

IBTISSEM SMARI – JUDIT NAVRACSICS

University of Pannonia
Smariibtissem.si@gmail.com
navracsicsjudit@almos.uni-pannon.hu

Ibtissem Smari – Judit Navracsics: Multilingualism and its impact on identity:
Tunisian case study
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**Multilingualism and its impact on identity:
Tunisian case study**

Az identitás kérdésének tanulmányozása nagyon összetett feladat, mivel különböző tudományterületek identitás-értelmezését vonja magával. A jelen tanulmány a 19-25 éves tunéziai fiatal felnőttek körében vizsgálja az identitás és a többnyelvűség összefüggéseit. Arra vagyunk kíváncsiak, hogy több nyelv elsajátítása milyen következményekkel jár az egyén önmeghatározása szempontjából. Hipotézisünk szerint a többnyelvűség tudatos kapcsolatot eredményez a nyelvek és az identitás között, azonban kutatásunk újabb távlatokat nyitott. Bár a tunéziaiak pozitívan állnak többnyelvűségükhöz, csak néhány adatközlő érezte az identitásában a változást a nyelvek tükrében. Abban azonban mindenki egyetértett, hogy a több nyelv ismerete megváltoztatta a gondolkodásmódjukat és attitűdjüket.

1. Introduction

Language has been for a long time viewed as an identification insignia providing one of the best telling clues for people's identity and where they belong. This relationship between language and identity is symbiotic and it is enormously supported in the recent literature (Block 2007; Edwards 2009; Joseph 2004; Liams and Watt 2010; Ricento 2005). Despite its small size, Tunisia represents a rich sociolinguistic laboratory with a long history of bilingualism and language contact. The delicate position of Berber, the diglossic situation of Arabic and the increasing efforts for Arabization, the regional and social variation in Tunisian Arabic (TA), the presence of French, and the gradual spread of English, among other closely-related topics, constitute the core themes of research within Tunisian sociolinguistics.

As the title suggests, a main concern of the present study is the way linguistic identities are constructed. A first consideration born in mind is that we conceive verbal interactions to be a key site where this construction occurs. People use language not just to communicate, but also to construct their identities, which includes their linguistic identities. Tunisia, as a case study, has experienced encounters between different cultures, with different languages. The more we observed language dynamics, the more the rationales behind the choices fascinated us. Amartya Sen's arguments (2007) influence our conviction that language as a medium of identity requires a multi-faceted analysis. Sen acknowledges the society-

wide effects that designations of identity generate, but he also emphasizes the role of personal choice in their expression. Inspired by Sen's claim that a person faced with plural identities prioritizes them based on political and social circumstances, this study concentrates on the social side asking: In what ways does multilingualism influence how an individual evaluates the significance of his or her concurrent identities?

1.1. Language and identity

There is no question that language is not only crucial but probably also the single most critical factor in the construction of one's identity. Edwards (2009, p.2) states that "... it is clear that identity is at the heart of the person, and the group, and the connective tissue that links them." According to Edwards (2009) language can be seen as an arrangement of arbitrary symbols that have gotten meanings through an agreed-upon significance within a community, and functions as a system through its aforesaid regularity and rules of order. It is then the individual who is most concerned with identity considering that he/she is the one that is directly affected by socio-cultural conditions – which include, apart from language, other extra-linguistic factors like family, sociology, psychology, history, politics, nationalism, etc. – and who feels the immediate connection with them. In an analysis of linguistic diversity, Madeleine Dobie argues that multilingual situations engender a hyperconsciousness about speaking habits. In his book "Identity and Violence", Sen states that strict cultural categorization neglects the existence of complex individual identities. He argues against 'the illusion of singularity' or the presumption that people can be easily classified, which is said to create tension in a non-homogenous society. According to Dobie and Sen, colonialism and immigration cause cultural encounters which should have the potential to cause reassessments of language habits. The arguments presented by Dobie, Woolard, and Schieffelin avoid any emotional aspects that these encounters may convey while Sen addresses them through his book's focus on the anxiety caused by navigating numerous identities. He constructs his arguments in opposition to those of Samuel Huntington's 1993 Clash of Civilizations's hypothesis. According to Huntington, everyone belongs to distinct, incompatible civilizations defined by factors such as history, language, culture, and religion. In contrast with Sen's assertiveness on the multitudes existing within any individual, Huntington believes that those belonging to one society share a homogenous identity. In this context, speaking a language would, therefore, be a declaration of belonging to a specific group.

1.2. Multilingualism and multilingual identity

The literature of applied linguistics is full of different definitions of the term 'multilingualism', which make it problematic to define. While some definitions

suggest that in order to count as a bi-/multilingual a person has to make frequent use of both/all the languages at his/her disposal, others are more flexible in this perspective. Bloomfield (1933: 56), for instance, defined bilingualism as “native-like control of two or more languages”. Braun (1937: 115) in his turn affirmed that multilingualism had to involve “active, completely equal mastery of two or more languages”. Such definitions in the literature are said to constantly refer to the monolingual norm. The definition of individual multilingualism is to a great extent conditioned by particular societal circumstances. Therefore, it is impossible to speak about individual multilingualism without referring to identity in close relation to societal issues (cf. Riley 2010: 376). In the European context, the most frequent factors connecting language and identity are said to be ethnicity and nationality, intimately associated with an individual’s origins.

Experts in the field of multilingualism frequently use the expression individual multilingualism to denote the multilingual state of a person as opposed to the multilingualism of a community or a society. The term linguistic identity is antithetic, it typically defines an individual as belonging to an entire community or entire communities, at the same time it refers to the identification of an individual with a language (or languages) and the community/communities of users of the language(s) in question. The term’s usage is often said to have political connotations or significance, to a not inconsiderable extent. It is mostly used as a reduced version of ethnolinguistic identity, which shows more explicitly the connection between language, identity, and social-environmental norms. In this context, Tabouret-Keller (2017: 315) affirms that “[t]he language spoken by somebody and his or her identity as a speaker of this language are inseparable”. She claims (1998: 317) that “[t]he link between language and identity is often so strong that a single feature of language use suffices to identify someone’s membership in a given group”. According to the above-mentioned definitions, linguistic identity unavoidably signals societal belonging to group commonalities rather than strictly individual characteristics. For a further distinction of the uniquely personal dimensions of identity which relate to the language one speaks, Aronin and Ó Laoire (2004) have proposed the notion of multilinguality. While the sense of multilingualism, like that of bilingualism, refers more to situation or community, multilinguality refers to the inner constructs of the individual language user. In contrast with the concept of individual multilingualism, multilinguality exceeds the fact of being language-related, and as opposed to linguistic identity it is not limited to political or ethnic identification with any particular language group(s). Indeed, multilinguality is seen as twisted with many, if not all the aspects and resources of an individual. In short, as defined by Aronin and Ó Laoire (2004: 17-18) multilinguality is “... a personal characteristic that can be described as an individual store of languages at any level of proficiency including partial competence – incomplete fluency as well as metalinguistic awareness,

learning strategies, opinions and preferences and passive or active knowledge of languages, language use, and language learning/acquisition’.

On such a view, multilinguality is very personal; it includes “idiosyncrasies and peculiarities of communicators, legacies of historical events and family history, embedded assumptions, and individual learning disabilities and gifts”. Following this thinking, we can affirm that each individual possesses his/her own multilinguality, which evolves from all the above and from many other factors.

1.3. A historical overview of the languages of Tunisia

Tunisia’s first constitutional article declares that “Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign state. Its religion is Islam, its language is Arabic and its form of the state is Republic.” (Tunisian constitution, Article 1). This constitutional article does not give a clear image of Tunisia’s complex linguistic situation which is, in the terms of Bahloul (2001: 4), “extremely colourful;” a mosaic of languages (Bahloul, 2001; Kammoun, 2006) that is made up of a “significant number of language varieties.” According to some Tunisian linguists, this multiplicity or rather complexity of the linguistic profile of Tunisia is due to the “long history stretching over three millennia that shows both its complexity and dynamism.” (Daoud (2001: 6)). Another linguist related it to a number of reasons including “historical, geographical, civilizational, identity, ideological, and political nature.” (Kammoun (2006: 2)). In terms of history, it is worth saying that Tunisia is a country with 3000 years of history BC. The Oxford Business Group in a report about Tunisia in 2009 described it in the following way:

At the crossroads of Europe, the Mediterranean and Africa, Tunisia’s strategic location has, over two millennia, attracted wave after wave of Phoenicians, Romans, Carthaginians, Arabs, Ottomans and French; that trend continues today, as the republic pulls in investors from all four corners of the globe.”

(Oxford Business Group, 2009).

Tunisia is believed to have been inhabited by Berbers (or Amazighs), an ethnic group indigenous to North Africa, from at least 10,000 BC. Berbers speak Lybic (Daoud, 2001), also called Amazigh (Bahloul, 2001). According to the history of Tunisia, the Lybic language was later mixed with the Punic language of the Phoenicians during the Carthaginian Empire that reigned from 814 to 146 BCE then with Latin in the era of the Roman rule in the region (146 BC-349 CE). Subsequently, the Greek language brought in during the reign of the Byzantine Empire took its position in the linguistic profile between 439 and 547 CE (Daoud, 2001). In the middle of the sixth century, the Arabic language appeared in the linguistic profile of Tunisia with the Muslim preachers who came from the Arabian Peninsula. The

Arabic language then spread across North African countries, mainly Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt.

Till that date in history, Berber, Punic, Latin, Greek and Arabic formed the linguistic scene of a multilingual profile. A Tunisian speaker can feel the influence of all these languages to different degrees in his/her 21st-century Tunisian dialect. For example, some city names, such as “Tanghza” and “Tataouin” in the south of Tunisia are of Berber origin. Some words as well like “fekroon,” and “Bebboush” in the Tunisian dialect meaning ‘turtle’ and ‘snail’, respectively, are said to be of Berber origin and one can easily understand that in no way do they relate to their standard Arabic counterparts i.e. “sulahfet” and “halazoon” (Aouina, 2013:32). ‘Tounis’, the name of Tunisia itself, is also said to be of Berber origin meaning “Key” which was originally the name of a small town overlooking the Lake of Tunis, the capital. Only four centuries after its first appearance with Islam in North Africa around 647 AD (by the 11th century), the Arabic Language eventually became the main and even the “official language” (Daoud, 2011:10). Three centuries later, Tunisia came under Turkish rule until the 19th century and this situation, according to Daoud (2001: 6), enabled the Turkish language to predominate in “administration and army, leaving a substantial number of words that are still used in literary and spoken Arabic in these sectors as well as in the musical, clothing and culinary lexicons”. The Turkish language made a massive influence on Tunisian Arabic even by affecting the very structure of words. Indeed, suffix “ji” /dzi/ which is used to indicate occupations; equivalent to the suffix “er” in English, is still very widely used in Tunisian Arabic as in the words “Kahwaji”, “Kawarji”, “bankeji” (‘waiter’, ‘soccer player’ and ‘banker’). The 19th century was marked by the settlement of some European immigrants coming from Italy, France and Malta and all these left their marks on many aspects of the language use like “industry and crafts, building, agriculture, marine activity and the arts” (Daoud, 2001: 6).

Indeed, a number of tools used in construction, up to the present day, still carry their Italian and French names. “Bala,” “bourwita,” to name but a few, are all names of building tools often used in Tunisian Arabic. The impact of the French language was more emphasized with the French colonization of Tunisia in 1881. French was introduced, in Daoud’s terms, as “the official language of administration and in the public schools” (2001: 6) and this choice proved to have a long-term effect on these two sections of administration and education.

1.4. Multilingualism, multiculturalism and identities in Tunisia

Moha Ennaji once said: ‘one should not think...that all the inhabitants of the Maghreb are multilingual...speakers range from monolingual Berber or dialectal Arabic speakers to those who can use the two varieties of Arabic as well as one or two European languages in their everyday life for specific purposes’. A Maghreb

country situated in North Africa on the Mediterranean coast, Tunisia was one of the most attractive lands for invaders. This possession that passed between Roman, Arab, Ottoman Turk and French hands, made Tunisia an exceptional place if one wants to study the political and social influences of languages. Even though Tunisia is an Arab country where Arabic is the official language, the current linguistic situation, according to Daoud, is complex and dynamic. Over the past 100 years and particularly since the independence from France in 1956, many generations of Tunisians have had different experiences with the language use in social and work environment, in the educational system, in the government, and in the media. Such experiences have helped to shape different attitudes towards these languages, producing discontinuities with respect to language and literacy. In the terms of Daoud (2001): “Language policy and planning in Tunisia have been both instrumental in shaping such experiences and attitudes and subject to their influence”. The present study explores the ways multilingualism have shaped identities in Tunisia. Its aim is to ascertain the extent to which Tunisians feel multilingualism is an intrinsic part of their identities as Tunisians or if it runs counter to this identity.

The study sheds light on different aspects of how Tunisians negotiate their multilingual identity by trying to find out:

- 1) how Tunisians perceive themselves as multilinguals, and how this affects the choices they make regarding language use in their everyday life;
- 2) to what extent multilingualism affects their identity construction;
- 3) in which ways multilingualism participates in the construction of their multilingual self.

2. The study

2.1. Methodology and materials

In every research project, the first step a researcher should have is to make choices as to which approach will be the most appropriate. In relation with the topic of the study, both methodologies-quantitative and qualitative-have already been used in the literature.

The two approaches are different in a way that the qualitative method aims to emphasize the view of the participant by looking for their understanding of the phenomenon studied while the quantitative aims to make generalizations through the description of objective and quantifiable data. We chose to work with our theme in a mixed-methods research manor. For that two materials have been used which are: a survey questionnaire and an interview.

2.1.1. Survey questionnaire

The survey consists of three sections. The first section includes a factual questionnaire involving subject descriptors and aimed at eliciting demographic information from the respondents. The informants were asked to provide information about their gender, age, nationality, level of education, occupation, native languages, and knowledge of specific languages. The second section of the survey involves a questionnaire which consists of a list of questions aimed at triggering respondent's impressions and attitudes towards multilingualism and its importance. The third section consists of a list of open ended attitudinal questions aimed at looking in the influence of the languages of the respondents on their identities including personality, habits, practices, emotions, accent, etc. This questionnaire was administered online. As far as the Tunisian context is involved, the target informants were Tunisians but answers from other nationalities were welcomed for the sake of further analysis. Some of the questions which were included in this survey questionnaire were:

- Would you consider yourself monolingual, bilingual or multilingual?
- Which of your languages do you use on a daily basis?
- Do you think that speaking different languages means having different personalities?
- According to your experience, do you see your personality changing when switching between languages?

The title of the questionnaire, that is, 'Language identity questionnaire', was removed during the administration because it might have affected the participants' responses. In developing the items, we were also careful not to make double negative items because they would sometimes make the items confusing. We tried to keep it simple, clear and to the point.

2.1.2. The interview

The interview was designed in two sections: the personal information of the participants and questions on multilingualism and its importance, and its impact on identity. First, the personal demographic information in this questionnaire included information about gender, age, occupation, education level, native language(s), language proficiency level, and second languages. In the second section of the interview, respondents were informed that the elicited information would be kept anonymous so that they would feel relaxed to answer the potentially sensitive questions in the interview. Moreover, we tried to put the more sensitive items to the end so that they would not discourage the respondents to respond to the items.

The focus is on what the interviewee perceives as important in understanding the questions and explaining their answers. In our study, we tried to look for the

uniqueness of each interviewee's story, the variety and similarity between them, and their understanding of the topic in question.

2.2. Participants

The field study research was designed to test the theoretical connections between language and identity. We selected subjects who recently graduated and they were working for one year or more in the company where we conducted the interviews. This choice was important because the deeply ingrained multilingualism reflects a diverse linguistic past in Tunisia that has shaped identity on both the individual and citizen level. All in all, seven participants were interviewed, from which only five interviews were analyzed for methodological reasons. The age average of the participants is between 19 and 25. Three of the participants had finished bachelor studies, while the two others have recently completed MA studies. All of the participants are working as Translators at INSTALINGO Translation Company, except for the only male participant who works as a Community manager and media producer. All participants speak, apart from TA, MSA, French, and English. The additional languages they speak are: Spanish, Italian, Turkish, Russian, and Hindi.

As mentioned before, the personal demographic information for the questionnaire included information about nationality, gender, age, language proficiency level, education level, first language, knowledge of additional languages, age and manner of acquisition of each language and length of stay abroad. The respondents to the questionnaire included 32 respondents who ranged in age from 19 to 53 years with a mean age of 29 years. 71% of the respondents were Tunisians. Other nationalities include respectively: Algerians (10%), Palestinian (6%), French, Mongolian, Hungarian, Syrian and Moroccan, which present only 3% each. 59% of the respondents to the questionnaire were females, while 41% of them were males. Most of the respondents have a university level degree, while only one answered she is a PhD student and another one who is doing post- doctoral studies. As for the occupation, 62% declare they are students, 28% is an employee and 9% other (Freelancer, housewife, etc.).

2.3. Data collection

The data collection took place at INSTALINGO Company. The interviews were conducted whenever one of the participants, who expressed their willingness to participate, had time to engage in an interview, and they were all done face-to-face. It was a total of five participants interviewed over ten days, and with their consent, we recorded every interview. Each interview lasted between 15-60 minutes. It was interesting how different the interviews turned out, although we saw many similarities in their explanations as well. The interviews were conducted in English,

French and Tunisian Arabic. We choose to conduct the interviews in multiple languages responding to the main theme of our research, i.e. multilingualism.

As for the questionnaire, it was on display between January 2018 and April 2018, and the respondents were from different nationalities with different language proficiency levels, ages, genders and educational backgrounds. As far as the questionnaire was provided in two languages, it was needed to translate all answers in languages other than English into English for analysis.

2.4. Data analysis

We transcribed the texts of the interviews. When this process was completed we read through the interviews before we coded the material into concepts and categories in the light of our research questions. The interview transcripts often take the form of a big amount of rich but unstructured material, so our responsibility was to be oriented and keep track of what was important. For analyzing the transcribed interviews we used the coding method which required breaking down the data into components and giving them names. We used these labels to organize the data. Under a constant revision and comparison, we preceded through all the interview material. During this process of open coding, we worked on comparing and categorizing the data while looking for similarities and differences with the aim of creating concepts that we could later group and turn into categories. These categories form the basis for the theory.

We organized the findings in three big parts, each designed to shed light on the research questions and contribute to an enhanced understanding of the purpose of the present study. The first part considers the interviewees' reflections on their language skills, which level they are on, and how the interviewees reflect upon their languages based on experiences made in their life that they develop their own multilingual skills. This part is dedicated to look deeply at the interviewees' linguistic competence and language practice, in other words, how they use language in different situations, which linguistic decisions they make in daily life conversations and how this is related to the construction of their multilingual identity. From here we move to the second part, which is dedicated to the central question of the current study which is the construction of multilingual identity. In here, we take a look at how language and the interviewees' perceived multilingual identity is communicated through their interactions and thoughts. We investigate how the interviewees perceive themselves as multilinguals, how important multilingualism for them and in which ways does multilingualism affect the construction of their identities.

3. Results and Data analysis

3.1. Reflections on language skills

According to Baker (2011), it's needed to make a distinction between multilingualism as an individual possession and as a societal possession. All interviewees reported a spontaneous effort into keeping the skills in the languages that were used in the spheres of their everyday life. They emphasized on the use and the daily practice of the main four languages they share which are in this case Tunisian Arabic (TA), Modern standard Arabic (MSA), French, and English. When talking about using the different languages on an everyday basis it was often reported in relation with interlocutor or the domain of usage. In this basis, Arabic, French, and English were reported to be used in daily basis conversation in the society, generally, and with family members. Along with those languages, Italian and Spanish were reported to be used in communication with friends and in chat. At the professional level, French, English and Italian were the most used by the interviewees at their work. As for the other languages in which the participants were less proficient like: Russian, Hindi, Turkish and Korean, the interviewees indicate that they use these languages as a 'code mixing'. Language described in the terms of a habit, and that this was done without any problems, a sort of "habitual switch". As one interviewee explained,

[...sa3at ana na3ref na7ki chwaya turki ..Sa3at kif n7ib na7ki tjini el klema beturki w matjinich bloughat o5ra tdhi3 3lia fi loughat lo5rin.. juste bech el we7id ikamel i3aber 3la rou7ou mayesta3milich loughat lo5rin 9ased kawno yesta3milhom ama juste 5ater fil wa9it hadheka el kelma hadhika bedhet fi mo5ou ma3nadouch wa9it bech ilawej 3al kelma elli m9ablitha fi lougha el om mte3o ya3ni juste bech ikamel ya7ki 3la toul moch 9asid 7aja ma3neha .]

[- ...I SPEAK SOME TURKISH ...AND SOMETIMES WHEN I AM TALKING, WORDS COME UP TO MY MIND ONLY IN TURKISH NOT IN ALL OTHER LANGUAGES I KNOW, THEY DISAPPEAR FROM MY MIND...JUST TO CONTINUE EXPRESSING HIMSELF, SOMEONE USES SOME LANGUAGES RATHER THAN OTHER, JUST BECAUSE AT THAT SPECIFIC MOMENT ONLY OTHER LANGUAGE IS ACTIVATED IN HIS MIND AND BECAUSE OF TIME PRESSURE HE COULDN'T FIND IT IN HIS MOTHER TONGUE...THAT'S MEANS THAT HE JUST WANTS TO EXPRESS HIMSELF, HE DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING ELSE.]

This shows that a sort of language mixing can occur when many languages are spoken by someone, and then a sudden language switch is occurring. This blocking

of words or mixing words in different languages was described by many of the participants. What is interesting here is how the participants reported dealing with it. While some found these occurrences amusing and took them as a language habit experience, other reported it as dangerous for their identity although they believe it is becoming part of their everyday language practice. However they reported that they are conscious of it, not to disturb their believing in their nationality. This reflects to which degree their self-identification as multilingual is a process of negotiation, where some find it more troublesome than others. The question of national identity was one of the most important factors for identification which shows how the interviewees see themselves as something other than the standard categories for identity, but rather a combination of many, which they could use and adapt to circumstances. This question demonstrates the feeling of belonging to other categories of identities in relation with language which seems to be basic in identifying themselves as Tunisians. The feeling of belonging to an ethnic group (Arabs), religious (Muslim), geographical (African) and national (Tunisian) rise up in the answers of our interviewees. Added to these categories, the interviewees related all these types of identities they belong to their linguistic identity as multilingual speakers. While some emphasized on the fact that speaking different languages and mastering different accents is ‘a special Tunisian linguistic capacity’ which distinguishes Tunisian identity from other nationalities. A feeling of pride and glory was obvious in M.Amin’s answer in relation to this question for instance where he replied saying:

[- National identity ... I am Tunisian... 5ater 3lech?...walina les tunisiens ma3roufin dans le monde entier mais ce qu’est bearsmi spéciale fina a7na les tunisiens concernant la langue. On peut s’adapter m3a ay lougha w net3almouha fisa3 fisa3 et on maîtrise les accents w l’accent mte3na a7na par contre s3ib ki tji tasma3 3rab o5rin i7ibou ya7kiw tounsi maya7kihouch kima na7kiweh a7na... a7na 3lech.. Peut-être mana3rech 3la 5ater tari5 mte3na t3adew 3lih barcha 7adharat wela l’emplacement mte3na i5alli barcha 3bed de pays différents ma3neha ijiw ba7dhena ... ama berasmi twensa on a une capacité énorme à imiter les accents mahma kenet lough ma3neha.]

[- NATIONAL IDENTITY ... I AM TUNISIAN ... WHY? ... BECAUSE WE, THE TUNISIANS, ARE WELL KNOWN IN THE WHOLE WORLD, WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT US AS TUNISIANS ABOUT THE LANGUAGE IS THAT WE CAN ADAPT TO ANY LANGUAGE AND LEARN IT QUICKLY. WE ALSO MASTER DIFFERENT ACCENTS WHILE OUR ACCENT IS DIFFICULT FOR OTHER ARABIC SPEAKERS FOR INSTANCE WHO CANNOT SPEAK IT THE WAY WE DO ...WHY WE HAVE THIS SPECIAL CAPACITY! I DON’T KNOW, MAYBE BECAUSE

OF OUR LONG HISTORY FULL OF DIFFERENT CIVILIZATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN HERE OR MAYBE OUR GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION WHICH ENCOURAGES MANY PEOPLE TO COME AND THEREFORE ALLOW US TO CONTACT WITH DIFFERENT PEOPLE ... BUT WE, TUNISIANS, REALLY, WE HAVE AN ENORMOUS CAPACITY TO IMITATE ACCENTS WHATEVER IS THE LANGUAGE.]

Others underline that switching from the native language to other languages is kind of habit specific to their daily speech. They confirm the fact that it is important for their linguistic identification but would never prevent their feeling of pride towards their native language. Taking the example of Hajer who explains in this context saying:

[Emmm nra rou7i tofla 3arbia.. emmm et le faite enni na7ki loughat o5rin moch ma3neha eni n7ib neb3id 3la ... 3al origine mte3i .. 3al joudhour mte3i ma3neha ...juste .. howa la79i9a da5lt fil 3ada mte3na kawnik ida5el kelmet mil loughet o5rin ya3ni b7okom el 3ada ida5el kelmet o5rin min loughat o5rin fi klemik ama enti mato9sodich kawno bech teb3id 3la loughtik ama ..ma... sa3at ana na3ref na7ki chwaya turki ..sa3at kif n7ib na7ki tjini el klema beturki w matjinich bloughat o5ra tdi3 3lia fi loughat lo5rin.. juste bech el we7id ikamel i3aber 3la rou7ou mayesta3milich loughat lo5rin 9ased kawno yesta3milhom ama juste 5ater fil wa9it hadheka el kelma hadhika bedhet fi mo5ou ma3nadouch wa9it bech ilawej 3al kelma elli m9ablitha fi lougha el om mte3o ya3ni juste bech ikamel ya7ki 3la toul moch 9asid 7aja ma3neha.]

[I SEE MYSELF AS AN ARABIC GIRL...AND THE FACT THAT I SPEAK LANGUAGES DOESN'T MEAN THAT I WANT TO GET RID OF MY ORIGIN, MY ROOTS...IN REALITY, IT BECOMES PART OF OUR HABITS TO BORROW WORDS FROM OTHER LANGUAGES IN OUR SPEECH...IT IS BECAUSE OF THIS HABIT THAT FOR INSTANCE I SPEAK SOME TURKISH AND SOMETIMES WHEN I AM TALKING, WORDS DESPAIR FROM MY MIND, EVEN I TRY TO CALL THAT SPECIFIC EXPRESSION BUT I CANNOT FIND IT, AND BECAUSE OF TIME I FOUND MYSELF EXPRESSING MYSELF IN TURKISH...SO IT IS JUST TO MAKE YOURSELF UNDERSTOOD BUT IN REALITY I DON'T MEAN THAT, IT HAPPENS UNCONSCIOUSLY...]

A sense of belonging was an important factor among all of the interviewees, when talking about perception of identity in relation to the nation and in a variety of interactive contexts. A well feeling to the belonging to an ethnic, religious,

geographical and linguistic national identity was clear and this can be linked to the idea that an individuals' membership and attachment to a group is rooted in various criteria, language being an important factor working as an identity marker at a group level. In this way language and identity become inseparable when the language used by social actors forms a part of the identity, and a feature in the mixing of identity. This indicated that especially with relation to the national link to Tunisia, the language skills do play a role in the issue of constructing a multilingual identity belonging to the society around them. They all put an emphasis on the importance of mastering and using different languages fluently in different communicative situations, but at the same time expressed that their native language is also important to keep an identity connected to the ethnic and religious group they belong to.

3.2. Construction of a multilingual identity

In this part, we will take a look at how the interviewees consider the process of identity construction, especially related to language. According to Elisabeth Jansen (2015), our identity is seen as a construct that possesses the ability to adapt according to the circumstances. It is affected by factors such as how we perceive and are influenced by the changing of the social world around us, and dialogue within ourselves and with others. It consists of facets making out one overarching identity, which can be chosen according to the situation. Language is often an important facet of the identification process and can function as a point of reference for people when establishing boundaries for their identities.

3.2.1. Reflections on linguistic competence

It was obvious how the interviewees link their identities to their use of language as they consider themselves multilinguals. Many of the interviewees expressed their positive feelings towards the fact of being multilinguals. They emphasized that it was a special feeling being able to speak all the languages depending on the situation and the persons involved in the interaction. They saw these capabilities as an important part of who they perceived themselves to be. However, they were aware that the ways of expressing oneself might differ a bit in the various languages they speak, but that this also could be related to with whom they used the languages. The learning of new languages at different stages of their lives seemed important to interviewees in that they could discover new ways of expressing themselves, different cultures, better job opportunities, and to have a humble status in the society. The possibility to feel different due to these choices of languages was one of the factors that made it possible for them to perceive and position themselves as multilinguals.

Looking at the questionnaire findings, results show that the majority of the respondents (72%) perceive themselves as multilinguals, while 22% considers themselves bilinguals. Two respondents answered that they were monolinguals, and

to our surprise, that they speak four languages. The first is a 19-year-old Tunisian university student, who speaks – apart from his mother tongue – Arabic, English, French, and Spanish. The second is a Hungarian lady aged 53 who speaks additionally to Hungarian; Bulgarian, English, Russian, and French. When checking their linguistic habits, the first reported using all of his languages when “Studying, contacting my friends, watching English movies without subtitles....”

The other participant explains in details the use of her languages on a daily basis as follows:

[Mother tongue and Bulgarian: everyday communication, sometimes for written translation (in the past simultaneous interpreting), English: on digital devices, watching videos and movies, English and French: sometimes for communication at work all languages mentioned in the Questionnaire for reading specialized literature and belle-lettres]

Those who reported speaking only one language other than their native language consider themselves either bilingual or multilingual. This also was popular among people who reported speaking two or three languages, other than their native language. Only those speaking four languages consider themselves multilingual. This shows that for some people the knowledge of two or three languages might not be enough to consider themselves multilingual. This can be understood as well from the perspective of linguistic practices where people may know many languages but do not use them on a daily basis, and this influences the way they perceive themselves.

When a person is using a language in social contexts, this action requires a greater accent on social competence with language. This is referred to as skills within skills, such as pronunciation, and extended vocabulary, the correctness of grammar, the possibility to vary in speaking style, and the ability to convey exact meanings in different situations (Baker, 2011). To view multilingual people from a holistic perspective, we acknowledge them as developing multilinguals. Language becomes a complete linguistic entity, which is seen as an integrated whole. Baker (2011) emphasized on the importance to be sensitive to differences in when, where and with whom multilinguals use either of their languages because the level of skill in a language depends on the context and how often a language is used. Likewise, it is important to take into account differences between conversational fluency and academic language competence. We found the interviewees descriptions on how they adapted their languages according to who they were talking to, very interlinked with Baker’s (2011) assumptions on the same theme. It has been acknowledged that similar to the interviewees’ explanations, different languages are often used with different aims. The individual is making choices regarding language, conscious and unconscious, and this is an inevitable action when bilinguals are using both their

languages, the same applies to multilinguals. The interviewees seem to understand their linguistic skills as personal capital that not everyone possesses and which can also be seen as an exertion of power.

3.2.2. Language choice

Deeply-rooted cultural and personal attitudes, including perceptions of modernity and openness, affect speaking habits (Dobie: 34). Switching between languages, however, can be psychologically taxing. The speaker may feel frustrated about his/her command of the languages, but s/he may also be affected by the possible switching of identities (Ennaji: 22). The choice of the language of the interview was left for the participants to decide on. Ines and Ons's preferred language to speak at the time of the interview was English, and this may be due to the fact that they are English major. For the others, they seemed to be more flexible answering depending on the language of the question. We found it very interesting how the interviewees managed their linguistic skills switching from one language to another, even if the question was asked bilingually, their answer took the same form (see example 1) or a mixture of both languages (see example 2).

Example1 :

Question: *Est-ce que tu penses que la multilingualism is important ?*

Answer: Is important. Yes, it is important because it keeps you having many languages.... It keeps you ... emmm...more open to other cultures...to... so you can speak to other people around the world [...] *le faite de pouvoir parler d'autres langues, Il était possible pour moi de trouver un travail hors de mon domaine d'étude. C'était plus facile de trouver un autre travail, de ne pas rester dans un seul domaine [...]*

Example2 :

Question: *Est-ce que t7iss elli le faite que tu parles plus qu'une langue ken 3andha influence 3al personnalité mte3ik?*

Answer : Akid...3lech? 3la 5ater idha eni **lorsque je maitrise une langue automatiquement que wa9et el endour sur internet bech nal9a des articles avec des langues différentes w lihna el we7ed lorsqu'il utilise l'intelligence émotionnelle mte3o, il peut par exemple yousel l un certain niveau, yal9a rou7ou lezmou ilawej mais il se limite pas une seule langue tant que eni je maîtrise italien, anglais et français donc idha 7ajti b une information wela bech nousel l7aja mou3ayna bech nlawej des sources b les langues elli eni nmetraisehom . de coup bech tal9a rou7ik t3adit 3la des points de vue différentes ketbouhom 3bed différents w ketbouhom 3bed 3andhom des arrières pensées totalement**

différents, de coup a kel **mixage el mélange** mabin **les idées** elli jayin min 3and 3bed **différents** bech i5alouk inti yanfluencouk **de manière direct ou bien indirect**. Here we see an example on how the interviewees consciously construct their identity as multilinguistic through deliberately choosing one language over another.

3.2.3. Reflections on accent changes

There is a long-standing myth that real bilinguals have no accent in their different languages. In fact, according to Grosjean (2011) “having a “foreign” accent in one or more languages is the norm for bilinguals; not having one is the exception. There is no relationship between one's knowledge of a language and whether one has an accent in it.” Related to this issue, Dewaele and McCloskey (2015) investigated the inter-individual variation linked to personality traits, multilingualism and socio-biographical variables in the attitudes that 2035 multilinguals have of their own and others’ foreign accent. Results revealed that multilinguals who were extroverted, emotionally stable and tolerant of ambiguity were significantly less bothered by the foreign accent of others. Only neurotic multilinguals were bothered by their own foreign accent. Unexpectedly, participants who knew more languages to a higher level were more negative about the foreign accent of others and their own. Yet, participants who grew up in an ethnically diverse environment, who had lived abroad and who were working in an ethnically diverse environment were significantly more positive about the foreign accent. It was found that sex had no effect on attitudes towards the foreign accent of others. However, women had a more negative attitude towards their own foreign accent. Education level and age seem to be linked to attitudes towards foreign accent. The findings thus show that how much multilinguals are bothered by foreign accent falls partly outside their conscious control as this depends on their personality, their language-learning history, their current linguistic practices and their socio-biographical background.

In relation to her accent, Hajer affirmed that sometimes she pronounces English words in French even though she knows the right pronunciation in English but she feels that the French accent dominates her English accent. And this was obvious during the interview, she gives you the impression that she is a French dominant speaker, even her Tunisian speech was full of code-switching to French. Added to that, in many parts during the interview, whenever she feels incapable to finish her idea, she usually switches to French where she expresses herself more clearly. Ines insisted that one should change his accent when switching between languages because she believes that languages’ accents should be respected and that an accent is a part of the language. According to her “speaking one language with a different accent doesn’t match the language itself”. Marwa, for instance, affirmed that she uses different accents for each language she speaks. She explains that when speaking a language, what comes first to her mind is the pronunciation, she usually tries to

imitate the native speaker of that language. As for English, she affirmed that she mostly use American accent because she feels that she is more influenced by it and not the British accent. She also believes that “every language has its own accent”, she doesn’t think that people speak different languages with the same accent. M.Amin also shares the same point of view with the other interviewees concerning accents, he affirmed that he strongly believes in accents and he explains saying:

[- Yeah... I believe in accents really. Because for example even in Arabic if you communicate with people who doesn’t have the same accent that you have maybe the information cannot be totally transferred. For example Islam (An Algerian gentleman working in the same company as the interviewees and he is named Islam.) works here and he speaks Algerian dialect and I speak Tunisian dialect, sometimes I don’t get it, I do not understand, you see! That’s why you have to master many accents so you can pass the information.]

When we turned to the questionnaire, we found that the answers to the question of accents perfectly confirm the literature that suggests that multilinguals are bothered with foreign accents. However, no correlation between gender and educational level with the attitude towards accent changes was found. Only a few reported changes in accents as well as changes in personality theoretically and practically. Those who reported that they see no changes in accents when switching between languages, or they do not know or care, reported no changes in personalities as well when changing the language. This shows that not many multilinguals relate their personality and accent changes with their linguistic skills, therefore they do not really believe or see the impact of multilingualism on their identities.

During the interview, M.Amin mentioned that Tunisians have the capability to imitate accents and speak languages fluently without an accent. His comments on Tunisians’ ability of mastering different accents is particularly illuminating because it shows the strong presence of foreign languages in Tunisian society as well as how it can be a divisive factor between Tunisia and other Arab countries, as he mentioned the fact that Tunisians are better than other Native Arabic speakers in mastering different accents. M.Amin seems to see this ability as a factor that characterizes or separates Tunisians from other Arab countries. Although the policies of Arabization were intended to culturally and politically unite Arab countries. The failure of these policies in Tunisia, according to Moore (2008:35), may have marked a turning point at which Tunisia began to emphasize a more independent identity.

3.2.4. Impact of multilingualism on personality traits

When asked whether their ability of speaking more than one language made an impact on their personality traits, the interviewees reported open-mindedness, global

awareness, intellectuality, better communication skills and cultural empathy. Apart from having different personalities, they agreed that when they speak their different languages, they perceive different worldviews. It's really an exciting notion, the idea that one's very self could be broadened by the mastery of two or more languages. In obvious ways like exposure to new friends, literature, culture, civilization and so forth; the self really is broadened.

While 56% (see Figure 1) of the respondents reported that the ability of speaking more than one language had no impact on their personalities, 46% were more enthusiastic towards multilingualism reporting that it had an impact on their personalities. Some of the impacts they mentioned are: discovering new cultures, becoming sociable, open-mindedness, becoming brave, changes in understanding others and other cultures, acquiring new cultures, more job opportunities, and gaining the respect and love of people. Despite the positive attitude of Tunisians towards multilingualism, only 32% of them reported that multilingualism had an impact on their personalities, while the majority (68%) saw no impact.

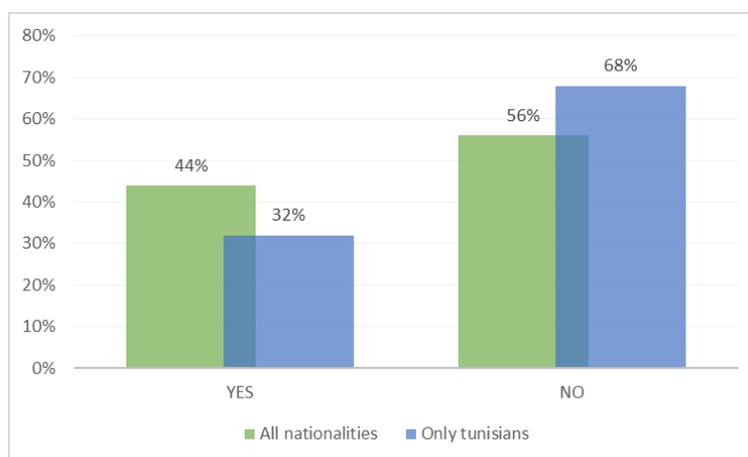


Figure 1. Impact of multilingualism on personality traits

3.2.5. Change of Language, Change of Personality?

Understanding the link between language and personality in multilinguals is one of the aims of the current study. This is one of the clues to understand the impact of multilingualism on individuals' identities. Could it be that multilinguals who speak more than two languages change their personality when they change language? After all, the Czech proverb does say, "Learn a new language and get a new soul." Studies of spontaneous reports by individual bilinguals showed different results in this context. In relation to bilingual studies, Grosjean noted that, although bi- or multilingual are in fact members of just one culture, monocultural bilinguals who make up the majority of bilinguals in the world are not really concerned by this phenomenon. He proposed in his first book on bilingualism, *Life with Two*

Languages, that what is seen as a change in personality is most probably simply a shift in attitudes and behaviors that correspond to a shift in situation or context, independent of language. Basically, the bicultural bilinguals in these studies were behaving biculturally, that is, adapting to the context they were in (Grosjean, 2011). This theory of a multilingual person having multiple personalities hasn't been frequently researched before. Trying to conquer the observation between 2001 and 2003, Dewaele and Pavlenko asked 1,000 bilinguals if they felt like a different person whilst speaking their other language- of which said they did. A few other experiments, basically investigating bilinguals more than multilinguals, include Susan Ervin's 1964 and 1968 experiments, and Michele Koven's 1998 research with bilingual Parisian adults.

The current study investigation languages impact on identity tries to look at the ways languages may change and influence multilingual personalities. In relation to her attitude towards multilingualism and its impact, Hajer thinks that speaking different languages means having different personalities. Her answer to this question was too short 'kind of'. When asked to explain she gave an example of herself as being Hajer, the Tunisian girl who is living in an Arabic country where all people speak Arabic, this is if she speaks Arabic. If she would switch to French, she mentioned that the circle of people with whom she would speak will be smaller with only people who understand French or 'foreign languages' as she mentioned. She declared that this makes her feel different because, for her, switching the language means traveling to the country where that language is spoken. Marwa and Ons as well think that generally speaking, speaking different languages means having different personalities. They explained that the different languages someone speaks have influence in his personality in a way that s/he changes personalities depending on the context and the languages. Contrary to the others, Ines and M.Amin do not agree on the fact that personality changes according to the language someone speaks. Although they admit that language may positively influence personality by making people more confident, comfortable and linguistically "safe", they strongly believe that language is only a mean of communication that facilitates the communication process in different circumstances. Ines, for instance, commented saying:

[...you are the same person but speaking different languages, you don't change your personality because you speak different languages, just the language, it is you but speaking different language, that's all.]

M.Amin in his turn explains that no need to change your personality, what happens in fact, from his perspective, is that you have the capability to express yourself differently to different people using different languages.

[- Bon, à certain niveau ça ne veut pas dire que tu as des personnalités différentes mais c'est une capacité à savoir comment s'adapter avec les gens de plusieurs nationalités. Disons... tu es le même mais tu sais comment s'adapter avec les gens... vous-voyez ! Et ça reflète l'importance de la langue par ce que tu peux t'exprimer avec n'importe quelle langue pour exprimer la même personne mais pour des personnes différentes.]

[WELL, AT SOME LEVEL IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU HAVE DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES BUT IT IS AN ABILITY TO KNOW HOW TO ADAPT WITH PEOPLE OF MANY NATIONALITIES. LET'S SAY, YOU ARE THE SAME BUT YOU KNOW HOW TO ADAPT WITH PEOPLE. YOU SEE! AND THIS REFLECTS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LANGUAGE BY WHICH YOU CAN EXPRESS THE SAME PERSON (HIMSELF), USING ANY LANGUAGE, FOR DIFFERENT PEOPLE.]

The interviewees were, then, asked to comment on their own experiences with multilingualism and if they see their personalities changing when switching between languages. While Hajer, Ines, and Marwa reported feeling different when they switch from one language to another, M.Amin didn't feel so. As for Ons, she was unsure reporting that she doesn't know, she thinks that personality cannot be affected by learning languages. In contrast, Marwa relates these changes to culture reporting that "culture is a huge aspect of learning a language and as a multilingual person learns a language, s/he simultaneously learn about the culture of a country". As for Hajer, this is more related to feeling confident, comfortable and safe. She argues that a multilingual person's confidence whilst speaking a language may also adjust their personality. She explains that if s/he is learning a new language and hasn't thoroughly learned the whole lexical or syntactical rules of that language, it is most likely that s/he will feel less confident than if s/he were speaking a language s/he has become fluent in. In this respect, we can entirely understand how a language's culture can adjust a multilingual person's personality.

Figure 2 shows the response to the question of "speaking different languages equals having different personalities" at two levels: theoretically speaking and in practice according to what multilinguals really experience. In contrast to Dewaele's (2001) and Pavlenko's (2003) findings, most of the respondents (72%) reported that they do not think that speaking different languages means having different personalities. Only 22% of the respondents confirmed that, while 6% reported having no idea about what is happening when switching between languages. When it comes to practice, the answers of the participants show that more people (31%) reported seeing their personalities changing according to their experiences, which coincides with what some previous studies found. Even though fewer people (56%) reported

in practice that they do not feel any difference in personality when switching between languages, the number of people is bigger than those reporting feeling different. In addition to that, in practice more respondents (12%) compared to theory (6%) reported that they do not know if their personalities change when changing the language.

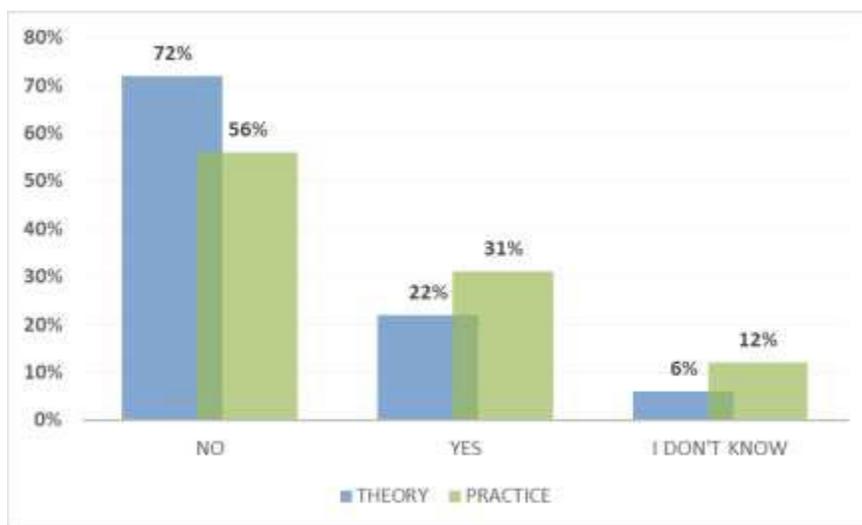


Figure 2. Change of personality – theory and practice

4. Conclusions

Considering that language is a medium through which one identifies with a community, the language planning of the Tunisian government indicates a desire to be at once both francophone and Arab, and at the same time open to the world through enhancing and encouraging foreign languages learning. It is because of this apparent split-personality of society that Tunisia makes an excellent case study for the effects of languages on identity. The tightening connections created by multilingualism present opportunities for speakers of different languages, but they also create tensions as individuals are obliged to define their own identities, including linguistic identities. The current study expected to find that multilingualism reflects a conscious association between language and identity. Instead, it found different perspectives. While Tunisians hold a positive attitude towards multilingualism and its advantages in general, not many of them have associated their ability to speak different languages with the fact of having separate identities. For them, the coexistence of the languages is a defining characteristic of Tunisia. They did, however, indicate considerations of how multilingualism have shaped their thinking and attitudes. Although some multilingual have admitted the impact of multilingualism on their personalities, not many did so. They have rather emphasized on how multilingualism is advantageous in their life. What they perceive as impact was rather an influence in the way of thinking and attitudes such as discovering new

cultures, becoming sociable, open-mindedness, becoming brave, changes in understanding others and other cultures, acquiring new cultures, more job opportunities, and gaining the respect and love of people. It was clear how much interviewees and respondents are aware of language being a personal capital enabling social mobility in different stages in life. The fact that not everyone possesses this capital gives them an advantaged position in the future regarding work and living possibilities. Thence they are also seen to have a strong instrumental motivation for learning the languages in that they want to develop themselves and equip themselves with capital that can advance their position and subjective trajectory in the world. It is evident that language is understood as a resource on a personal and economic level, which enables them to act as global citizens in the future.

Literature suggesting that multilinguals are bothered with foreign accents goes with the findings of the present study. However, no correlation between gender or educational level with the attitude towards accent changes was found as the same literature suggested. It was clear, during the analysis, how the perception of personality changes goes with the feeling of accents changes. Thus, when changes in personality theoretically and practically was reported, changes in accents was reported as well as, which only a few reported so. Those who reported that they see no changes in accents when switching between languages, or they do not know or care, reported no changes in personalities as well when changing the language. This implies that not many multilinguals relate their personality and accent changes with their linguistic skills, therefore they do not either believe or see the impact of multilingualism on their identities.

Regarding the Tunisia research, the demographic status and the number of Tunisians we interviewed or those who responded to the questionnaire online limit the applicability of our conclusions for the greater Tunisian population. Tunisians of different ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographic origins may make different associations in relation to language and identity. Would languages other than Arabic, French or English be more influential to someone with more or less same linguistic experience other Tunisians have? Considering the legacies of Arabization, the history of French colonization and globalization, it would also be valuable to explore how these factors have shaped Tunisian identity and if it had any influences on the regional identity of Tunisians. To conclude, given the unique geographical, political, cultural and linguistic histories of Tunisia, the country undoubtedly has the potential to host many future studies about language and identity.

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