‘You Never Truly Feel at Home’: Students’ Perceptions of their Multilingualism and its Role in their Identity Construction

- A Study Performed in a Suburb Located in a Socially Vulnerable Area.

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Abstract
A relevant subject in our globalized world concerns the relationship between language and identity, specifically amongst migrant youngsters’ experience of group belonging. This study therefore focused on how adolescents born to foreign parents in Sweden, perceived their multilingualism as part of their identity formation. I also aimed to include how socio-economic aspects could affect the process of identity construction. Thus, the investigation was performed with seventh grade students at a primary school located in the Stockholm suburb Bredäng. The methods consisted of a questionnaire, which was completed by the entire class and a group interview where six students participated. The results revealed that students adapted their language use based on the context, but Swedish was used most habitually. The informants viewed their multilingualism as beneficial but yet fully aware of the linguistic ideologies functioning in society. By combining their minority and majority language, the students were left with different ethnic identities and had diverse interpretations of what it meant to be Swedish. Even though all of them perceived themselves to have multiple ethnic identities, this was not solely seen positively. The issue of belonging was raised and the students claimed to be outcasts everywhere. However, the results differed depending on whether the students were born in Sweden or not. Also, most of them struggled with the process of assumed and ascribed identities, since they perceived themselves to be Swedish but experienced that society valued them as immigrants. Lastly, the study revealed that there were connections between their multilingualism and social mobility as the relationship towards the motherland was highly prioritized even with low levels of economic capital.

Keywords
Multilingualism, perceptions, identity, adolescents, social mobility
Contents

1. Introduction ................................................................. 5
   1.1. Aim of study and research questions ............................ 6

2. Theoretical framework .................................................. 6
   2.1. Post-structural approach to identity ............................. 6
   2.2. Language ideologies ................................................. 7
   2.3. Multilingualism, identity and its shifting definition ........ 8

3. Previous research ........................................................... 8
   3.1. South African research .............................................. 8
   3.2. Scandinavian research .............................................. 9

4. Method ......................................................................... 10
   4.1. Questionnaire as method .......................................... 10
   4.2. Group interview as method ....................................... 11
     4.2.1. Limitations ...................................................... 11
   4.3. Implementation ....................................................... 11
   4.4. Selection .............................................................. 12
     4.4.1. Setting - Bredäng ............................................... 12
     4.4.2. Presentation of the informant selection .................... 13

5. Results ........................................................................... 14
   5.1. Results from questionnaires - part one ....................... 14
   5.2. Results from questionnaires - part two ....................... 16
   5.3. Results from group interview - students’ linguistic practices 19
   5.4. Results from group interview - ethnic identity ............. 19

6. Discussion ....................................................................... 20
   6.1. Benefits of multilingualism and students’ attitudes towards it 20
   6.2. Identifications and ideologies of the “mother tongue” .... 21
   6.3. Relationships between languages and ethnic identities ....... 22
   6.4. Socio-economic background and social mobility ............ 23
     6.4.1. Further research ............................................... 23

7. Conclusion ..................................................................... 24

References ................................................................. 25

Appendix A ................................................................. 27
Appendix B ................................................................. 29
Appendix C ................................................................. 33
1. Introduction

Modern civilization is often categorized by its major transformations. The world has undergone radical changes and become more globalized, which has made multilingualism an essential resource. Regarding Sweden, the society drastically altered after the Second World War, due to the growing amount of immigrants. This in turn resulted in an increased number of non-native Swedish speakers, which caused multilingualism to successively appear more frequently in society. Subsequently, during the past twenty years, the Swedish school environment has become extremely varied in terms of linguistic, cultural and ethnical diversity. Today there are approximately 5,000 languages divided into 200 countries, which evidently reveals the dominance of multilingualism (Edwards, 1994). In fact, being multilingual is considered a requirement for the majority in the world. Thus, whenever monolingualism occurs, it is often a consequence of living in a country that is dominated by a “powerful language”. However, the supremacy of multilingualism is also an outcome of the comprehensive immigration. According to numbers provided by the “Migration and Remittance” from 2015, there are estimated to be 250 million international migrants in the world. Thus evidently, multilingualism is today a widespread, universal phenomenon and classified to be the normalizing paradigm amongst speakers (Weber & Horner, 2012).

A widely discussed topic in relation to multilingualism regards the connection between languages and identity. Weber and Horner (2012) describe that all practiced languages or varieties are used to construct different identity functions. However, identity options are not only related to language, but also negotiated in the areas of ethnicity, gender, social class, etc. Therefore, language practices are viewed as socially constituted, signifying that people are formed by and through their language usage (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Still, some languages are considered more valuable than others and immigrant minority languages tend to mostly remain in the bottom of this hierarchy (Weber & Horner, 2012). As the majority of all refugees in Sweden migrated from Syria, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Somalia (Statistics from 2014), their language, culture and religion differ greatly from Swedish traditions. Being able to adjust to a new society can be problematic, as it requires the individuals to find a balance between their identity and ethnical background. For instance, it can become challenging when individuals are ascribed ethnical identities based on stereotypical prejudices, since such discrimination could result in negative self-views and isolation in society (Almqvist, 2006).

As this contemporary phenomenon occurs in many parts of the world, the last decade has been flooded by research on urban multilingualism. Scholars have especially focused on multilingual adolescents’ negotiation of group membership in terms of identity construction and how they implement and vary their language usage (Rampton, 2006). Even though there have been numerous studies addressing the relationship between language and identity in multilingual settings, there are limited findings on how socio-economical factors may affect this relationship - specifically, in Swedish school settings. Therefore, it seemed logical to conduct an investigation, discovering these aspects.
1.1. Aim of study and research questions

In this study, I aimed to explore students’ practices and attitudes towards their multilingualism and its role in their identity construction, in a school located in a socially vulnerable area. In addition, I wished to investigate whether social mobility could affect the process of identity construction. The study was therefore carried out with seventh grade multilingual learners in a Swedish elementary school positioned in the suburb Bredäng, Stockholm. In order to fulfil the purpose of the study, the following research questions were answered:

• What are students’ everyday linguistic practices, language biographies and repertoires?
• How do students use their multilingual repertoires to construct different identities?
• What are the connections between multilingualism and social mobility?

2. Theoretical framework

To fully comprehend the investigation, a theoretical framework has been conducted, where main theories and ideas regarding language and identity are presented. These notions will then be useful resources for the analysis.

2.1. Post-structural approach to identity

The negotiation of identities can be viewed from a post-structural approach, which has brought major shifts in understandings of identity. Based on this standpoint, an individual’s life is indistinguishably connected to the social world, whose actions have to be realized within their complex circumstances (Collinson, 2006). The identity, the inner self, is seen as containing of fluctuating, divided and non-rational attributes; thus identity processes are not static but fluid and always up for reconstruction (Weber & Horner, 2012). Moreover, to be capable to examine how languages are related to authority or socioeconomic processes, a post-structural perspective is acquired (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Questions such as where, when or why certain identities become challenged or who the person is to negotiate these identities comes to mind. In addition, this approach allows us to view why and how certain individuals get to impose value in the process of negotiation, as some people obtain more power in the negotiating process (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Since my study focused on the negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts, a post-structural approach to language and identity provided a more nuanced investigation and permitted a wider understanding.

2.1.1. Identity

Weber and Horner (2012) portray how identity is constructed through other people’s influence and through processes of categorization. Humans are constantly labeled by others, and this classification is a way of attempting to fix somebody’s identity. Such categorizations are often based on stereotypical assumptions; for instance, objectifying
someone as an “immigrant” or “foreigner” (Weber & Horner, 2012). They are in addition socially constructed and related to questions of power, where a person of authority is able to impose an identity on a less-authorized person. Powerful groups have more capital resources to create dominant identities for themselves and in this way, decide the rules of the identity production for subordinated groups (Lin, 2008). In these contexts the distinction between ascribed and assumed identities is often mentioned, where the first aspect covers how people perceive one another, whereas the latter explain how people perceive themselves. It is then continuous processes between these approaches that determine the identity construction (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Recent studies have suggested that people may have multiple or dual ethnical identities and that there is no longer a one-to-one link between language, ethnicity and identity (Kerfoot & Bello-Nonjengele, 2014).

2.2. Language ideologies

Language ideologies are cultural systems of ideas, feelings and norms that describe people’s beliefs and reflections about languages (Weber & Horner, 2012). There are different language ideologies that show how different social groups perceive the construction of languages distinctively. My focus rests on two different ideologies as they were used in the analysis: the hierarchy of languages and the mother tongue ideology.

The hierarchy of languages indicates that, in every social group, linguistic practices (languages, dialects, accents etc.) are part of a hierarchy. Languages are for instance seen as superior to dialects and certain varieties are perceived as more valued than others (Trudgill, 2000). In addition, certain languages within a country are given higher status as the official language of the state. Some languages tend to be more appreciated than others on a national level as well. For instance, in Sweden, English, French or German are considered more prestigious due to the countries’ worldwide powerful influence, in comparison to immigrant languages such as Arabic, Kurdish or Iranian (Weber & Horner, 2012). Thus, since language is a social and cultural phenomenon, it is inseparable from the social structures of society.

The mother tongue ideology describes that the belief that speakers only have one mother tongue leads to great generalizations. Each individual obtains different perceptions of what should be categorized as his/her mother tongue. Many speakers even classify languages they do not speak as their mother tongues, thus: “Is the mother tongue the language(s) you learned first, the languages(s) you know the best or the language(s) you use most?” (Weber & Horner, 2012, p.18). Furthermore, scholars argue that the concept of one mother tongue results in a negative and excluding view of non-mother tongue speakers and it also maintains an undesirable norm of monolingualism (Weber & Horner, 2012). However, defenders of the theory claim that the concept is needed in the struggle for linguistic human rights for mother tongues. For instance, Kurdish has been a forbidden language in Turkey; thus for the Kurds, their mother tongue has become a significant symbol for justice since its oppression by the majority has been so obvious. This position would agree with Trudgill’s (2000) argument that a person’s origin is revealed through its language, accent or dialect. According to his essentialist standpoint, a person’s identity seems to be fixed to his/her
heritage and unlikely to change, and people acknowledge themselves based on their mother tongue. However, in the Kurdish case, this connection is exploited for strategic reasons.

2.3. Multilingualism, identity and its shifting definition

Most people would today define multilingualism as mastering several languages. However, Blommaert (2010) argues that being multilingual indicates that a speaker has a package of semiotic resources, which includes a range of linguistic varieties, including accents, genres, dialects etc., and thus form a person’s linguistic repertoire (Weber & Horner, 2012). Therefore, languages are now discussed in terms of resources whereas language usage is reviewed in terms of practices. As discussed above, researchers nowadays tend to distance themselves from previous essentialist perspectives to language and identity constructions, and instead view identities as dynamic and socially constructed.

3. Previous research

In recent years, scholars’ interest towards children and adolescents growing up in multilingual environments has increased (Rampton, 2006). The focus has especially lain on juveniles with minority language backgrounds, their perceptions of language and how they shape social identities. This is due to researchers desire to investigate the general principles governing the minority languages’ status as a result of the existing global linguistic diversity (ibid.). Since this is a growing area of international research, there has been much literature for ongoing studies in the Nordic countries as well. I will below present two international studies from South Africa and two from Scandinavia.

3.1. South African research

The first study took place in Soweto, South Africa, by Shilela Nkadimeng and Leketi Makalela (2015), who focused on investigating identity constructions amongst multilingual adolescents, residing in “super-diverse” communities. Their purpose was to study youth’s perceptions of social and linguistic identities in Soweto after the end of the socio-political turbulent conflicts that had occurred prior to 1994. The results revealed that there was a fissure between students’ classroom and out of school language. This rift indicated that the Soweto juveniles now had wide linguistic repertoires, due to the socio-political status of South Africa, and also that the monolingual classroom language no longer provided sufficient space for creativity and plural identity construction. They also concluded that many African indigenous languages today are embedded in one another, which resulted in that the respondents used a mixture of languages as a part of their identity construction, as opposed to assuming a specific identity based on the language they spoke. Accordingly, the traditional language and identity boundaries have been blurred due to people’s movements amongst different ethnic and linguistic memberships.

The second research was carried out in a primary school in Cape Town and executed by Caroline Kerfoot and Basirat Bello-Nonjengele (2014). They aimed to
investigate a low-income environment where the poor uniquely were racially diverse, meaning that there were both “colored” and “black African” students. Therefore, the setting was considered a social space where different cultures could meet and clashes could occur. The purpose was in turn to illuminate how these multilingual students negotiated difference by utilizing the semiotic resources at their disposal. Some of the results showed that once again older theories of one-to-one relationships between ethnicity and language do not always hold. The authors concluded that youngsters use their meta-awareness of both their own and others’ linguistic repertoires to construct social identities and achieve social goals in society. These identity choices are often in disagreement with parental ideologies as they threaten the essentialist perspective of language possession. However, this study provided an aspect of viewing learners as agents who redraw borders amongst languages or changed the ways in which linguistic repertoires were given certain values. Thus the challenge for schools remains in finding methods that support post-racial identities and that value the linguistic and cultural capital that all different kind of learners bring to school.

3.2. Scandinavian research

The first Scandinavian research took place in Sweden by Johan Falk and Miguel Angel Sarmiento (2003). Their aim was to investigate language attitudes amongst Spanish-speaking persons settled in Sweden, with focus on the relationship between age, arrival to Sweden and linguistic attitudes. The results demonstrated that it was easy to distinguish two different groups of “first” and “second” generation immigrants and there was a gap in the informants’ identification with their L1 and L2. For the individuals that came to Sweden as adults, the majority language was not seen as “theirs”. However, the second-generation immigrants expressed more equalized attitudes towards both languages. Some of these informants still viewed Spanish as an important aspect of their lives and declared it as their “first” language. Other informants nevertheless wanted to distance themselves from the language - since Spanish receives little official support in Sweden - and become a part of the majority society. In this context, the ideology of hierarchy becomes present as the participants aimed to distance themselves from their mother tongue due to its low status, which reveals the ideologies’ effects on language education.

The final study was conducted in Denmark by the researcher Martha Sif Karrebæk (2013). The article treated the socialization process of immigrant pupils with minority language backgrounds in a classroom in Copenhagen. Thus Karrebæk sought to address how pupils adjusted to a condition of linguistic hegemonic dominance. The findings revealed that students almost never oriented towards other linguistic registers than Standard Danish. The teacher did not work systematically with diversity in her classroom and had a narrow-view towards the complex linguistic situation in her classroom. Also, the parents generally accepted the school as a Danish environment, and none of them seemed unhappy that their home language was neglected. There was one father who considered his L1 (Turkish) to be unimportant, due to its infrequent occurrence in non-educational contexts. He however believed that Danish, which has great social value, would enable his daughter to become an active participant in society. Karrebæk concluded that the condition of linguistic hegemony unsurprisingly was present in the Danish classroom, even with a diversified population. She explained
that the minority child was compared to the normative majority child, which subsequently marginalized the minority child. This in turn was problematic as children became unrecognized and their identities were seen as less resourceful. Since I was studying immigrant students in a Swedish school setting, I found this paper of relevance in order to investigate how they as minority speakers of another language related to the majority language and whether this affected their identity formation.

4. Method

The methods for this study were twofold, including both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) techniques. By utilizing a questionnaire I collected both linguistic and social background information about the students. This material thereafter helped me recruit suitable interview respondents. Quantitative methods provided more validity in terms of statistical measurements and were simpler to analyze but with qualitative methods my personal interpretations became present, which opened up the possibility of more than one explanation being valid (Denscombe, 2003). The qualitative method was still preferable as I based the study on a student perspective and wished to explore students’ personal experiences towards their multilingualism and identity construction. Quantitative data was however important to systematically collect background information.

4.1. Questionnaire as method

Questionnaires are effective tools for collecting straightforward uncontroversial data when there are large numbers of respondents (Denscombe, 2003). This survey consisted of 20 questions and was divided into two parts: the first section concerned students’ linguistic background, whereas the second one regarded their social backgrounds. The questions in part two were constructed in a way that would reveal their social-economic conditions without explicitly asking about them, so called “social class indicators”. Questions regarding occupation, place of residence, education, spatial relations, consumption patterns etc. divulge knowledge of such aspects (Block, 2012).

Furthermore, the questions were factual, which means that they did not require personal attitudes and both open and closed queries occurred. Denscombe (2003) claims that the information gathered by open questions is more likely to reflect the complete richness and complexity of the respondent’s views. Unfortunately, these types of questions can be contra productive as they demand more effort by the respondents and can be difficult to interpret by the researcher. In my survey, most of the open questions remained unanswered and this naturally affected the study’s outcomes. Another limitation that occurred was that some students provided different answers to the same question. For instance, one student claimed to perceive Urdu as his first language in the questionnaire, but during the interview he explained viewing five different languages as his mother tongues. Therefore, questionnaires can be restrictive in the way the queries are formulated since participants are unable to explain and justify their reflections (Denscombe, 2003).
4.2. Group interview as method

Six students were interviewed as a group based on the background information provided from the questionnaires. The students were asked to discuss issues regarding their multilingualism and its effects on their identity construction. The interview was video-recorded to capture both non-verbal and verbal communications (Denscombe, 2003). Also, it facilitated the process of distinguishing between students’ voices and raised the study’s reliability. However, since the interview was recorded, the observer paradox occurred. The impact of the tape-recorder usually wears off quite quickly; still, the recorder disturbed the interviewees as they often commented its surveillance. Moreover, the interview took the semi-structured form, meaning that I had a clear list of the addressed issues but the topics occurred in different orders and the interviewees were allowed to elaborate their thoughts more widely (Denscombe, 2003).

Since I had the opportunity to participate during the students’ classes, I perceived an idea of their different individualities. Most of them were insecure and therefore group interviews were more suitable than individual ones, as consensus views could be revealed and the participants were permitted to challenge each other’s viewpoints (Denscombe, 2003). Nevertheless, with group interviews there is a risk of certain ideas, often those belonging to “quieter” people, becoming neglected as the dominant members control the discussion, whereas the quieter struggle with getting their voices heard. In correlation to this, certain ideas become acknowledged as “acceptable” within the group, which perhaps causes deviant ideas to be omitted in fear of breaking the accepted norm (Denscombe, 2003). I experienced that this happened during our meeting since the students often provided similar answers. Also, there is the issue of gender addressed in these contexts, where men often manage to direct the discussions, whilst women’s opinions become overshadowed. This was the situation during my interview since the girls barely spoke and one boy led the conversation.

4.2.1. Limitations

As noted above, the group interview had certain limitations that might of affected the outcomes. I perhaps should have recorded the students a couple of instances before the actual interview to remove the feeling of inspection and avoid the observer paradox. Also, I could have separated the boys from the girls to avoid the boys dominating the discussion. Overall, if I had spent more time with the students and subsequently built stronger relationships, they perhaps would have gained more confidence, and shared their honest opinions. Due to the short time, this was not an option but it is however important to consider for future studies.

4.3. Implementation

I initially contacted one of the teachers at the school to ask if I was welcome to perform this type of study. Thereafter, I visited the school and met the students, introducing the aims of my research and distributing consent forms. There are ethical aspects to be considered when implementing these types of methods, especially since the students were underage. Thus, I had to get approval from parents and teachers through consent forms (See Appendix A), which included my intentions, ethical matters, voluntary responses and rights to withdraw. Once the forms were signed and
gathered, I visited the school and allocated the questionnaire (See Appendix B). 25 students in the seventh grade participated. Both the questionnaire and the interview were in Swedish as their level of English was limited.

The provided information was then used in order to establish suitable respondents for the group interview. I asked which students that were willing to participate and based my selection on that (for more information about the students, see 4.4.2.). The interview was approximately 40 minutes long and took place in a study room next to the students’ classroom. However, the environment was not ideal since fellow classmates often distracted the students. I initiated the interview by again explaining the purposes and by demonstrating my personal linguistic “body map”. This map was intended to function as an icebreaker and to awaken a certain way of thinking. In short, the body drawing provides a multimodal approach to the examination of one’s linguistic repertoires and provokes explanations concerning humans’ language practices, resources and feelings. It engages participants to think about their linguistic repertoire in terms of languages, codes, means of expression and communication etc. and does not only refer to languages as bounded entities (Busch, 2012). After my presentation, I asked the students to motivate where they would locate their resources on that map. The activity was then ensued with the actual interview questions (See Appendix C).

4.4. Selection

The school I selected was multicultural, which indicates that there were several students with different cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Since I aimed to investigate multilingual students, it seemed a natural choice. In addition, my study focused on how students residing in segregated suburbs viewed their multilingualism and how this affected their identity construction. Therefore, I chose a school that was located in a diversified and socially vulnerable area. However, the results may have differed if I had chosen students residing in different parts of Sweden.

4.4.1. Setting - Bredäng

The school I investigated was situated in the suburb Bredäng, located approximately 11.3 kilometers south of Stockholm City. The construction of the district was initiated in the sixties and within two years 3900 apartments were created. Shortly after, an attractive subway station was inaugurated, which quickly inhabited the area (Rittsél, 1999). Furthermore, Bredäng was a part of the Swedish “Million Program”, which was implemented between 1965 and 1974 by the governing Social Democratic Party, to ensure citizens with housing for reasonable prices (Swedish National Encyclopedia). The purpose was to create a million new dwellings within ten years, destined for working- and middleclass residents. The Million Program was initially a description of the modernistic dream where all Swedish citizens would be enabled to live in high standard buildings. However, this romanticized picture quickly changed. A new streak emerged in the media where these suburbs began being described as “filthy” (Molina, Ristilammi & Ericsson, 2000). Additionally, social problems regularly appeared in the media in association with the suburbs. Thus, during the seventies, the suburbs became acknowledged as the “problematic areas” of society. In the eighties however, the immigrants began to be viewed as the “problem”. The immigrant-dominated suburbs
started to be overflown with prejudices and discrimination and were described by the media as only representing criminality, juvenile gangs, women’s oppression and living on social welfare (ibid.). As the proportion of people with foreign origin significantly evolved in the Swedish society, this resulted in an increasing housing segregation and a rising marginalization of large groups of immigrants (Bijvoet, 2003). During this period, the unemployment rate increased, people went into early retirement and the percentage of people with tertiary education decreased in Bredäng. Consequently, the inhabitants of the suburb had worse economic and social conditions than the average Swede in Stockholm.

Bredäng today contains 9985 inhabitants. 67% of them have an immigrant background: 48% born overseas, whilst 19% have foreign parents. Thus, the population is highly heterogeneous, and between 50-75 nationalities are represented (Olsson, 2005). Moreover, 80% of the population lives in rental apartments and 34% between the ages of 16-74 have a post-secondary education. In 2011, the unemployment rate was estimated to 7,4% and the workers had an average income of SEK 200 000 per year (“Stockholm Stad”, 2014). Thus, in accordance with Bourdieu’s (1984) society analysis, Bredäng is considered a suburb with low economic, cultural and symbolic capital. The low level of education, the perception of alienation in society and not being able to influence the direction of their lives, evidently have negative effects on the individuals, as the majority of the population lacks the required knowledge for gaining authority or symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984).

Albeit there exist certain issues within these areas, the immigrant suburbs in Stockholm are generally associated with unfortunate prejudices. I, however, only have positive connotations towards my hometown Bredäng and the multicultural environment has only influenced me positively. Thus I feel great pride in growing up in Bredäng and these stereotypical preconceptions about suburbs needs to be eliminated, to remove social injustice amongst the residents, bridge the social gaps, and encourage integration.

4.4.2. Presentation of the informant selection

Three girls and three boys from the same class were interviewed to obtain a nuanced picture of the students’ identities. I tried to select the respondents based on their distinct linguistic backgrounds to elicit several perspectives. However, due to many students’ unwillingness to participate and not signing permission forms, I was unable to interview the ones I truly preferred. Thus, my only demand in the end was that the students were multilingual.

Diyar was born in Kurdistan in year 2002. He has been living in Sweden for eight years and started learning the language at the age of four. Diyar perceived Kurdish as his mother tongue and used it with his parents. Swedish was however used most frequently, even with his siblings since he experienced it to be the most “natural” condition.

Amir was born in Sweden in year 2002. He had five languages in his linguistic repertoire, including Swedish, English, Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi. He explained that he spoke both Swedish and Urdu fluently, but Hindi and Punjabi were also highly ranked.
Yet, Amir considered all five languages as his mother tongues, but mainly spoke Urdu at home with his parents. Otherwise he used Swedish with his friends.

*Abel* was born in Sweden in year 2002. His parents came to Sweden from Eritrea so he spoke Tigrinya in addition to Swedish and English. Yet, he claimed that his fluency in Tigrinya was low and that he only managed to express some sentences in that language. He for instance perceived his English skills to be more developed. Abel mostly used Swedish at home and with friends, but still viewed both Swedish and Tigrinya as his mother tongues.

*Emilia* was born in Sweden in year 2002. Bosnian was part of her linguistic repertoire and she ranked it quite highly in terms of fluency. Nevertheless, she claimed to master the Swedish language better, but viewed both Swedish and Bosnian as her mother tongues. Both languages were used at home but Swedish was mainly used with friends.

*Yohana* was born in Sweden in year 2002. This girl was extremely timid and I mainly got this presented information from the questionnaire. She spoke Tigrinya beyond Swedish and English. However, she described her skills in Tigrinya to be low and she mostly used Swedish at home and with friends. In addition, she viewed Swedish and Tigrinya as her mother tongues.

*Miriam* was born in Sweden in year 2003. Her parents migrated to Sweden from Iraq, thus Arabic was part of her linguistic repertoire. Also, she considered herself to speak both Swedish and Arabic fluently, and viewed both languages as her mother tongues. Both languages were used frequently but she used Arabic at home and Swedish and English outside of home.

## 5. Results

I will initially present the results from the questionnaires with accompanying tables, in order to facilitate the understanding of the outcomes. Thereafter, I will demonstrate some results from the group interview with focus on the six interviewed students.

### 5.1. Results from questionnaires - part one

Of all the 25 participants in the survey, 16% were foreign-born, 12% had parents with “ethnic” Swedish heritage and 72% had parents with different foreign backgrounds. 9 different languages beyond Swedish, English and the foreign language taught in school (Spanish, French, German) occurred. The amount of languages in the students’ linguistic repertoires differed greatly (See Figure 1.), but the most common number was three languages.
Moreover, the results showed that the majority of the students, approximately 40%, considered Swedish as their first language, 20% viewed another language as their mother tongue and 16% perceived it to be English (See Figure 2.).

Regarding the question of which language was used most frequently at home, again 40% of the students claimed to mostly be using Swedish. However, 20% seemed to combine both Swedish and another language and 16% solely utilized another language (See Figure 3.).
The students mainly used English on the Internet. 52% of the pupils claimed to only use English; 24% stated that they only practiced Swedish, whereas 20% implemented both languages (See Figure 4.). Finally, 96% of the informants used Swedish on their leisure time when encountering friends, visiting shops etc.

5.2. Results from questionnaires - part two

In this section, the results from the questions regarding students’ social backgrounds will be illustrated. Initially, 64% of all the students lived in Bredäng and the rest mostly lived in nearby suburbs that obtained the same socio-economic conditions, with two exceptions (‘Mälarhöjden’ and ‘Älvsjö’) (See Figure 5.). In addition, the majority of the students, roughly 60%, lived in apartments (See Figure 6.).
Furthermore, 32% claimed that they visited Stockholm’s City a couple of instances per year. 20% claimed to visit once a month, and another 20% stated once a week, but 8% explained that they never visited the city (See Figure 7.). Lastly, 40% travelled abroad once a year (mainly to their parents’ homelands); 36% traveled once every three years and 20% traveled several times a year (See Figure 8.).
To summarize the questions regarding the parents’ occupation, I managed to compile that 18% of the parents were not working. Three students explicitly wrote that one of their parents was unemployed, whereas the other six failed to mention both parents. Eleven students wrote that both parents had an occupation but five students did not provide an answer at all. According to my own interpretations, assuming that all students have two parents, 26% obtain a post-secondary education, mostly as teachers, nurses and one registered police. These are however subjective understandings of the students’ answers and naturally I am unaware of the level of education they might possess from their motherlands.
5.3. Results from group interview - students’ linguistic practices

The first discussed theme concerned how, when and why students use certain linguistic practices. All of the students stated that their parents mainly used their first language when speaking to them but that they often replied in Swedish. They also agreed on speaking Swedish better in comparison to their mother tongue as it was used more frequently.1 Lastly, all the students mostly practiced English on the Internet, by watching TV-series, football games, YouTube-videos etc.

Diyar explained that Swedish is the “general” language in society and therefore speaking Swedish has become a habit: “We learn Swedish everyday, speak Swedish to our friends. We live in a Swedish country so it is not strange that we speak more Swedish.” He also claimed to have forgotten much Kurdish and often needed to incorporate Swedish words in order to express himself clearly. Nevertheless, all the students agreed that they often used their mother tongue when speaking to relatives and parents but that it varied depending on the context. Amir explained that: “In my homeland I either use my mother tongue or English, but even in Sweden, if I meet someone who comes from the same country as I do, I use my mother tongue”.

Interestingly, Emilia illuminated that she had several Bosnian friends residing in Sweden and they usually spoke Swedish even though they spoke Bosnian fluently. She added that they occasionally included Bosnian words, which I interpreted as a form of code switching, thus I asked if this occurred since there was no direct translation. Emilia answered that there were straight translations but that it was “funnier” to for instance do a prank in Bosnian. After her statement, Diyar interrupted and agreed with Emilia: “It is more amusing to joke in the mother tongue”. I asked why they understood it in this way and they replied that it becomes more “internal” and relatable.

Finally, I asked the students in which language they usually think or dream in. Again, most of them claimed that this varied but Diyar was the only one who explained how. He adapted the language he thought in depending on where he was situated. Thus when he visited Kurdistan, he began thinking in Kurdish, whereas in Sweden he thought in Swedish. I asked what the reasons for this could be, and Diyar responded that he wanted to inherit “the mode” and obtain a particular “role”. The rest of the students agreed as they nodded quietly, but Miriam expressed that she both thought and dreamed in English, which I assume could be a result of mainly using English in social media. However, she did not want to develop that announcement further.

5.4. Results from group interview - ethnic identity

The students were also encouraged to reflect on personal views regarding their ethnic identities. I asked if they perceived themselves as Swedes or something else and what in turn resolved whether a person “belonged” to a certain ethnicity. All of the students viewed themselves as having a Swedish identity. Diyar said: “You jump around the maypole and sing “Little Frogs”, you do everything Swedish so you are a Swede and part of the Swedish culture”. Emilia also filled in: “You live in Sweden, you have lived here your entire life and speak Swedish everyday, so you feel Swedish”. Abel then

1 I will occasionally refer to the students’ parents’ languages as their mother tongues even though they also perceive Swedish as their first language, to facilitate the discussion.
added that: “We speak Swedish fluently so we are Swedes”. Thus I asked whether speaking the language is the element that determines if you can categorize yourself as a Greek, Bosnian or Syrian. Almost all of the students responded vigorously to me and said that each individual personally decide what s (he) perceived himself/herself to be. Miriam highlighted that: “YOU are the only one who can decide what your identity is”. Diyar specified that he was proud to be Kurdish since it defined his identity: “I am a Kurd and speak Kurdish, so you are proud over who you are”. I asked him if a person who spoke Kurdish automatically indicated that s (he) was a Kurd, and he replied that: “No, it depends on how you personally feel”.

Moreover, the discussion touched on how they balanced their different identities and if this influenced the sense of belonging in society. Most of the students claimed to have multiple identities, indicating that they had both a Swedish identity and another identity related to their ethnic background. Miriam perceived herself to have an Arabic identity due to its constant occurrence in her life: “It is my life, my culture and my language”. However, the students raised the issue of not belonging anywhere or gaining full membership, due to their persistent dualities. Diyar, with frustration, illuminated that whenever he visited Kurdistan where he originally was born, he was viewed as a Swede but in Sweden he was categorized as an immigrant: “You never truly feel at home…”. Miriam confirmed his statement and claimed that she continuously was referred to being a Swede in her homeland but considered an Arab in Sweden.

In correlation to this discussion, I asked whether the students ever felt neglected, excluded or victimized in society due to their foreign backgrounds. Most of them said “No”, but Yohana hinted towards Miriam who apparently had experienced discrimination. However, she did not want to share her experiences due to the threatening position, where the power relations were unclear and she perhaps lacked complete confidence in me.

6. Discussion

6.1. Benefits of multilingualism and students’ attitudes towards it

All the students agreed that it was always beneficial to speak several languages when for instance wanting to attain an international profession or for communicative purposes. Abel highlighted the importance of languages as a tool for communication, and for maintaining a person’s parents’ language, as it represented their culture. They stated that it was never a disadvantage; nonetheless, all the students stated that society valued each language differently, where, for instance, English and French were highly ranked in Sweden. I asked whether all languages were equally valued and Abel immediately answered that they, at least, should be. However, Diyar pointed out that Kurdish for instance is only spoken in a small area and therefore not as “beneficial” to know. Emilia also claimed that languages tend to be valued less when spoken by a lesser population. Still, all of them confirmed that it was more important to speak Swedish since they lived in Sweden.
The adolescents’ awareness of the linguistic hierarchy becomes evident during this discussion. By listening to the students, I got the impression that some of them perceived their mother tongues as less valued as they were not majority languages. Diyar’s unwillingness to maintain Kurdish could perhaps be a result of this dominant linguistic hierarchy, since the immigrant language Kurdish is considered less valued, as in Karrebæk’s study where the father de-valued Turkish, due to its “low status” as a minority language. Diyar seemed to be imprisoned by the condition of linguistic hegemony, which evidently has effects on students’ self-attitudes, as they become perceived as excluded (Karrebæk, 2013). The rest of the students mentioned that Swedish was more important to maintain in Sweden; thus they were partly in agreement with Diyar. However, they were also eager to preserve their mother tongue, which is common amongst second-generation immigrants who tend to have equalized attitudes towards both languages (Falk & Sarmiento, 2003). Diyar was not born in Sweden, which plausibly justified his different reactions. It is nevertheless important that schools find different methods that invite the diversifying world into the classroom to give students the possibility to view themselves positively and strengthen their identities.

6.2. Identifications and ideologies of the “mother tongue”

The students were generally positive towards their mother tongues. All of them (except Diyar) revealed that they experienced joyfulness when hearing their mother tongues being spoken. Diyar, however, claimed to be indifferent towards Kurdish and did not feel anything special when hearing it. He additionally explained that he had forgotten much Kurdish but did not feel unhappy about this. Interestingly, he was the only one who was not born in Sweden and the only one who did not perceive Swedish as his mother tongue. The rest of the students viewed both Swedish and another language as their mother tongues, Amir even perceived all five languages in his repertoire as his first languages. Miriam described that she enjoyed hearing Arabic since she experienced a feeling of fellowship. Also, everyone except for Diyar expressed that it was shameful that they did not conquer their mother tongue as well as Swedish and perceived it as a loss. Thus I asked if they would speak their mother tongue to their potential future children. Most of them stated that they would force their children to have home instruction in their L1, even though five of them did not go themselves, claiming that the lessons were too early in the morning. Diyar claimed to not care that much about home instruction. The students seemed split in their opinions: on the one hand they truly valued home instruction to maintain their parents’ cultural heritages even though being residents in Sweden; still they did not think it was necessary for them. Abel explained that he already spoke Tigrinya at home and did not need home instruction. I asked if there was a difference between speaking and studying a language, where Diyar replied that you learned more about cultures through studies. Overall, they explained to feel extreme pride in mastering several languages and associated their L1s to the hearts.

Firstly, it is evident that the mother tongue ideology truly has a different meaning today than historically viewed. As illustrated, all of the students except for Diyar perceived themselves to have two or more L1s, even though not being “ethnically” Swedish. Amir even recognized a language he did not speak fluently as
his mother tongue, which Weber and Horner (2012) explain is a common feature in multilingual societies. Moreover, albeit the informants were proud to be multilingual and only viewed it as beneficial, some of them did not practice their L1 when speaking to siblings or friends. All of them claimed that it was more natural to communicate in Swedish with siblings; thus the majority language amongst the students was Swedish, which in turn justified their Swedish identifications. It was expected that they sensed such strong connections towards Swedish even though being raised in a home where another language had been in focus. However, I see an issue of language survival amongst these students. According to Boyd (1985), adolescents who use Swedish to their siblings face a risk of not transferring the language to coming generations. All of the students agreed on the importance of maintaining their mother tongue with future children, but I see tendencies of this lack of transfer especially as some of the students declared that they did not speak their languages fluently. It is interesting that for instance Abel and Yohana, who did not speak Tigrinya very well, still stressed the prominence of preserving it for upcoming generations. Again, this illustrates their perceptions of multilingualism as being something beneficial and vital to uphold parts of their identities.

I further asked the students how (or if) they perceived that the school encouraged multilingualism. They mentioned home instruction but all of them thought that the school could highlight different cultures more. Diyar stated that they always had vacation during Christian holidays but as a Muslim he felt excluded. Thus they agreed that schools in general should adjust their current traditions and norms to include more people in society. Abel said that this perhaps would make more students feel integrated. As already mentioned, Diyar was the only one with some dissented opinions and had rather negative attitudes towards maintaining Kurdish. Perhaps his feelings of exclusion in society can be an explanation for this, since he has been limited and unable to practice his desired identity.

6.3. Relationships between languages and ethnic identities

The students had different experiences of how they created distinct identities. All of them perceived themselves as both Swedes and part of another ethnic identity. Thus their assumed identities (how they viewed themselves) were based on how frequently a language was used, with whom it was implemented and the cultural heritage each language brought. However, as Diyar explicitly pointed out, society viewed them as immigrants due to their foreign backgrounds even if they perceived themselves as partly Swedish. According to Weber and Horner (2012), this concerns the imposed identity (how people viewed others), which is based on stereotypical categorizations in society, attempting to fix another person’s identity. This in turn is centered on an essentialist ideology of language and identity. The constant negotiation between the ascribed and assumed identities is what determines our individualities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Subsequently, a person can either be recognized as (he) desires, or others (with social power) who are ignoring this constructed identity will continue to assign an identity through perception of “otherness” (Weber & Horner, 2012). Perhaps this explains why the students were caught in such dilemmas and experienced to not belong anywhere. Although you personally may perceive yourself to be Swedish, another person with power has the authority to impose another identity. Miriam
experienced to be imposed an identity as an “Arab” in Sweden, even though she had different perceptions of her personal identities. These adolescents had, due to their foreign backgrounds, been ascribed the role of immigrants since they were born, which in turn had become a part of their identity. Being an immigrant is not something negative; however, it can become problematic when another person decides which ethnic group each person should be a part of, especially if this group has negative attitudes and associations in the dominant ideology (Almqvist, 2006). In turn, if these impositions are based on stereotypical prejudices, it evidently affects the persons’ self-conceptions and can result in exclusion and segregation in society.

Some of the students discussed the meaning of obtaining dual ethnic identities. The students were members of ethnic minority groups and attached great importance to their cultural heritage. In such contexts, it can be common to have negative attitudes towards dominant majority groups, as their “other” identity becomes marginalized (Martinovic & Verkuyl, 2014). However, the fact that many students had constructed dual identities for themselves seemed to reduce feelings of hostility to the dominant society and enabled them to value both their “ethnic” heritages and their Swedish ones. As mentioned it seemed as if the students who were born in Sweden faced less difficulties in constructing plural identities than Diyar who immigrated to Sweden. Still, dual or multiple identity models could truly be a resolution, and I believe that schools and teachers are a central contributing factor to these encouragements.

6.4. Socio-economic background and social mobility

Lastly, I will emphasize which aspects of the students’ social status that perhaps influenced their identity construction. The questionnaires illustrated that generally the students in the whole class had rather “low” economic capital (Bourdieu, 1984), since the majority lived in rental apartments in areas of low socio-economic status (See Figure 5 and 6), shopped in nearby stores, parents often possessed non-professional occupations and unemployment occurred. Of the six interviewees, the majority did not visit the city very often (See Figure 7) - Abel even claimed to never leave outside his home area. Nevertheless, during the group interview, the six students explained that they travel to their homelands often, which requires a certain economic capital. Emilia for instance visited Bosnia every summer and Amir visited Pakistan several times a year. Thus, the importance of maintaining relations to the motherland and culture seems significant to the parents. Hence, even though the students did not leave their immediate environments much, they still traveled abroad frequently, which again strengthens the significance of preserving connections to the mainland. It also illustrates new patterns of mobility, which are not visible in traditional accounts of language and social class.

6.4.1. Further research

Due to the short amount of time I was unable to further incorporate the provided information regarding students’ social backgrounds. Initially, I aimed to investigate whether social class differences, segregation and high unemployment could impact students’ language usage and opportunities for identity construction. However, to do so, I would be required to make a comparison between this school and perhaps a
school located in another social area. My suggestion for future studies is therefore to compare schools located in diverse socio-economic regions and examine whether students’ linguistic and identity practices are influenced by such elements. In addition, research has confirmed the importance of encouraging and valuing students’ multilingualism in classrooms; it could therefore be beneficial to investigate different teaching strategies in Swedish multilingual schools.

7. Conclusion

The study has shown that, as expected, students varied their language use based on the situation, where in this case the majority of the students used Swedish in most contexts, even with siblings and friends. This in turn raised the issue of language survival and whether the adolescents would carry the heritage to coming generations, which seemed doubtful given their current practices. However, overall the students perceived multilingualism as beneficial but were aware of the linguistic hierarchies operating in society and the place of their own repertoires in them. Regarding ethnic identity, the students claimed to have created identities through families and relatives, through home instruction in the L1, by visiting their homeland, by immigrating to Sweden etc. All claimed to have a Swedish identity as well as something else, but the sense of belonging was raised and additionally the effects of dual identities. Students did not view these dual identities as entirely positive as they experienced themselves to be outsiders in both places. Thus while these youngsters had more fluid conceptions of identity, they were still evaluated within essentialist ideologies functioning in both countries. However, it seemed as those who had been in Sweden since birth had less trouble constructing healthy dual identities than those who arrived as children. Also, there was evidence of complex and conflicting identifications amongst languages and ascribed and assumed identities. Evidently the post-structural approach was the most appropriate perspective, since identities were proven to be changeable and dynamic. An individual did not always identify with the language s (he) spoke, or contrariwise - an individual identified with a language s (he) did not speak. Lastly, there were surprising connections between mobility, home language, culture and socio-economic status, since even those with relatively low levels of economic capital still prioritized traveling to the homeland to ensure enduring bonds.
References


Appendix A

Parent consent form:

Dear Parent!

My name is Sinaya Espar and I am studying within the teaching program, specializing in upper secondary school at Stockholm’s University. This semester, I am writing my bachelor thesis, which is on multilingualism. I have requested permission to perform a study at seventh grade students at “blank” as part of my research. Your written permission on this form is required for me to this research.

Goal of the study:
My aim of study is to investigate how students practice and perceive their multilingualism as a part of their identity.

Research methods:
Your child will participate in a questionnaire where they answer questions regarding their language background and social interests. A few learners will also be asked for interviews to find out their views on language use and identity construction. These interviews will be recorded. Eventual group discussions may also emerge depending on the results. This means that a few students will discuss topics that concern language and identity, while being recorded.

It is voluntary and anonymous:
Your child does not have to participate. There will be no penalties against your child for not participating. Learners only have to answer the questions they want to answer and they may stop at any time. The purpose of the research will be explained to learners and they will be able to ask questions. Your child's privacy will be protected. No names will be recorded or attached to the research report. A copy of the final research report will be given to the school.

Best regards,
Sinaya Espar

Please sign and give this form to your child to bring back to the school. If you have any questions, you are welcome to contact me: 076 – 29 79 379 or sinaya_espar@hotmail.com. Thank you for your help!

[Consent form]

I, (name)…………………………………………..do / do not (please circle one) give permission for my child to participate in the study.
Parent’s signature:…………………………………………
Child' s name:………………………………………………
Date:……………………………………………………..
Teacher consent form:

As a teacher at....................................................................... I hereby acknowledge the following:

1. The researcher has explained to me the purpose of the study. She also explained to me that all information received as part of the study would be used for research purpose only.

2. I have given permission for her to perform a questionnaire on the students. She has also been allowed to interview a few students and if necessary use audio- and video recordings.

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any stage.

4. I understand that the school and all participants in the study will remain anonymous.

Teacher’s signature:.........................................................
Date:....................................................................................
Place:..................................................................................

Researcher: Sinaya Espar
Contact: 076 – 29 79 379, Sinaya_espar@hotmail.com
Appendix B

Survey on language and identity

To think about:

• Read the questions carefully
• Answer as fully as possible
• Write your answer on the line beneath the question, or
• Check the box next to the question with an X
• Each question can have several answers
• You only have to answer the questions you want to answer

1. In what year were you born?

2. Were you born in Sweden? (If your answer is “Yes”, you may jump to question 5.)
   Yes
   No

3. If not, in which country were you born?

4. How long have you been living in Sweden?

5. What languages do you speak? Write all of them! Please rank your answers from 1-10, where 1 signifies that you have very little skills in that language, whilst 10 indicates that you speak the language fluently. For instance: Swedish 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Rank</th>
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</table>
6. What do you consider your mother tongue/-s or first language/-s?

- Swedish
- English
- Another language/-s: ______________________

7. What language/-s do you use the most at home?

- Swedish
- English
- Another language/-s: ______________________

8. What language/-s do you use the most with your friends?

- Swedish
- English
- Another language/-s: ______________________

9. What language/-s do you use on the Internet?

- Swedish
- English
- Another language/-s: ______________________

10. What language/-s do you use for communication when purchasing items in a store?

- Swedish
- English
- Another language/-s: ______________________
Part II.


12. Have you lived in that suburb your entire life? (If your answer is “Yes” you may jump to question 14.)

   Yes

   No

13. If not, when did you move there and why?

14. Please check the box that matches your current living situation. I live in a/an:

   Apartment
   House/Villa
   Terrace house
   Row house
   Other: ______________________

15. What language/-s do your parents speak?

16. What are your parents’ occupations?

______________________________
17. Where do you and your family usually shop for groceries, clothing and other necessities? Please write the name of the places and where they are located.


18. How often do you visit Stockholm’s inner city?

- Several times a week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Several times a year
- Never

19. How often do you travel abroad?

- Several times a year
- Once a year
- Once every three years
- Never

20. What are your most frequent spare time activities?


Thank you for your participation!
Appendix C

Interview questions:

Further background information about their language use:
- When do you use Swedish, English or your mother tongue?
- With whom do you use Swedish, English or your mother tongue?
- And why do you use Swedish, English or your mother tongue in different contexts?
- Of all the languages you speak, which one did you learn first?
- Which language is used the most at home? Which language do you speak to your parents? Which language do your parents speak to you?
- Many of you have several mother tongues. Which language do you consider yourself knowing the "best" and why?
- Which language do you feel the most comfortable speaking, why?
- Which language do you think in? Does it vary depending on the situation, and what do you think is the reason for that?
- Can you think about an instance when your mother tongue is the most important and an instance when Swedish is the most important?

Associations towards the mother tongue:
- How do you feel speaking your mother tongue? Do you like hearing it?
- Do you wish that you could speak your mother tongue as well as Swedish?
- Do you think you will forget your mother tongue in the future?
- Would you rather speak your mother tongue than Swedish?
- Do you wish that you could speak your mother tongue more often during class?
- If you have children, what language do you want them to speak and why?

The importance of language in general:
- Do you think it is beneficial to speak many languages? Why?
- Can it be bad to speak many languages? Why?
- Do you feel pride in speaking many languages?
- Do you feel you have an advantage over people who only speak one language?

“Ethnic” identity:
- Do you consider yourself to be Swedish or something else?
- What decides whether you are a Swede, Greek or Bosnian etc.? Speaking the language?
- Where do you feel the most at “home”?
- Do you ever feel left out for having a foreign background?
- Have you ever experienced to be discriminated or treated badly because of your foreign background?
- Many of you wrote that you travel abroad often, where do you travel? Do you visit your parents’ homeland?
School:
- Do you think that your school encourages multilingualism? Can you give any examples?
- How do you think that the school could work on highlighting different cultures and languages other than Swedish?
- Is it important that the school have home language instruction?
- How do you think your teacher perceive the fact that you are multilingual?