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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### The Relationship between Language and Identity

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#### ABSTRACT

This research explores the relationship between language and identity; with more than 7,000 spoken languages in the world today, we can transmit our identities and thoughts by using our language, and that is one of the strongest human abilities as far as the language is different as much as the transmitted can be different too since the language is a main and an important method to express our identities in any culture and society. Language is either individual words, connected speech, or even writing. While we use written or spoken language, we do not only express our thoughts, culture, society, intentions but also who we really are and how we want people to see us. We both perform and produce specific identities depending on the context. I used a survey (quantitative data), and I published it on different media, so I could gather as many participants and cover a large number of experiences. It included both open and closed questions and also included possible answers (multiple choices) to serve accuracy as well as selecting percent to serve self-evaluation. The participants of the study were random people of society from different age categories, consisting of both genders, male and female, with graphs to show some of the statistics of the survey questions. As I mentioned before, the setting was different social media programs. Hopefully, this research will clarify the relationship between language and identity.

#### KEYWORDS

Language; Identity; Relationship; society; gender

#### ARTICLE INFORMATION

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#### 1. Introduction

The relationship between language and identity is a strong unbreakable relationship, both of them affect each other in some way, and every person is affected by this relationship. Our language and our surrounding determine who we are, considering the importance of the language which is used among us and between us. While science grows and the researchers increase, they have been curious about that. And studied many places that were unknown, trying to figure out how the differences in the languages can create different identities and really, the differences in our languages can be an obstacle to being able to communicate with each other. When we learn more about this relationship, it will help us even on a personal level. It will also help our understanding of the surrounding people, even if we are different in languages and identities.

The more we know about this relationship, the more we will know how they are connected to each other and which one of them has a stronger effect on society. Our culture, which plays a great role in constructing our identity, affects our language use; for example, in English speaking countries, the buyer use Thank you in buying things and please in the request more than in other countries. Unlike in Japan, mostly the person who sells is the one who thanks. Even though the situations are similar, and the order of the events is the same, we still find some differences. Our language and our choice of specific words and sentences are shaped by our cultures and our society, as well as the people around us. In some way, our language shapes them too.

### **1.1 The Research Questions**

- What does language mean?
- What does identity mean?
- What are the types of identity?
- How are language and identity connected?
- How language shapes identity and the way we think?

### **1.2 Research Problems**

In my research, I tried to address the language and its effect and the relation with our identity and who we are. The reason behind my choice is a great number of people from different age categories do not know the real definition of language!

When I asked some random participants do you know what language is? They simply answer: talk- speech...etc., which I consider to be wrong and a huge mistake. Language is more than that; it is our unique way of explaining ourselves, our cultures, our backgrounds, our society, our social status and, most importantly, our identity. We are expressed by our language, but what language and how?

The second part of it is what is identity? Is it possible for an individual to carry more than one identity? What are the types of identities? Are they affected by our surroundings? So many questions need to be answered, and I hope by the end of my research, you will be able to answer them easily and with confidence.

I wanted to discuss this in depth in my research in order to explain every little detail and to spread the true understanding of the relationship between language and identity.

### **1.3 Background**

One of our most important properties in life as human beings is speaking, to have the ability to express our ideas, beliefs, and the important thing is our identities and who we are. Maybe the clearest example that explains the great importance of language to identify a human's identity is Victor, the wild boy of Aveyron. He was found in France abandoned by his family; he appeared to be 11 or 12 years old; he made no sounds and not even a single word. They tried to teach him, and they made a great effort to make him speak. Itard, who has taken the boy's responsibility, gave him the name (Victor). He grew up without language, which affected his intelligence, his learning and, of course, his identity. Just because he did not have a language used around him, he did not have a clear identity that explained his thoughts, feelings, and who he really was. Our language plays an important role in shaping us from different aspects, such as our gender identity, our social identity, as well as the role we play and contributes in our own community or any other community we are involved in; that is simply because our language is more than just linguistic behaviors we perform, it is who we really are. Certainly, there is no person without a current specific identity, but with many languages today, the way of our expression could be definitely different. Nevertheless, we can still disclose our identity to one another. Many researchers over the years studied the relationship between language and identity, but still, it is renewed, and of course, evolves over the years for different reasons, such as: - the existence of new languages that were not known or the different expressions from one language to another.

## **2. Literature review**

I collected in this chapter different views of different researchers about the meaning of language and the meaning of identity as well as their opinions about the relationship between these two concepts.

### **2.1 The Relationship between Identity and Language**

Due to the multiple meaning of identity, it is a little bit hard for us to conclude a single definition; we have to take into consideration the community and the society as well as the culture and the environment. According to Kira Haal(2017), "The term identity literally refers to sameness. One might therefore expect that identity would be most salient when people are most similar. Yet this seemingly straightforward formulation is more complex in practice. It is not easy for an outside observer to determine when a group of people should be classified as "alike," nor is it obvious on what grounds such a classification should be made, given the infinitude of ways in which individuals vary from one another"(p. 370). She claimed that "identity is an outcome of cultural semiotics that is accomplished through the production of contextually relevant sociopolitical relations of similarity and difference, authenticity and inauthenticity, and legitimacy and illegitimacy " (p. 382). Kira Haal(2017) argued, "In many ways, the study of linguistic anthropology is the study of language and identity. The field's concern with the linguistic production of culture entails a

concern with the variety of culturally specific subject positions that speakers enact through language. Thus classic linguistic-anthropological studies of performance and ritual, of socialization and status, describe not merely kinds of speech but kinds of speakers who produce and reproduce particular identities through their language use.<sup>1</sup> Although the field did not rely heavily on the term identity itself until relatively recently, the concept has now taken a central position in linguistic anthropology" (p. 369). According to (Holmes & Wilson, 2017), "Through analyses of linguistic variations, sociolinguistics is concerned with the effects of societal factors on linguistic behavior. One significant dimension of sociolinguistic research is the investigation of the impact of social norms and roles on linguistic identity".

Masoud Mahmoodi Shahreabaki (2018) explained, "Sometimes, individual speakers maintain dual identities by use of two linguistic varieties to communicate in double speech communities. It is not true in any sense to conclude that social identity is the sum of every single individual's identity. In other words, both intra and interlinguistic identities may change in different ways through time. Within the speech community, speakers continuously adjust their identities and contribute to the group's identity" (p. 218).

However, according to Majd Sarah (2018), "Research interests in the relationship between identity and language learning underwent a shift in the epistemological paradigms utilized by many second language acquisition scholars and linguistic anthropologists. Questions on identity and language learning have taken up new research trajectories theoretically and empirically" (p. 57), and she claimed that "language forms a central role in defining social and political organizations is essential to the way in which post structuralism depicts individual diversity" (p. 58) in addition she argued "identities are constructed through social interaction" (p. 60). But what is identity? Different terms have been used to explain the term identity.

According to Masoud Mahmoodi Shahreabaki (2018), "research on language and identity has its root in three main philosophies, namely, social constructivism, sociolinguistic theories and sociocultural theories of language learning. Sociocultural theories and sociolinguistics investigate the potential effects of social factors and societal structure on the development and use of language. However, social constructivist theories posit that human learning and behavior are constantly interacting with the social, environmental and ecological variables in a mutually constitutive process. That is, while sociolinguists and proponents of sociocultural theories assert that social factors decide language, identity and behavior as a one-directional process, social constructivists consider this process bidirectional, reciprocal and interactive" (p. 220). He argued the impact of using language on our perspective by saying "the multiple forms people can use to communicate with plenty of audiences very fast and widespread and the diversity of audience accompanied by digital communication, has changed our perception of self and others" (p. 222).

## **2.2 The formation of our identities**

According to Masoud Mahmoodi Shahreabaki (2018), "The language we learn as children at home is formative of our identity; we cannot quickly change it or replace it. Owing to the fact that language learning serves as a tool for the realization of one's identity in varying social environments, it is a reflection of our socioeconomic status (SES), race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and so many other aspects of speakers' identities" (p. 221). And according to Ron Darvin, and Bonny Norton (2019), the definitions of identity is "self"; "position"; "role"; subjectivity", "subject", and "agent", and they explained that "in recent years, the difference between social and cultural identity is seen to be theoretically more fluid, and the intersections between social and cultural identities are considered more significant than their differences. Contemporary identity research has been consistently marked by a social constructionist paradigm that pays attention to the micro-level of interaction and meaning making. Recognizing that identity is socioculturally constructed, educators draw on both institutional and community practices to understand the conditions under which language learners speak, read, and write the target language." (p. 451-474). Ron Darvin, and Bonny Norton (2019), argued: "Cultural identity refers to the relationship between an individual and members of a particular ethnic group who share a common history and language and similar ways of understanding the world" (p. 452-474). The effect of the language has been explained by Masoud Mahmoodi Shahreabaki (2018) when he argued, "Given the influence of one's language on one's identity, people learn to be male, or female, or English, or Chinese, or Hispanic, or Jewish, or Christian. And this is the main reason for us judging people's race, ethnicity or gender based on their speech" (p. 221).

We have to take into consideration the importance of appreciating the multiple identities of each person; that is what Nicola Marsden & Monika Pröbster" (2019) explained, "People are complex, and multiple identities have to be considered in their interplay to account for a comprehensive representation otherwise, personas might be superficial and prone to activate stereotypes."

Now I will focus on the second concept, which is language. The concept of language varies; it has many definitions; however, our focus will be on the broader one. According to Honorary (2021), "language is a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release."

### 3. Methodology

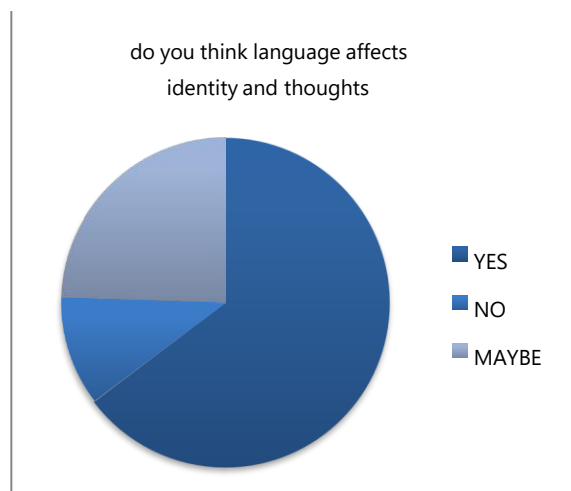
The research focuses on language and identity without paying attention to a specific language because every individual in any community has an identity of their own. So I wanted my research to have quantitative data, and I preferred to work with a random category of people from different backgrounds as well as from a variety of classes of society. I had to work with both genders, so I could generalize the data after analyzing them. In order to be as much as accurate, I addressed different age categories too. This chapter consists of the following sections: a- participants b-setting c- data sources, d- data analysis e- validity and reliability.

Participants were 102 in my questionnaire; the age average was between 20 to 30 years old, which consisted of 41% of the participants, and the age average of the next group was more than 41 years old, which consisted of 39% of them. However, the smaller group, which occupied 14% of the total number, was their age average between 31 to 40 years old, and the smallest portion was a group of children under 20 years.

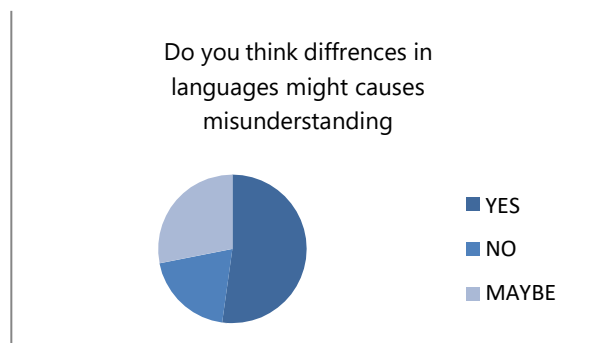
As I mentioned before, I sent my survey through social media in order to get a large number of participants as much as possible.

I used a survey consisting of open-ended questions, multiple choices, and answers containing percentages. I applied it to a large sample size in order to cover the opinions and thoughts of the participants about the fundamental relationship between language and identity, as well as to what extent they think their languages could affect their social and cultural identities.

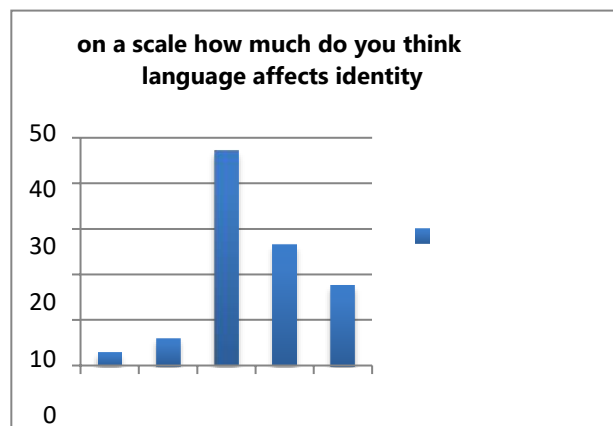
After analyzing the data, in analyzing one of the most important questions, I found that 64% of the participants believed that the language connected as well as has an effect on a person's identity and thoughts, as shown in the diagram below, whereas 24% were not sure about it.



61% of the participants think that after learning another language person's identity might change, whereas 19% were not sure. The majority of them think that language has a great effect on a person's progress and then has an effect on the expansion and learning more about other cultures. As well as has an effect on his lifestyle and communication with others. It influences self-confidence as well, has a great influence on the opportunities of having a job and provides him more with the different fields in life; in general, it affects his whole life. 52% of them think that the difference in languages might cause misunderstanding as well.



And 58% think not having a common language might be a barrier to communication with others. In the last of my survey, I asked the crucial question of my research, to which degree do you think language might affect identity? The answers varied; however, a great percent have chosen a high one, which proves the great impact of language on our identities.



One of the most important questions, in my opinion, was, have you ever mixed your language with terms of another language? A huge portion answered yes, they were 85%, whereas 17% denied it. That great number is proof of the strong bond between the languages.

I ensured the reliability and validity of my survey because the methods I had chosen to collect data were valid and reliable since my questionnaire is high quality and consisted of clear and specific questions. It consisted of participants who wanted to join to help as well as I asked for the participants' approval before starting to answer, which increased the validity.

**Timetable**

Research Activities	Estimated Timeline
Selection The Topic	10 <sup>th</sup> Of February 2021
Submission The Proposal	3 <sup>rd</sup> Of March 2021
Identify The Research Tool	In The Research Proposal
Applying The Research Tool	In The Middle Of March (After Approval Of The Research Proposal)
Data Collection	After Two To Three Weeks Of Applying The Research Tool
Data Analysis And Interpretation	After The Questionnaire Expires
Determine The Results	In The Final Research
The Final Discussion Of The Research	At The End Of The Term

#### 4. Conclusion

The relationship between a person's language and identity is fundamental. The importance of language and identity is indescribable. As we discussed, our language plays the most important role in expressing our identities and gives the most significant clues about our cultures. However, there is a variety of factors that affect this relationship, such as gender, age. Considering their roles in our society as well as our daily life, we can not neglect their importance and how they help us to understand our own identities and others. And how we can shape the different aspects of our identities depending on our languages. And to emphasise the beauty in difference and how it will not become an obstacle to communicating with each other. Actually, years from now and with more and more studies, many secrets about the connection between language and identity will appear. Hoping this research will be one of them. I am sure that someday there will be research that covers all the different aspects of this amazing relationship, and I hope that day is soon.

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