around language use, such as "*Kriol was looked down upon in their time*". Seven participants also mentioned that their education or environment influenced language use, saying they were educated somewhere else than by their parents or grandparents. Several participants described using more languages or engaging in code-switching more frequently than their parents, as one explained: "*I like code-switching, but my parents don't*" (see Appendix L). Lastly, new vocabulary, slang, and evolving expressions were mentioned as being different from their elders.

Among those who answered "no," nine participants stated that they and their families speak the same set of languages, "*todos hablemos 3 lenguajes*" (see Appendix L). They also suggest that not only do they speak the same languages, but they also learned language use from their family, and still use the same ways of speaking.

In summary, the questionnaire revealed: (a) high multilingualism in Orange Walk, with approximately 70% of participants reporting use of English, Kriol, and Spanish; (b) context-dependent language use, with English dominating formal settings, Kriol used socially, and Spanish spoken at home; and (c) a perceived generational language shift, as 76% of participants believe their language use differs from that of their parents or grandparents. While these demographic insights provide an overview of language use patterns across age groups, they do not fully capture the nuances of how participants experience and talk about their multilingual identities. The following section draws on interview excerpts and language portraits to explore these themes in more depth.

4.2. Interviews and Language Portraits: Generational Differences in Language Use

The following excerpt is from an interview with two participants in their 30s, a couple, discussing the formulation of the interview questions (see Appendix J, Hozayu and Diamur, p.25). This excerpt provides a useful entry point into the discussion, particularly because, as outlined in the methodology, the questions were written in a code-switched manner. Their conversation highlights not only their reactions to this approach but also the naturalness and challenges of encountering CS in written form :

"Hozayu: Yeah, I mean questions were kinda hard for me to understand, like if there's a writing that you do

Diamur: Well, it is true, like, for read it, it was easier for me, like I could read it, but like it would take me a little bit like time to try decipher

Hozayu: Like for me, yeah, like two times

Dimaur: Like, try decipher, and I guess that because like UNCLEAR wanted to say you think in one language, and I mean we know three different languages, UNCLEAR like completely in that language, although I don't think I would read Kriol

Hozayu: 'Cause we don't know Kriol in writing, we just talk-

Diamur: 'cause when we text, it's in English

Hozayu: Yeah

Diamur: But for the most part

Hozayu: Yeah

Diamur: Yeah, so reading Kriol probably would've kind of-

Hozayu: That make it tricky, you know

Diamur: Yes, I mean now interst- this is very interesting though

Hozayu: *laughs*

Diamur: I- I never realized, I never realized how we go about and- and these things just come natural to me like you know the putting English and Spanish and like but when you have that like ina this context, 'cause we talk like this, we literally talk like this but for reading it's like a whole different-

Hozayu: But maybe not to this extreme

Diamur: Well, true, although you would have like some of my friends, NAME literally talk like that *laughs* she literally talk like that, so…"

These two participants shared that they agreed this is the way they speak; however, seeing it written down felt unusual or even challenging.

4.2.1 Generational Patterns in Language Use

The recordings allow for a reasonably accurate identification of the primary languages used by participants. For each recording, the languages used were identified by the researcher, and then the main language present in it was found by simply looking at a rough proportion of languages used in each sentence. Each interview had a clear dominant language, although short phrases or individual words from other languages were frequently inserted. Kriol and English were both counted as "Anglophone", as it is often difficult to distinguish between English in recordings. So the distinction was made between "Anglophone" and Spanish. For example, participants would primarily discuss in Spanish but use a few Anglophone words like "*class*" or "*number*" (see Appendix J, Angpat and Ryagar, p.13). Or primarily use Anglophone and insert some Spanish sentences, for example "*me trabo*" (see Appendix J, Shabar, p. 95). As we can see below (Table 3), the main language that was used is Anglophone for the first two age groups, but Spanish for the older one.

Table 3
Main Language Spoken by Age Group

Age Group	Main Language Spoken in Recording
18-25	Anglophone
26-45	Anglophone
56-65	Spanish

English emerged as the dominant language overall, particularly among younger participants (see **Table 3** above). Spanish appeared more frequently with older participants

and overall within the participants when recalling past experiences, cultural ties, or emotional content, as seen in the following examples: "*Spanish again of like [...] the emotional aspect of it*" and "*Como que el español tiene más [...] sentimientos*" (*As the Spanish language has more feelings*) (Appendix J, Phisyl and Edmrey, p. 87, p. 27). As the following quotes show, CS and language choice were not random; they aligned with topic shifts, emotional intensity, and identity themes. An example of topic shift is two participants (see Appendix J, Angpat and Ryagar, p. 13-19) discussing mainly in Spanish, but inserting English terms like "*professionalism*" or "*first language*" when talking about formal settings or linguistic societal expectations. Furthermore, two participants used Spanish to express emotional nuance (e.g., some said Spanish is better for emotions, even though they mostly used English) (see Appendix J, Javnab and Phisyl, p.44 and p.87).

4.2.2 Language Choice in Daily Life: Context, Comfort, and Interlocutor

Based on the participants ' insights, this section will give a bigger picture of how different generations in Orange Walk use languages in their daily lives. Most participants confirmed that they frequently encounter situations requiring multiple languages. However, three factors influence language choice: the context (where the conversation is happening: home, work, church, etc.); the interlocutor (who they are speaking with: family, friends, superiors, etc.); and their personal comfort level (how confident they feel in each language). Similar sentiments were expressed across interviews, such as:

> **"Hum, pues todo depende. Hablo español donde más se habla español, como con mi familia, pues más el español, acá en la casa en español. Pero a veces en el trabajo, o- o en la iglesia, más a veces es en inglés, también la iglesia más en español, pero con los niños más inglés porque a ellos más les gusta inglés. Uhm y ya depende dónde estoy, depende del lugar donde estoy, con la gente con quien estoy" (Appendix J, Keigri, p.61)**
>
> *Hmm, well, it all depends. I speak Spanish, where Spanish is more spoken, like with my family, well, more Spanish, here at home, and in Spanish. But sometimes at work, or at church, sometimes it's more in English, also at church more in Spanish, but with the kids it's more in English because they like English better. Uhm, it depends on where I am, it depends on the place where I am, the people I am with.*

“I feel more comfortable speaking English with my friends. Whenever we have someone that does not understand proper English and speaks Spanish we would speak Spanish because most of us would be able to speak both languages, but then the Kriol would be something that I [...] it would be more comfortable speaking with friends that speak Kriol because they would understand both English and Kriol.” (Appendix J, Edmrey, p.27)

One key factor influencing language use is the interlocutor. A recurring answer among participants is that they “*mirror*” the language their their conversation partner’s language, responding in English if addressed in English, and in Spanish if addressed in Spanish. Participants consistently agreed that language choice is shaped by both local and global contexts. Local influences refer to personal and intimate interactions, while global influences relate to broader, external factors such as institutional settings and international exposure. Indeed, participants reported speaking at home mainly Spanish, in the streets, informal settings or with friends, mostly Kriol and Spanglish (local influences), and at work, school or formal settings, English (global influences) (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Some settings, such as church, reflect both local and global influences. Although the church is often perceived as a local space, the language used within it is frequently mixed with other languages, particularly when interacting with children. This is exemplified by the following participants, Cargri and Keigri:

“En lo que es en church pues la mayoría- es puro- la mayoría es inglés.” (Appendix J, Cargri, p. 62)

As far as church is concerned, the majority - it's pure - the majority is English.

“En la iglesia es puro español, pero cuando eh ehm me toca ir con los niños en ellos son más- Ellos hablan más inglés como el americano.” (Appendix J, Keigri, p. 61)

In the church it is pure Spanish, but when ehm I go with the children they are more- They speak more English like American.

Another example is education, English is dominant due to the formal academic setting, yet informal interactions among students may include Kriol or Spanish. These

patterns suggest that language use is highly context-dependent. This is reflected in the following participant quotes:

> **“Hum, yes, I- there's various situations that would require for you to speak either in Kriol or hum Spanish or English, obviously I would speak English at work, Kriol with my friends, hum maybe Spanish with my family.” (Appendix J, Diamur, p.22)**

> **“It would be like more English, when it comes to like school based, like you know with all the teachers, especially for English then it would be more like English, and then when we're like socialising outside then it would be like Kriol, and like for my example it would be like at home it would be more like Spanish and then for yours it would be English.” (Appendix J, Kaiver, p.49)**

The final factor to consider is language comfort: do participants feel more at ease using one language, even though they regularly switch between several? Comfort levels seem to vary across generations. Among younger participants, 15 reported feeling more comfortable with a specific language—7 preferred English and Kriol, while 8 felt most at ease with Spanish (see Appendix J and Transcripts 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 16, 19, 22, and Appendix M). Although some expressed confidence in Spanish, others reported anxiety when speaking it with native speakers from predominantly Spanish-speaking countries, possibly due to regional variations. One participant noted that Spanish is more commonly spoken in villages, towns tend to be multilingual, and cities lean toward English and Kriol (Appendix J, Aalara, p.5). This regional background likely influences language comfort and preferences. One participant, who feels more comfortable in English, explained this is due to exposure to American TV, and often expressed pride in their English proficiency:

> **“I would consider myself like a tv kid so I ended up speaking and hum watching a lot more in hum american cartoons, american shows, disney channel cartoons UNCLEAR so hum a lot of the UNCLEAR I adopted more using English then.” (Appendix J, Javnab, p.44-45)**

Middle-aged participants showed considerable individual variation in language comfort, with English, Kriol, and Spanish used with similar frequency. All participants in this group used multiple languages interchangeably, without a clear dominant one. While some

leaned slightly toward Spanish or Kriol, all three languages featured prominently in daily interactions. Only two participants (Nimoro and Sheoro) spoke only Spanish during their interviews (Appendix J, pp. 55–56, 90–94). This age group acts as a "bridge" between older and younger participants, connecting their language practices. Lastly, older participants generally reported greater comfort in Spanish .However, in this study, there is limited data for this generation, so findings are not completely representative. Balam et al. (2020) note that in some communities, older individuals are frequent code-switchers. However, this pattern is not universal and may depend on factors such as migration history and local context. In this case, the older participants' limited CS is likely explained by their immigration background: since they originally came from Spanish-speaking countries and maintained Spanish as their dominant language, they have less need or opportunity to switch between languages in daily interactions. However, while the sample size is small, the findings remain consistent with the sociolinguistic context of these specific individuals and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of generational language practices.

Finally, participants emphasised that code-switching, although influenced by context, interlocutor, and comfort, remains a part of nearly all aspects of daily life. As one participant put it, it is part of "*everything and anything we do*". And, beyond these factors, switching between languages is not just a reflection of setting or preference; it is also an essential tool for social adaptation.

4.2.3 Code-Switching as a Tool for Adaptation and Identity Negotiation

This section examines the different language practices through the generations. Younger generations frequently switch between home and friends. But patterns vary. Some switch languages fluidly within the same conversation (e.g. Spanish with grandparents, English with siblings); others prefer sticking to a single language (e.g English, Spanish or Kriol). The mid-generation CS is frequent in all settings: work, home and social interactions in general. There are no strict boundaries; language use remains fluid and spontaneous. In addition to having a different use of CS, the different generations have different approaches to this. Younger and mid-generation speakers switch languages fluidly without strict boundaries, whereas older generation have mixed views. Some reject CS as improper, and others embrace it as a natural linguistic practice. Those who reject it believe it reflects a lack of education, but some just regret not being able to speak another language beyond Spanish.

Regardless of these generational differences, one common reason for code-switching across all age groups is the need to adapt to different contexts and people. Multilingual language practices are necessary for adapting to different contexts and people; they can be used as an adaptation tool. Indeed, participants expressed the need to switch languages because they "*try to adapt to society*" (Appendix J, Aalara, p.4). To illustrate this, 16 participants talked about their experience at the workplace. Many participants have to concentrate on sticking to one language, mostly English, in meetings or training, such as mentioned by Mircaw and Migcaw (Appendix J, p.73-78) or Victre (Appendix J, p.125-129). However, when interacting with clients, it is always unclear what language they have to speak. Whether they work at a shop or as a project manager, they always need to adapt to what language their client talks. Several participants shared struggling to choose the appropriate language when addressing clients. Yet, despite occasional difficulty, most expressed that switching languages ultimately "*comes naturally*" (Appendix J, Hozayu, p.22). As Syacaw stated, "*[Code-switching] is anywhere and everywhere*" (Appendix J, p.122), reflecting its embeddedness in daily life.

Still, the majority of the participants state that CS is the most natural way to communicate in Belize. For example, Javnab shared, "*I do speak both languages at home so there is not really pressure to fit in*" (Appendix J, p.44), and Kaiver similarly noted, "*I don't think I would have to switch my language to fit in*" (Appendix J, p.50). This sentiment was echoed in a shared reflection by participants Moichi and Kargut:

> **"Moichi: Yo creo que UNCLEAR en la situación donde UNCLEAR haces tienes que hacer switch languages pero no para fit en un particular social group or setting-**
>
> **Kargut: no porque normally acá en Belize todos hablan así español, inglés y mezclan todo. " (Appendix J, Moichi and Kargut, p.57)**
>
> *Moichi: I think that UNCLEAR in the situation where you do UNCLEAR you have to switch languages but not to fit in a particular social group or setting-*
>
> *Kargut: no because normally here in Belize everybody speaks Spanish, English and mix everything.*

Participant Syacaw further explained that language choice depends on the comfort of the interlocutor:

> **“It’s not really to fit in but because as I know the people and their background and what language they feel more comfortable, then i would speak it like, whenever I’m with particular four persons in the office it’s mostly Spanish, because that’s the langauge that they feel more comfortable.” (Appendix J, Syacaw, p.112)**

These accounts suggest that multilingualism is present in daily life by: switching languages at home, with family, friends and colleagues. So it is not related to social pressure, as social pressure would mean people switch languages because they feel forced to fit in, avoid judgment, or meet expectations. As discussed earlier, CS is “*anywhere and everywhere*”.

However, even if language practices such as CS are part of everyday life in Belize, in some cases, it can be confusing or take more mental effort. The most meaningful examples are those from teachers. Teachers frequently have to use CS to adapt to different situations. When communicating with parents who may only speak English or Spanish, or in classrooms where English is the official language but students may be more comfortable in another language. As participant Migcaw recalled, “*I struggled a lot as well. I had to speak in English, plus translate in Spanish. I had some parents with the Spanish-speaking*” (Appendix J, p.74), illustrating the cognitive and communicative challenges of navigating multilingual parent-teacher interactions. In another exchange, participants Phisyl and Naosyl reflected on how language use in school settings requires constant adaptation:

> **“Phisyl: Right, right. The second one says, pueden pensar de un situation where you may have fih switch between languages para hacer fit en un particular social group or setting? Please elaborate. [...] The setting aspect of switching between languages. I think parents' meeting is one, that you know we have them frequently.**
>
> **Naosyl: Yeah, having to interact with parents, that definitely one. Also, like at school, coworkers they speak mostly Spanish so like, phscycologically you would help yourself to learn Spanish so you could also fit in.” (Appendix J, Phisyl and Naosyl, p. 83)**

Additionally, younger participants reported similar experiences of students. Many switch languages when working in groups with multilingual peers. Some also think in one

language (i.e. Spanish or Kriol) and then translate into English when speaking in class. Adapting can be confusing, as reformulating ideas in another language takes effort. One participant illustrates this well:

> **"Si estamos en school, tenemos que hablar proper English, pero son cosas que no me in- que me incomoda un poco, porque estoy más en el Spanish, me gusta más en Spanish." (Appendix J, Ryagar, p.13)**
>
> *If we are at school, we have to speak proper English, but these are things that make me feel a bit uncomfortable, because I am more into Spanish, I like Spanish better.*
>
> **"Like in high school, I didn't know anyone there, yeah, so hum when I group myself with people, it will be with the people that like they communicate in Spanish, but then I had to force myself to talk more in Spanish because it feels like it was an obligation, talking Spanish with them." (Appendix J, Dexmat, p.3)**
>
> **"Eh sí, cuando llegué el primer día en el colegio, yo vine, y ya estaba más como con mi español, pero después para hacer amigos o para hablar con los maestros tuve que cambiar con mi inglés, cosa que yo no estoy acostumbrado, y no me- me sentí un poco incómodo, pero lo tuve que hacer porque es parte del colegio." (Appendix J, Ryagar, p.13)**
>
> *Eh yes, when I arrived the first day at school, I came and I was more with my Spanish, but then to make friends or to speak with teachers I had to change to my English, thing that I am not used to and I don't- I felt uncomfortable, but I had to do it, because it's part of school.*

4.3 Attitudes Towards Language

4.3.1 Generational Attitudes towards Language Practices

This section will explore in more depth the language attitudes across generations in Orange Walk. Participants from the young adult generation perceived a shift from Spanish dominance in older generations to increased use of English and Kriol among younger generations: (a) grandparents are perceived as speaking primarily Spanish, (b) younger family members (especially younger siblings) are perceived as speaking more English and Kriol, (c) some younger individuals understand Spanish but do not actively speak it. For example, one

participant, Javnab, 22 year 22-year-old male (see Appendix J, p. 46), said "*like me and my sisters tend to speak a lot more English*". Participant Myrnau (Appendix J, p.80) summarises it well: "*So code-switching is our way we [...] communicate more with more people and [...] more efficiently*" CS is the most efficient way to communicate in Belize, allowing for seamless interaction across different linguistic groups.

Regarding the mid-generation's (26-45) perceptions of language use, they generally perceive the older generations as being more monolingual, maintaining their heritage languages: Spanish for Mestizos, Garifuna for Garifunas and Maya for some groups. On the other hand, they believe younger generations are increasingly English-dominant due to the following factors. They perceive young speakers as using more American English features and slang. And, they view themselves as fluent bilinguals or trilinguals, switching fluidly between Spanish, English and Kriol. They believe they engage in more language use than their parents did. Lastly, the older generation perceives younger people as speaking more English as well. They say their past generations spoke Maya or Garifuna, but now Spanglish is the most common language.

While these perceptions appear to reflect broader generational trends in language use, this alignment cannot be fully verified within the scope of this study, as it focuses on participants' self-reported experiences rather than a systematic analysis of recorded speech across generations. Nonetheless, the perceived patterns are meaningful in their own right: some participants perceive multilingualism as an advantage, allowing for greater global connections, while others express concern over the loss of traditional languages, including indigenous languages.

4.3.2 Language Shift vs. Language Loss: Is Belize Losing Its Linguistic Diversity?

The three generations seem to perceive the possibility of language loss in Belize. A key question that arises is whether language loss might occur or will occur in Belize, given that younger generations are becoming increasingly English-dominant. While this study does not focus on language loss directly, participants' insights provide useful perspectives on potential shifts in language use. As mentioned previously, according to participants, younger generations, particularly Gen Z, are using more English due to education prioritising English, exposure to the internet media and social platforms that emphasise American English and limited opportunities to practice Spanish or Kriol outside the home. Indeed, older generations

sometimes struggle to understand younger speakers, as their language includes American English features and slang, frequent CS and Spanglish and internet-influenced expressions unfamiliar to older generations. It was suggested by one participant, Naosyl (see Appendix J, p.86), that this might also not be a phenomenon specific to Belize, but just a common generational difference. As they describe the younger generation's speech as a "*whole new language*" that they must adapt to understand (Appendix J, Naosyl, p.86).

> **"Por ejemplo, acá nuestros nietos y nietas que hablan puro inglés, y nosotros hablamos puro español." (Appendix J, Marpos, p.55)**
>
> *For example, here our grandchildren only speak English, and we speak only Spanish.*
>
> **"Los chiquitos de hoy en día no quieren hablar como ehm Spanish, solo Spanish, como tus niecies and nephews. Ya no quieren hablar solo Spanish, ya quieren hablar, quieren hablar puro Inglés." (Appendix J, Moichi, p.59)**
>
> *The children nowadays do not want to speak Spanish, only Spanish, like your nieces and nephews. They do not want to speak only Spanish; they want to speak, they want to speak only English.*
>
> **"Como con los younger generations, ya es más English que se hace require para ellos." (Appendix J, Keigri, p.65)**
>
> *Like with the younger generations, it is more and more English that is required to speak with them.*

This fear of language loss is understandable, but it might be more appropriate to talk about language shift, as defined previously by Bullock and Toribio (2009), gradually moving from one language to another. This is not the same as language loss, when a language is no longer spoken at all, either by individuals (personal loss) or by the whole community (language death) (Haynes, 2009). Regardless, participants try to explain this through the following factors: (a) education and exposure, (b) family language practices and (c) cultural and regional variations.

First, several participants pointed to education, television, and internet access as key reasons for generational shifts in language use. As Hozayu observed, "*The younger generation, just like English, proper English. I feel they not really teaching Spanish now*

because they get more influence by internet and TV" (Appendix J, p.24). Similarly, Karrod noted that children often grow up watching TV, "*and TV is mainly like all English*" (Appendix J, p.28).

Second, 9 participants out of 48 explicitly reported that their parents or grandparents spoke mostly Spanish. Their own generation code-switches between Spanish and English, and Kriol, and much more. However, their children seem to use less Spanish and still prefer English, raising questions about why that is. Lastly, there is a cultural and regional variation. Participants reported that in urban areas, English and Kriol are dominant, that in town, Spanish and Kriol are dominant, and in the villages, Spanish is the main language. Overall, based on participants' perspectives, the current trends suggest a language shift rather than immediate language loss; however, concerns remain about whether Spanish and Kriol will continue to be passed down. Future research could further explore whether Belize's linguistic diversity will persist or if English will increasingly dominate at the expense of other languages.

4.3.3 Language Prestige in Belize: A Context-Dependent Perspective

Participants' responses raised questions about whether language shift in Belize is driven by prestige: Does one language hold more status or respect than others? Participants' responses suggest that language prestige is not absolute but rather:

(a) context dependent (varies based on setting and function): As seen in previous quotes, certain participants associated English with formal or professional environments such as work or school, while Kriol or Spanish were often linked to more informal or home settings. This aligns with previous quotes where participants described adjusting their language depending on who they were speaking to and the context.

(b) region-dependent (some languages are more common in certain areas): Language prestige also depends on geographical location. As indicated in the questionnaire data (Appendix L), English and Kriol tend to dominate in urban areas, while Spanish is more prevalent in rural villages, and as explained by three participants, Aalara (Appendix J, p.5), Ryagar (Appendix J, p.13) or Mircaw (Appendix J, p.73). These regional patterns influence which language is seen as more "appropriate" or "expected" in specific places, rather than suggesting any inherent superiority.

(c) influenced by personal experiences (individuals perceive language respect differently based on their background): Finally, individuals' perceptions of prestige are influenced by their own background and experiences. As Syacaw explained, "*I know the people and their background and what language they feel more comfortable, [then I would speak it]*" (Appendix J, p.112). Similarly, Hartra noted that adapting one's language can "*make them feel comfortable when I'm talking to them*" (Appendix J, p.43).

English is the official language of Belize and holds prestige in formal settings. It is used in education, government, workplaces, and professional environments. It is often described as the "*proper way of speaking*". Three participants, Ryagar, Hozayu or Edmerey (Appendix J, p. 13, 22 and 27) emphasise the importance of speaking "*proper English*" or "*fully formed words in English*", being important and respectful and being respected in certain contexts. However, this does not mean that English is more respected than other languages; it is simply the expected norm in formal situations. English's role is functional rather than necessarily being "*more prestigious*".

Kriol plays a central role in Belizean identity. As participant Edmerey described, it is "*unique within our country*" (Appendix J, p.28). Yet, attitudes towards it are ambivalent: while many acknowledge its cultural value and linguistic richness, it is still often perceived as a "*lazy*" or informal way of speaking (Appendix J, Mircaw, p.75). Such views likely stem from Belize's colonial legacy and educational system, both of which have historically failed to recognise Kriol as a legitimate language. Nonetheless, Kriol remains the dominant mode of communication in several regions, particularly in southern Belize.

Two participants, Keigri and Myrnau (Appendix J, pp. 62 and 80), felt that Spanish is less respected in Belize. This perception may be linked to the dominance of English and Kriol in public life, as well as the association of Spanish with informality or immigration. However, views on this matter differ. All other participants either engaged in debate around the question or clearly expressed the belief that all languages in Belize are valued, regardless of how frequently they are used. These attitudes are shaped by personal experience. For example, Hecval (Appendix J, pp. 34–42), who arrived in Belize from a Spanish-speaking background, recalled feeling pressure to learn English. In contrast, Dexmat (Appendix J, p.2), who grew up in Belize, never experienced English as an imposed language and described Spanish as the "*default*" around Orange Walk.

Participants such as Allmar, Hozayu, and Kaiver (Appendix J, pp. 116, 24, and 52) argued that English holds no greater prestige than other languages; rather, its dominance stems from practicality—its use in education, government, and business. Rather than being about prestige, language choice in Belize seems more connected to functionality and context. This study's findings suggest that Belizean language practices may challenge Western notions of linguistic prestige, which often associate "*proper*" language use with social hierarchy and status. Many participants noted a lack of judgment in casual language use. For instance, Naosyl (Appendix J, p.83) described feeling free to switch between languages during informal gatherings, whether at the beach or on a hike, without fear of being criticised. This suggests that Belizeans use language fluidly, based on their environment rather than prestige concerns.

To summarise, the findings highlight several key patterns. First, participants' language choices are shaped by context, their interlocutors, and their comfort levels. Code-switching is not only common but also serves a practical function. Generational differences emerged as well: younger participants expressed pride in their English proficiency but some discomfort with Spanish, especially when speaking to native speakers; middle-generation speakers showed wide variation in preferences; and older participants were generally more comfortable in Spanish, though some viewed code-switching as a marker of lower education, while others embraced it. Finally, English and Kriol use appear to be increasing, while Spanish is gradually declining.

4.4 Multilingualism and Linguistic Identity

4.4.1 Visualising Language Identity: Insights from Language Portraits

As explained in the methodology of this research, participants were asked to do a Language Portrait (*Language Portraits – Lost Wor(L)Ds*, n.d.). This experiment has a creative purpose; it prompts reflection on personal language and identity connections. It also gives space to the participants for a different form of expression, with a visualisation of language and identity dynamics. And, it brings new discussion with a different way of analysing the data. Some of the participants kept their portrait simple, separating it into three or two equal parts; however, each participant had a unique explanation of their portrait (see **Figure 9 and 10**). While some portraits are simple and symmetrical, others are more nuanced and asymmetrical, which

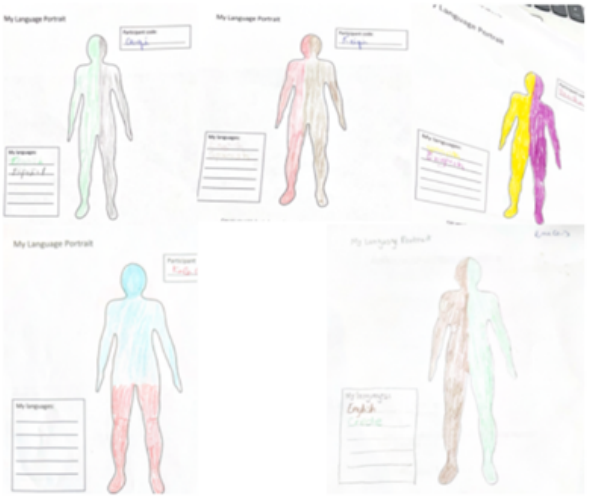
shows the individuality of how language and identity interact, with unique explanations for each participant.

Figure 9

Language Portraits- Divided into three languages (English, Spanish, Kriol)

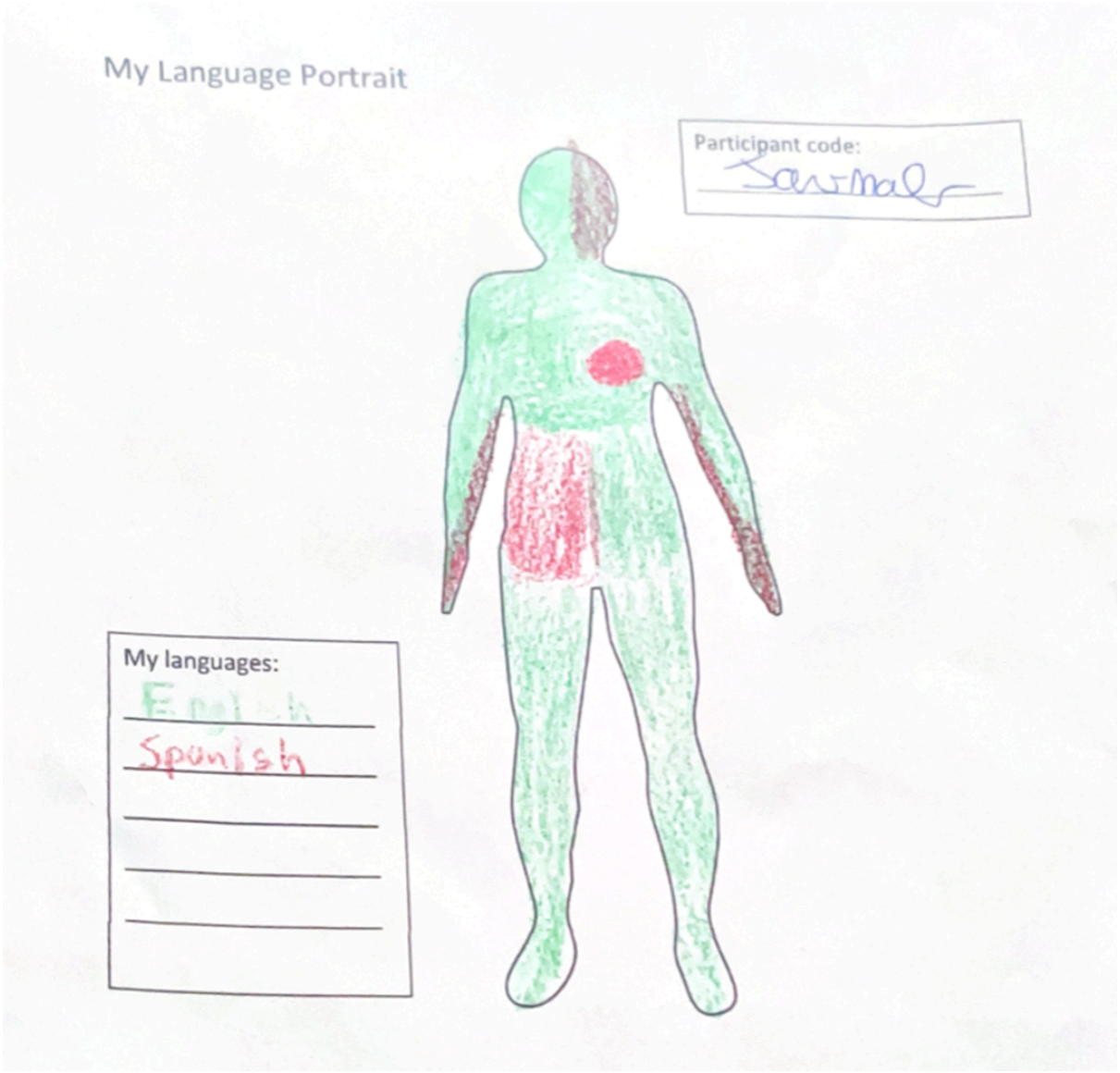
Figure 10

Language Portraits- Divided into two languages (English/Spanish, or English/Kriol)



The overall analysis of the language portraits, as mentioned previously, is included in the analysis of the overall results regarding linguistic identity. Yet, let us have a closer look at three of them.

Figure 11
Language Portrait



A 22-year-old male student from San Estevan, a village near Orange Walk, created this portrait. They described their portrait as follows (**Figure 11**, see Appendix I, p.18):

> **"So, I mostly just speak English and Spanish, those, just those two languages Hum again mostly colored mine mostly in English because that's the language I mostly speak and that's I think that's like my primary language like I- my primary language that's the one that I always fall in default. The only reason I speak a bit of Spanish, I understand Spanish I- for hum reading and writing is a bit more difficult for me so I still understand Spanish, the reason I colored like the heart area a bit red because I'm born Spanish like I'm mestizo so I'm born**

there, so there's always gonna be that Spanish part of me like in my head in my UNCLEAR a bit of my body." (Appendix J, Javnab, p. 47)

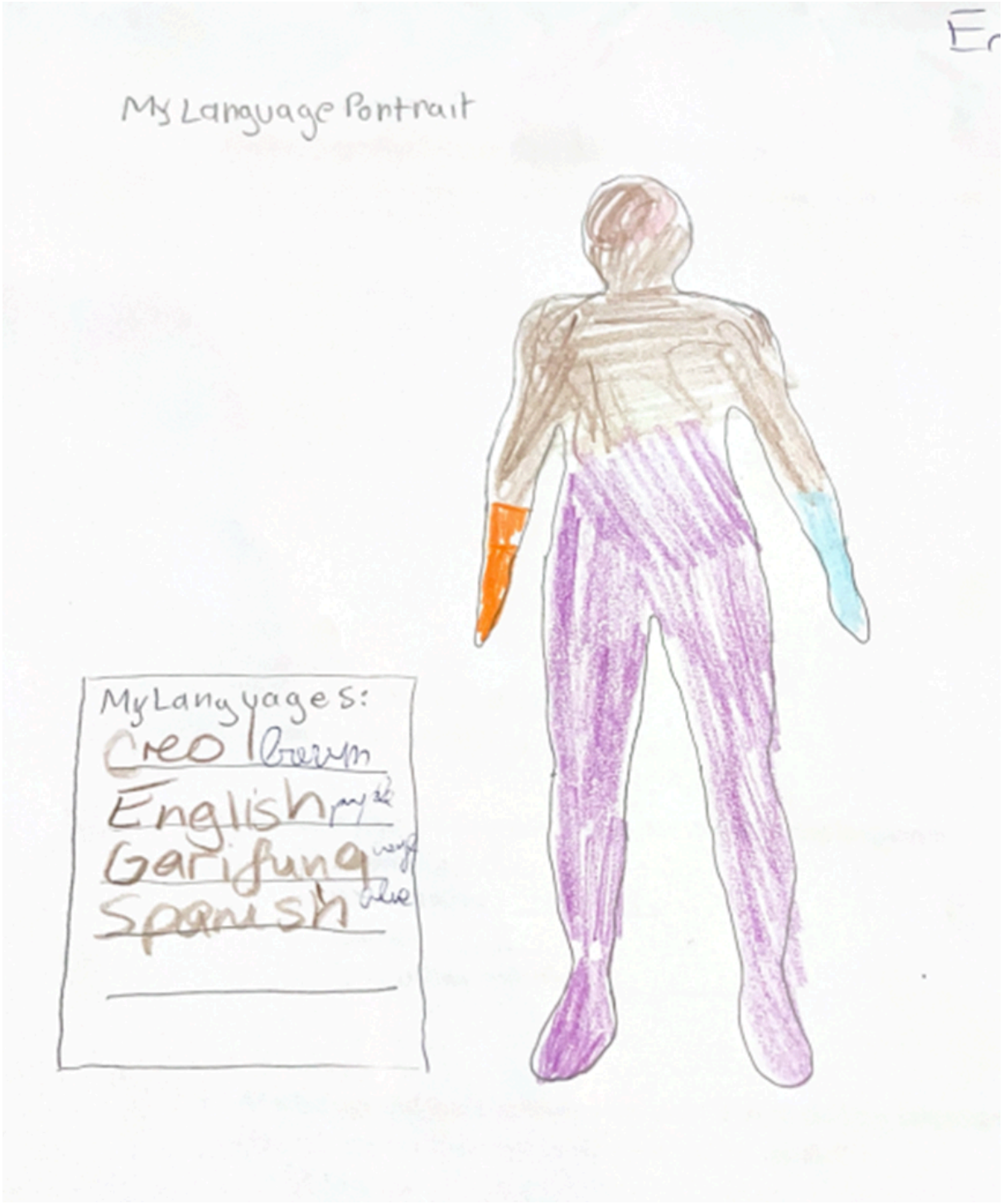
In short, English (in green) covers most of the body as it is the language they mainly speak, their "*primary language*". Spanish (in red) covers the heart and some small parts of the body, as they understand it and speak it a bit. It is in the heart as they are mestizo, and it is a part of them.

The participant based their drawing on their linguistic hierarchy, meaning that the colour green (representing English) dominates the body, which relates to their "*default*" language, as they mention. A language where they feel comfortable speaking, and that they would almost always automatically choose to express themselves. Then red (which represents Spanish) is confined to the heart and small parts of the body. This represents the speaker's partial proficiency (their understanding is better than their speaking and writing), but still holds symbolic importance. In fact, the heart's centrality contrasts with its small physical representation; there might be a tension between emotional roots and practical usage. So maybe language proficiency does not necessarily relate to belonging and identity.

The heart is used as a metaphor. Spanish is linked to ancestry ("*I'm mestizo*") and cultural birthright ("*born there*"). The heart here is the core of their identity, their heritage, a fixed belonging. Even if their proficiency is limited. Whereas the rest of the body is used as a function. It reflects the utilitarian dominance of everyday life, using it at school, in social life, etc. When first looking at the portrait, English dominates over Spanish, and yet, the heart is there and resists. Spanish is emotionally central but functionally on the side, as the participants have more struggles with Spanish when it comes to writing or reading. There might be some sort of dissonance here, as the participants feel "*Spanish*" culturally but struggle to claim it linguistically. It might also suggest a possible attrition, where Spanish, in their case, remains a heritage language tied to identity more than practice.

In the end, even though there is an internal conflict, with English as the "*primary language*" and Spanish as identity, the participant deliberately placed the heart, asserting their agency: "*There's always gonna be that Spanish part of me*".

Figure 12
Language Portrait



The participant is a 45-year-old female, Senior youth officer, originally from Belize City, but moved to Orange Walk Town. They described their portrait as follows (**Figure 12**, see Appendix I, p. 32):

> **"Yeah, alright so hum with my picture why I color no why- hum, this is a girl it's not a boy, so I coloured the top part in brown to represent the- the Kriol so hum**

> **half I got brown because I talk Kriol fluently, and the other half I put maroon for English. You know. So I feel like equally I can talk the two of them at any time switching- switching no matter when, but on the tip part the two hands I have ehm the blue for Spanish because yes I could identifiy how to say, like when one would- I could tell you what the telephone, I could tell you coke, I could tell you about the key, computer phone UNCLEAR all of them but for put it ina a sentence […] No. And that's the same thing with the Garifuna language, and while we grew up ina the culture, my mother would know how to speak it, but when her sisters and family come around, so the garifuna, but we could say like phrases you know like fih say hem like come here, let's go eat, go buy the UNCLEAR, like few short sentences, so this tip represents hum the Garifuna language, hum the Spanish the other tip, and the other hum full body, the top UNCLEAR Kriol and the bottom English. ” (Appendix J, Enicas, p.33)**

In short, Kriol (in brown) covers the top part of the body, as the participants mention they speak it fluently. English (in purple) covers the lower half of the body, as they speak equally both languages and switch between them. The two hand tips are colored. One is in blue (for Spanish) because they can speak it a little due to their job, and them moving to Orange Walk, where Spanish is more present. The other tip is in orange (representing Garifuna) as they do not speak it, but grew up with the culture.

There are dominant languages in their portrait. Kriol (brown and top half) and English (purple and lower half) are equally split. They represent the participants' balanced bilingualism: "*I can talk the two of them at any time, switching.*". The equal halves also show a natural alternation between the two languages in their daily life, naturally CS. Then there are peripheral languages. Spanish (blue and in the hand) and Garifuna (in orange and the other hand). Those languages are confined to the body extremities, symbolising their limited proficiency; they can say "*phrases*" and a "*few short sentences*".

This is not just about their linguistic proficiency but also about the cultural meaning behind the languages. The participants saying "*I talk Kriol fluently*" and positioning it as a core part of their body signal it as important culturally and in their everyday life. Though the participant did not mention this, positioning English as the lower half of the body might signal it as the support language. However, equal halves imply that there is no internal hierarchy between Kriol and English.

Regarding Garifuna and Spanish, the hands are a smaller part of the body, but are functional. They can be used for basic communication in everyday life, such as "*come here*". For the Garifuna, there is also a potential erosion of the language. "*My mother would know how to speak*", a potential language attrition in the next generations. So, including Garifuna despite their limited proficiency shows cultural loyalty or importance. Again, showing that language proficiency does not influence belonging to a culture.

Compared to the previous portrait (see **Figure 13**), where English dominated and Spanish was linked to emotional ties, here, Kriol and English are at parity, and Garifuna, a heritage language, is also marginalised in a smaller part of the body, but remains highly acknowledged and respected. Both use body geography to negotiate language-identity tensions.

Figure 13

Language Portrait

The participant is a 35-year-old female, an Education officer, from Orange Walk Town. They described their portrait as follows (**Figure 13**, see Appendix I, p.1):

> **"Okay, my one. My languages es English, Spanish, y Kriol. English I would say pusé, lo hice like out my whole body because it's the language que we usually use the most and then anything and everyday. Then I have like hum, hice como una swirl, swirly thingy allí, con Spanish y Kriol, 'cause I would think sometimes in Spanish sometimes in Kriol, but then hice draw como un little UNCLEAR because sometimes the language también es Kriol. Depends with who am I speaking right, and then hum siempre yellow le pusé because es el language que hace ehm hace es predominant. And then I joined together English and Spanish and I did Spanglish uhm actually it's not like the language, UNCLEAR in Belize, but we mostly do, and I coloured my entire body 'cause we [...] no,**

> **Spanglish because it's red. Es que no sé the difference between [...] difference between- but actually I should have used another colour, but anyways the whole body, literally everything is Spanglish, because that is what we mostly use in our daily language and everything so yeah, that's my one." (Appendix J, Syacaw, p. 107)**

In short, they outlined their body in yellow (for English), the predominant language in Belize, and filled it in with red (for Spanglish), which they describe as their main mode of everyday communication. And then they did a swirl with all the languages, English, Spanish and Kriol in the head, as they can speak and think in all these languages.

The participant's use and distribution of colour appears deliberate, symbolising the presence and importance of each language in their life. The entire body is outlined in yellow (English) and red (Spanglish), which indicates that these languages are a part of the participant, independent of contexts or settings. The swirl in the head, combining English, Spanish, and Kriol, reflects their constant mental and oral language switching and how they process information multilingually. The participant also used the body as a metaphor for their self, as by saying "*the whole body, literally everything, is Spanglish*". This implies that Spanglish is not just a language but a way of being and interacting in their environment.

Even though the participant presents all languages as integral to their identity, they also indicate that language use varies depending on context. They note that language choice depends on the interlocutor, "*depends with who am I speaking*", which shows dynamic, context-dependent language practices and reflects the diversity in a multilingual community. People fluidly shift between languages based on social context. Furthermore, it is not just about context but also about status. English is described as "*predominant*" in Belize. This suggests its institutional dominance, while Spanglish is positioned as the most used language in daily life. This suggests that their everyday linguistic practices may differ from official language policies or ideologies.

4.4.2 Language and Identity: Generational Perspectives and Personal Narratives

After analysing these language portraits, by looking at the answers in the recordings, we can notice some common themes emerging. Each participant has their narrative, but there are patterns in how they think about identity and language. The portraits reveal that identity

encompasses more than language; it is shaped by culture, upbringing, emotions, and lived experiences. The following section discusses these broader themes as expressed across participant narratives.

Participants believed their identity is shaped by various factors such as culture, personal experiences, upbringing and environment, and language is one of those factors. It plays a significant role in expressing identity, but is not the sole defining element. As Hozayu explains, *"language is part of the culture, so I think it does make you- you know, the language does make you who you are in a way"* (Appendix J, p. 24). Similarly, Moichi emphasizes the importance of individual character over language alone: *"Tu own personality es lo que te hace quien tú eres"* (Appendix J, p. 57). This view is echoed by Allmar, who states that *"your culture defines who you are"* (Appendix J, p. 115). These responses reflect a common belief that language is an important component of identity, embedded within a larger constellation of cultural and personal factors.

Still, some participants, such as Naosyl (Appendix J, p.84), describe language as particularly important for them, an extension of their identity. How they think, feel and communicate through language influences how they perceive themselves. For example, two participants share that the "*main language*" a person thinks in when they wake up can be connected to their identity. This connection between language and identity can go even deeper, as two participants, Shabar and Natsan (Appendix J, p.97-98), noted that certain emotions or ideas are best expressed in specific languages, for example, "*Spanish is an emotional language*". This reinforces the idea that multilingualism provides diverse ways to construct and perform identity.

Each generation perceives the relationship between language and identity differently. Younger participants reflect that identity is shaped by many factors, with language being important but not exclusive. They believe their cultural background, social environment and personal experiences are significant influences on their identity. But for many, language also serves as a means of self-expression and connection, with the ability to switch languages depending on the context. As mentioned above, several participants link language with emotions, values or key life events. For instance, English might represent strength, while Spanish may represent connection to family and happiness. Two participants, Hecval and Shabar (pp. 34 and 98), also reported feeling like outsiders due to linguistic differences. Four participants mention the idea of "roots", connecting language to ethnicity and cultural heritage (Appendix J, p.23, p.37, p.98, p. 66). However, language proficiency does not

necessarily match ethnic identity. This all indicates that while language can play a role in expressing identity, it is not the sole determinant.

The mid-generation believes that language and identity are intertwined but not absolute. While they see language as a part of their identity, they do not consider it the defining factor. Regarding the expression of emotions, some reported feeling that Kriol is deeply connected to Belizean culture, humour and resilience, while others reported feeling that Spanish is better for expressing emotions and integral to their sense of self. But identity goes beyond language. Participants emphasised that identity is primarily shaped by ethnicity, culture, values, food, and social interactions, beyond just language. In the end, language is seen more as a connection and navigation tool to connect with others and navigate their environment. This highlights how language, as a tool for social interaction, is inherently tied to identity.

Lastly, for the older generation, language and identity are not always linked. Participants Marpos and Juapos (Appendix J, pp. 55-56) wish they knew more English, but do not feel that language defines their identity or forces them to change. Three in the older generation identify as Mestizo and embrace their culture (Appendix J, Libgut, p.66 and Mircaw and Migcaw, p.75). However, Mircaw and Migcaw also acknowledge a linguistic disconnect between ethnicity and everyday language use. As they reflect:

“Mircaw: “What makes you who you are? Siente que el language es un way de hacerlo express? What makes you who you are? We are mestizos
Migcaw: Mestizos, right, so we follow our culture
Mircaw: Yes, we follow our culture
Migcaw: Somos mestizos, yes
Mircaw: But then we’re mestizos, but we speak a lot of Kriol”(Appendix J, p. 75).

This exchange highlights the complexity of identity, raising questions about whether ethnicity is necessarily tied to language.

In summary, from the language portraits analysis it was found that: (a) identity is multifaceted and evolving; (b) language prestige in Orange Walk is not absolute but context-dependent; (c) personal experience shapes language perception; (d) CS is natural and (e) language proficiency may not align with emotional or cultural belonging.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This study explores the interaction between language attitudes and identity across generations in Orange Walk, Northern Belize. It draws on recordings of conversational pairs discussing language use, attitudes, and identity, supported by demographic questionnaires. We complemented this information with some demographic questionnaires. This chapter will interpret the findings through the research questions:

Do relationships exist between current language attitudes and linguistic identity among different generations in Northern Belize (Orange Walk)?

If so:

- How do speakers, across ages, explicitly describe their attitudes toward local languages?
- Do self-reported attitudes translate into actual language practices?
- Do speakers associate specific language(s) or language practices with their linguistic identity?
- Are there differences between age groups in self-reported attitudes and identity associations?

It will integrate literature and discuss unexpected insights, like language use during the recordings. Overall, this study found that:

1. Orange Walk is a place where multilingualism and everyday practices such as code-switching, language choice, and patterns of language shift are the norm, it is part of everyday life;
2. Language use depends on where you are, with whom you speak and age;
3. Participants reported a shift toward increased English use, which poses questions for the future of multilingualism there;
4. Lastly, the link between language and identity is personal, multiple and always in movement; it is not one simple fixed thing.

As a summary of all the data presented previously (from questionnaires, recording quotes and language portraits), this is how each factor interacts through age:

Table 4
Generational Differences in Language Attitudes, Practices, and Linguistic Identity in Belize

Factor	Younger Participants	Middle-aged Participants	Older Participants
Language Attitudes	Positive or neutral views on language practices in Belize	Positive views on language practices in Belize and see it as a useful tool	Overall, more resistance against multilingual practices in Belize
Language Practices	Frequent code-switching, but more English	Frequent code-switching	Less code-switching, more monolingual use
Linguistic Identity	Language does not define identity	Language defines identity, but alongside values	Identity is grounded in cultural roots rather than language

5.2 Multilingual Language Practices as Normative Practices

This section answers whether there exists a relationship between current language attitudes and linguistic identity among different generations in Northern Belize, by how self-reported attitudes translate into actual language practices and how speakers associate specific language or language practices with their linguistic identity. The data confirm that multilingualism is deeply embedded in everyday life in Orange Walk. This supports Schneider's (2021) observation that code-switching is a normative practice in Belize. Contrary to Western approaches to multilingualism, like Bucholtz and Hall (2005), the findings of this study present Belize as another linguistic reality. Multilingualism and multilingual language practices in Northern Belize are not marked.

The results of this study align perfectly with Siebenhutter's (2023) framework for multilingual communities and linguistic identity. They explain that multilingual language practices are not always strategic or performative; it is a natural, lived practice, just like in Belize. Furthermore, multilingualism often reflects the unconscious negotiation of identity. By aligning with Sibenhutter's (2023) framework, this study provides a counterpoint to

performative models by emphasising the everyday multilingual practices and their role in shaping, rather than performing, identity. This study supports analysing language use beyond fixed identity construction. Reinforcing the idea that language and identity are dynamic, personal, and multifaceted; it is not one simple fixed thing. In Belize, multilingual language practices (i.e language practices in a multilingual context) are not merely a tool for expressing identity, but are identity itself. These findings suggest that Belize should not be viewed as an exception but as a meaningful alternative to performative models of identity. The Belize case demonstrates that multilingualism can be a stable, positive norm in postcolonial societies and offers a model for understanding language and identity in other diverse multilingual contexts. In short, yes, based on these attitudes and practices, there is a relationship between them and linguistic identity, and it is visible across ages. The way people feel about languages influences how they use them, and this, in turn, shapes their sense of who they are.

5.3 Contextual and Generational Variation in Attitudes and Practices

This section helps us understand how speakers, across ages, explicitly describe their attitudes toward local languages, and if these self-reports translate into actual language practices. It helps us understand if there are differences in age groups in those self-reported attitudes. The data suggest that (2) language use depends on where you are, with whom you speak and age.

Language attitudes in Belize vary not just by generation but also across social and situational contexts. What this study found about the different languages aligns with Balam (2013): (a) English is generally associated with education and formal settings, it is also often viewed as the language of opportunity and is valued in professional contexts; (b) Spanish is valued for its role in familial contexts, especially in Northern Belize, among Mestizo communties; and (c) Kriol is perceived as a marker of national identity, but can still be sometimes stigmatized or seen as less prestigious. These findings illustrate how language prestige is negotiated in Orange Walk's context. Indeed, according to Balam (2013;2014;2016), the languages that are spoken more in Belize are these three. And even though English is seen as the most prestigious, and Spanish and Kriol can be stigmatised, it remains a language for formal settings, but not the main everyday life language. This can be seen as an "artifice", an adaptation to social expectations and perceived prestige (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). It underscores the three languages' role as markers of genuineness and authenticity and reveals a tension between language ideologies (what society says) and personal use (what people feel and do) (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This association of English

to certain formal contexts illustrates how language choice indexes different social settings (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In other words, language choice is not just practical or performative; it also depends on social and emotional factors (Schneider, 2021).

This divergence between emotional attachment and actual language practice underscores the need for a more dynamic understanding of identity. What this study found aligns with what Seitz (2005) argues about identity. It is fluid and shaped by multiple factors. Just like in Orange Walk, where linguistic identity does not depend just on the language use and proficiency but also on the cultural background it carries. The interplay of context-driven identity and language choice also brings to light intergenerational tensions. As we have demonstrated in this research, different age groups in Orange Walk do not perceive these languages in the same way. In sum, language attitudes and practices are interconnected, influenced by generational, contextual, and emotional factors. Understanding language in Orange Walk requires seeing identity as something flexible and content-dependent. Despite these contextual and generational differences in language attitudes and practices, some consistent patterns emerged. The next section looks at these patterns of stability, showing how core aspects of identity remain even as language use evolves.

5.4 Stability in Change: Identity Across Generations

Despite generational differences in language practices, participants shared a remarkably consistent sense of identity. Even if younger Belizeans use more English, and older people more Spanish, for example, it does not disrupt their feeling of cultural belonging. This section explores what it means when behaviour changes (as seen previously), but identity feels stable across ages.

Findings indicate that language is a part of identity, and can be linked to belonging and emotions; however, it does not fully define who one is. This aligns with what Balam (2013; 2016) wrote that language links to belonging, emotions and memory in Belize. These emotional and memory-based connections to language shape how individuals perceive their sense of belonging. Participants across all ages shared their opinions on the matter. This study found that younger Northern Belizeans see their identity as shaped by many factors, language being a meaningful one, but not the core defining element. Middle-aged Belizeans view language as part of identity, but believe that other factors, such as values, ethnicity and social life, are more central to it. And, elderly Belizeans generally do not see language as essential to their identity and feel more attached to their cultural identity. As we can see, the perception of identity remains similar throughout the ages. Indeed, this study also found that in Northern

Belize, it is not an issue if you do not speak a language; what matters is the culture and the roots. Even if one does not speak Spanish, for example, they can still identify as Mestizo and be proud of their origins. Cultural identity does not depend on language use and proficiency. This raises the question: How can identity remain stable despite shifts in language use across generations?

This identity stability in Northern Belize can be theorised through different reasons. The first one is how shared culture, values, and history help identity stay strong even when language changes. Common cultural memory acts as a stabiliser; it remains embedded in Belizeans regardless of language through different transitions and heritages. This supports Snoek's (2022) theory of "social memory", where the history of the community and its culture is stronger than individual experiences. This also aligns with Eberhard (2018), who mentions that multilingual communities often detach language from identity, prioritising cultural practices as markers of belonging. In Belize, language is important, but it is not the only requirement for cultural belonging. Furthemore, Van Doeselarr et al. (2018) explains that identity has different layers, it is not just one thing, but a mix of (a) distinctiveness, what makes you unique or different from others, (b) coherence, having a sense of who you are that makes sense to you and (c) continuity, feeling like you are the same person over time. In the case of this study, young Belizeans focus on being unique and mixing cultures (influenced by global factors and local roots) (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Van Doeselaar et al., 2018). Older people care more about keeping traditions and staying connected to their ancestors, and middle-aged people try to balance both being true to themselves but also adapting to new things. This fits with the "complex system theory" mentioned by Sa'd (2017, p.21): identity is not fixed; it changes and adapts as life changes, even as people change, there still is a core sense of self that stays present. A sense of community and shared culture.

These findings challenge models that place language at the centre of identity performance. While scholars like Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue for the performativity of identity through language, this research shows that in Orange Walk, identity is not always actively performed through language only. Instead, language practices, such as code-switching, reflect a fluid, context-sensitive way of communicating. These practices carry emotional ties, social roles, and values, often in subtle ways. Thus, identity is embedded not in a specific language but in how language is practised in social interaction.

This section reinforces the idea that identity has multiple layers and constantly evolves; it is negotiated through everyday interactions and social relationships, supporting the idea that identity is always in movement and shaped by relational dynamics (Bucholtz &

Hall, 2005). Sibenhutter (2023) says identity cannot be fixed, and this ties back to what Schneider (2025) calls “liquid languages”. Yet, in this case, we could even talk about “liquid identities”. Identities, like languages, flow, adapt, and glide, depending on contexts and situations, just like water. What this research shows is that Belizeans in Orange Walk do not necessarily overthink their identity or their language choice. They change languages because it is the norm, it is how they communicate. It is done naturally, without overthinking it. Of course, there are still languages that are facing discrimination, and some also worry about a potential language loss, but generally, it is a region where everything is fluid. CS is a normal communication tool. It is fluid, alive, and never fixed, and so is identity. But, in this community, that very fluidity might actually be a stable or consistent part of how people express who they are. In other words, what is “fixed” is not the language itself, but the practices of switching, this is their norm, and it can be seen as an identity trait. In brief, in Orange Walk, language contributes to identity in complex, generationally nuanced ways, but identity remains flexible and is shaped by more than just language and family; culture and context play equally important roles.

5.5 Intergenerational Shift: The Rise of English and the Future of Multilingualism

The research helped answer how speakers, across ages, explicitly describe their attitudes toward local language and if there are any differences between age groups in self-reports. This study found that (3) participants reported a shift toward increased English use, which poses questions for the future of multilingualism there. Participants thought that younger Belizeans speak mostly English; this refers to age groups that could not be interviewed (because they are underage). It is true that in the recordings, the younger participants often used English, but this could have been influenced by the setting: the recordings were done at school. All participants shared that an interview was something “formal”, so they preferred to do it in English. But they still used Kriol and Spanish from time to time.

So, this fear of language loss, especially Spanish, refers to the youngest. With this research, we cannot know if this loss is real, but other studies indirectly talk about it. For example, Balam and Prada Pérez (2017) with the stigmatisation towards Spanish. This could mean that such a language will always be spoken less. And it can also explain why: if one is discriminated against because of language, they do not necessarily want to speak it. However, according to the participants, it is not only due to stigmatisation. They mention it might be

due to the media: animated movies, social media, everything is in English. It influences younger Belizeans and pushes them to use more English.

To understand these possible implications, it is crucial to consider whether younger generations are continuing to transmit Spanish and Kriol within their families or if these languages are being sidelined in favour of English. Even if we cannot know if what participants perceived is true, it shows that it would be interesting to study this aspect more closely. However, it shows as well that it is important to look at linguistic practices at home and see if languages like Spanish or Kriol are transmitted within the family. It joins what Tran et al. (2023) say that supporting multilingualism at home is essential to preserving linguistic diversity. Their work shows that the familial environment plays a crucial role in keeping languages alive. Ultimately, these trends raise the question of whether Belize is witnessing a gradual loss of Spanish and Kriol, or the emergence of new language practices that reflect the country's evolving multilingual identity.

The growing dominance of English in Belize, among younger generations, raises concerns about cultural preservation and identity. This may marginalise Spanish and Kriol even more. So, Belize's multilingual identity could weaken. But as the results show, less-spoken languages remain emotionally and culturally significant even nowadays. Thus, will these emotional and cultural ties be strong enough to ensure the maintenance of Spanish and Kriol for future generations, or will the practical advantages of English reshape Belize's linguistic landscape? So, the continued emotional and cultural significance of Spanish and Kriol shows that these languages still index deep-rooted aspects of identity, even as their practical use may decline (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).To summarise, findings suggest that generational shifts in language attitudes and practices, with English becoming more prominent among youth, but the full impact on multilingualism and identity in Belize requires further study. The role of family transmission and the influence of education and media are central to understanding these evolving patterns.

5.6 Methodological Reflection: Did Participants Mix Languages While Talking About Identity?

This section analyses the similarities and differences between participants' self-reported language choices and their actual use of language in the recordings. As a reminder, the youngest group used mostly English in the recordings. This could be influenced by the setting, as the recordings were conducted at their school, for most of them. So, if they talk

about experiences at school, they would naturally do it in English. Thus, the language used during the interviews may not fully reflect the participants' natural, everyday speech patterns. However, there might still be a link between the content and the form. When participants used Spanish or spoke about it, it was often to talk about a precise moment, a scene that they reenacted. This shows how language choice is indexically tied to lived experience and context (Buchooltz & Hall, 2005). Spanish was also used to express emotional aspects. The middle group was the one who switched the most between languages. We could observe CS also depending on the topic. For example, they would insert English or Spanish words depending on the theme, as if some topics would be linked to a specific language. There was also the case of Spanglish, with one participant considering it a language in itself (Syacaw, Appendix J, p.107).

What this implies is that language is linked to context, even when recalling a memory, they seem to reenact it in the language it happened in. This is a common pattern, as mentioned by Lai and O'Brien (2020) with their "Adaptive Control Hypothesis". It explains that bilinguals, or in our case, multilinguals, adapt their language use based on different interactional contexts, and insert words from one language into another when those words are more contextually tied to a specific topic. This confirms that there is no "ideal" language to express identity (Lai & O'Brien, 2020). This theory explains the "how", the cognitive adaptation to context in language use. But, it ties back to the "what" and "why". Which are ideas from Siebenhutter (2023) or Schneider (2025): languages are in movement, fluid and non-fixed. It would be interesting to go deeper into this topic by comparing the self-reports of participants (their perceptions) to the linguistic reality of the country. In Belize, the boundaries between languages are not strict or closed. They constantly influence each other: the words, the expressions and structures can switch from one language to another. Overall, this research demonstrates how language choice in Orange Walk is closely linked to context, memory, and emotion, with different age groups showing distinct patterns of adaptation and CS. This fluid, adaptive use of language shows the non-fixed, always evolving nature of both linguistic practices and identity in multilingual communities.

6. Limitations

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the study sample of the older generation is underrepresented. This is due to recruitment challenges, which limit the ability to draw reliable conclusions for this age group. It also restricts the analysis of generational shifts in language attitudes. Second, even with the best attempt to define linguistic identity, it remains complex to quantify. Although it was assessed through self-reports and language portraits, linguistic identity remains a fluid and multifaceted concept. Furthermore, regarding age, this study focuses on the generational component; it also acknowledges other factors that make multilingualism and identity such intersectional concepts (Samie & August, 2025). Identity and multilingualism are also shaped by factors such as region, gender, and ethnicity. A significantly larger sample and extended timeframe would be necessary for a comprehensive analysis.

There are also methodological biases to take into consideration. The language used by the interviewer and the interview setting may have influenced how participants responded or chose their language, despite efforts to write the questions in a code-switched manner. Also, some participants reported difficulty going through the code-switched questions, which suggests that the method, while still appropriate, could have been refined. Regarding the transcription, the similarities between Belizean English and Belizean Kriol made it difficult to clearly differentiate them. This might have led to a wrong transcript in some of the quotes, potentially resulting in an underrepresentation of Kriol in some transcripts.

Lastly, there were some practical constraints. Time restrictions limited the number of interviews and reduced the generalizability of the generational comparison. Limited pre-fieldwork knowledge of Orange Walk meant key themes only emerged during data collection, strongly suggesting follow-up studies.

7. Conclusion

The current research aimed to identify generational differences in language attitudes and linguistic identity in Orange Walk, Northern Belize. The central question for this research was:

Do relationships exist between current language attitudes, language practices and linguistic identity across ages in Northern Belize (Orange Walk)?

There is a link between language attitudes and identity across generations in Northern Belize, Orange Walk. However, these links are not linear or uniform; they are dynamic and context-dependent. In fact, rather than showing a single trajectory, generational differences in language use and attitudes show the fluid, evolving nature of identity in a multilingual community. This reflects a community where multilingual practices are the norm. Linguistic identity is context-dependent and non-static. Thus, language attitudes and linguistic identity are interdependent and generationally layered.

The study found age-related patterns that were clear yet non-linear in language use, attitudes, and identity. Younger participants tended to use more English compared to other generations, especially in formal or school-related contexts, but still engaged in frequent code-switching with Kriol and Spanish in informal settings. Their sense of identity is shaped by multiple factors, including language, culture, and emotion, but language alone is not central. Middle-aged participants displayed the most fluid and balanced multilingual practices, switching easily between English, Kriol, and Spanish across settings. For them, language is an important part of identity, but not the only one; values, upbringing, and community also played key roles. Older participants generally used more Spanish and showed more resistance to code-switching, although this resistance varied: some viewed code-switching as improper or linked to a lack of education, while others saw it as a natural evolution. Yet, even among those who used fewer languages, identity was rooted more in cultural and familial belonging than in language use. These varied responses highlight that even within a generation, there is no fixed stance or pattern. Instead, context matters more than just age. Additionally, identity is stable not because language stays the same, but because cultural memory, emotional ties, and shared values persist even as linguistic practices evolve.

While the study began without rigid expectations, it was informed by theories assuming structured relationships between language, identity, and generational change (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1987). But it introduced theories that say identity is not fixed, but changes depending on the situation (Schneider, 2025; Siebenhütter, 2023). The methods worked well for this. The “language portrait” activity helped people show how they use different languages in their lives, and the open interviews let them talk freely. Letting people choose which language to use during the recordings made

them comfortable, so we could see how naturally they switched between languages. Instead of following rigid norms about which language to use, they frequently switch in ways that reflect a shared, familiar multilingual environment. The research found some changes between generations, especially with younger people using more English. But it did not collect enough data from older participants to accurately say how things are changing over time. Future research is needed with a larger sample, enabling a more solid intergenerational analysis.

The study collected participants' perceptions of a potential language shift towards English and a fear of losing Spanish. Future research could explore in more depth whether the linguistic diversity of Belize will persist or if English will become more and more dominant.

It contributes new insight into an area where there is limited empirical research on everyday multilingualism and identity. It fills a gap by exploring how different generations think about and use languages in their daily lives. It helped move away from rigid frameworks of language and identity links, to show lived, fluid multilingualism. It found that CS is natural and widespread across all generations. It also demonstrated that identity is not tied to one language, but to multilingual practices shaped by context, interlocutor, and emotional comfort.

This research methodology, especially the language portraits, revealed that participants placed languages in symbolic parts of the body, showing emotional and cultural ties beyond practical use. Furthermore, the recordings showed CS linked to memory and context. It thus challenges these structured assumptions with real-world linguistic fluidity by using creative methods that helped uncover how natural and normal CS is. Lastly, participants themselves described CS as "normal", "natural" and "everywhere", which supports Siebenhutter's (2023) idea that CS can be unconscious and identity is not always strategically constructed. These findings give new ideas for future research about how language and identity work in multilingual communities, for multilingual identity theory and sociolinguistic research in similar multilingual contexts.

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9. Appendix

Some supplementary materials, including transcripts, detailed data tables, and additional analyses, are available online as appendices. These can be accessed via the following link: https://osf.io/ckxty/?view_only=4a41b2c6881042ce995bb8200fa8f837

For reference throughout the thesis, appendices are labelled (e.g., Appendix A, Appendix B, etc.) and correspond to the documents available at the above URL.

Reference: Rini, L. (2025, July 1). Generational Perspectives on Language Attitudes and Linguistic Identity in a Multilingual Community. Retrieved from osf.io/ckxty

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