Directions in Language and Identity Research

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Abstract

The recent explosion of interest in language identity research (LIR) is traceable to a major shift in linguistic thought in the second half of the twentieth century, which emphasised the social dimensions of language. Language became conceived primarily as a social phenomenon appropriated by humans while negotiating social relationships. This shift in focus drew attention to language as an instrument for identity construction or negotiation. Since then, interest in LIR has grown exponentially, giving rise to the employment of identity as a construct in a wide range of domains. In light of this, this paper offers a critical review of the major directions in which LIR has burrowed. To achieve this, the paper is organised into three parts. Firstly, a conceptualisation of the slippery term 'identity' is undertaken, followed by a critical examination of the nature of the interface between language and identity. The third part overviews the main directions or domains in LIR, with an evaluation of the key studies in each domain, and concludes with a discussion of future directions in the discipline.

Keywords: *identity, sociology of language, constructivism, sociolinguistics, language and identity research (LIR)*

Introduction

One of the most contentious concepts in the social sciences and humanities is, arguably, 'identity'. Since its entrance into mainstream research in these fields, it has remained one of the most used terms by researchers, given that questions of identity connect most, if not all, social sciences/humanities disciplines. Questions of *what* distinguishes a person/group from others have significantly shaped the directions of research in these sister disciplines in recent times. Current social concerns like globalisation, rights movements and migration have further problematised identity-driven research, and it is predicted that these concerns will continue to engage researchers for a long time. As these trends continue to evolve, identity continues to be complexified, given this increasing "rise of new forms of assertion of identity" (Okolie, 2003, p. 1). More than ever, identity will continue to matter to us in contemporary times chiefly because of the new patterns of living occasioned by globalisation, migration, and other new ways of being or new patterns of 'identitying' (Ugwuanyi, 2021). These facts suggest that identity matters to humanity not only as a construct or theory but as a fact of life (Gilroy, 1997).

The recent interest in identity has been described by many scholars as explosive (e.g., Hall, 1996; Jenkins, 2014; Schwartz, 2001; Yuval-Davis, 2010). Virtually all social science and humanities disciplines and even other disciplines in management studies, law and some aspects of pure sciences whose interests intersect with human behaviour now investigate aspects of identity in very profound ways. Worchel et al. (1998, p. xvii) lent credence to this view when they posited that "one of the most unique features of the area is that it has found a warm welcome in a variety of camps." In all, however, the core theorisation of the concept has been located within the social sciences and humanities.

The realities of modernity and globalisation influence how people position themselves and are positioned, thus making it increasingly difficult to characterise a person's or group's identity. What information, for instance, do we use in identifying ourselves, and others? How do we know which people are the same as us (in terms of group sameness, for instance), and those different from us? How do we know the limits between *our* individual selves in isolation and how selves are shaped by group interactions? What ties connect us with others, and how tight or loose are those cords that bind us? Why and how do people assign—or impose— certain identities on themselves, or on others? Who has the power to assign identities, and to whom, and why? In short, why has identity become so important in the 21st century? These and many more identity questions compound the concept the more. Oftentimes people take issues of this nature for granted. But since they increasingly continue to affect relationships, social services, understandings, attitudes, perceptions, access to resources, etc., discourses on identity have come to occupy a very important space in our lives, for it pervades all aspects of our individual or social lives. Even with the enormity of debates and identity research, the concept has largely remained elusive in terms of definition. What then is identity?

Conceptualising and Theorising Identity

Identity, in whatever sense, is about *defining* a person or group, either by the person/group or *others*. It is in this sense that Jenkins (2014) opines that identity is about *similarity* and *difference*, linking it to its Latin root, *identitas*, meaning "the same". Echoing this viewpoint, other identity scholars (e.g., Butler, 1999; Gilroy, 2006; Hall, 1996; Taylor, 1994; Woodward, 2004) agree that identity, particularly group identity, or social identity (Tajfel, 1978), pertains to *knowing* what features one (group) shares with others (similarity) and what other features in one (group) are absent in others (difference). This view of identity holds that in defining oneself or in group definition, one simultaneously defines others. Winkler and Olivier (2016) support the view that "identity—whether the identity of a singular or collective subject, of the self or of a people—is a product of differential relations" (p. 95), an understanding they argue has its roots in a recent Western thought motivated by the writings of thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault.

Identity has also been generally conceptualised as the "answer" to the question "who am I?" or "who are we?", or even "who are they?" However, this views is perhaps only a fundamental means of grappling with an obviously elusive concept (Jenkins, 2014; Joseph, 2004; Deschamps & Devos, 1998). In this vein, therefore, identity answers the fundamental question of who one is or who/what a group is or stands for. This understanding of identity seems common perhaps because it accounts for the most obvious aspect(s) of identity: personal identity—one's perception of oneself, or others' perception of that individual, especially because the earliest theorisations of identity focused mainly on individual identity. However, as identity studies continue to evolve, there is increasing awareness that personal identity is only a part of the entire story (Edwards, 2009; Woodward, 2004). In fact, current knowledge in identity studies, especially within the poststructuralist framework, is that identity is almost always relational—that which is formed in our interactional relationship with others. Even when what is at stake is personal

identity, it can only be more completely revealed in relation to what the individual does *with* others, for "knowing who I am" almost always implicates "knowing who others are or are not". While the view that identity is inherently about who (we think) we are in relation to *others* can be tenable, identity scholarship has shown that the concept entails much more.

In Deschamps and Devos's (1998) view, only a few concepts are as polysemous as identity. Some even argue that identity is so complex a term for the academia, and too fluid and ambiguous to be researchable (e.g., Malesevic, 2003; 2006). Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have also opined that identity is torn apart, overused and made to mean so many things at the same time, and therefore should be discarded. The reason for their outrage is apparent: identity is a term employed as a research construct in numerous disciplines, and the understanding of the term is bound to differ from discipline to discipline. However, both Jenkins (2014) and Ashton et al. (2004) maintain that no matter how "abused" the concept of identity has become, it can no longer be discarded. Further, Joseph (2004) reminds us that "no attempt to unify and contain its interpretation has ever been or can ever be successful" (p. 10). From all indications, a univocal definition of the term appears unworkable. To this end, some (e.g., Chandler & Munday, 2011) have suggested that the best option is to "break up" the concept to signify its many meanings of self, identification, personality, social identity, etc. Doing this seems no lesser evil, as it would, at best, amount to a circularity of jargonising (Joseph, 2004). We shall briefly examine how identity has been conceptualised and theorised in some of the key social science/humanities disciplines.

The theorisation of the concept of identity in the academia has a relatively short history. However, statements, observations and questions that pertain to aspects of identity have historically been part of man's existence. Humanity has always sought to understand itself better in relation to the essence of human existence and relationships with other people, which are at the heart of identity. For instance, the famous maxim inscribed on the ornamental façade of Delphi Temple, "Know Thyself", and indeed most of Socratic reflections, are just a few examples of such manifestations of "identity questions" in Antiquity. In other words, it is the recent explosion of interest in identity studies that we can rightly regard as having a relatively short history, not the idea of identity itself.

Identity has been theorised from a range of disciplinary standpoints. For example, the Freudian psychoanalytical constructs of *id*, *ego* and *superego* (Freud, 1923/1961 & 1930/1965) touch upon self-concept, which some correlate with identity. However, the first theoretical attempt to bring the (psycho)social dimension into identity studies was the work of Erik Erikson, espoused in his seminal work, *Childhood and society* (1950/63), in which he conceives of identity as representing all the values, beliefs, goals and choices that a young individual develops in their journey to adulthood while interacting with their environment. Erikson initially identified four identity classifications—a sense of individual identity, continuity of personal character, ego synthesis, and solidarity—which he later modified into three: *ego identity*, one's most basic private beliefs, which may even be unconscious; *personal identity*, the values and beliefs one shows to the world; and *social identity*, sense of belongingness to and solidarity with a group (Erikson, 1980; Schwartz, 2001).

Whilst the Eriksonian model has been acknowledged as multidimensional and paving the way for "further theorising, exposition, and research on identity" (Schwartz, 2001, p. 8), it has also been criticised as lacking theoretical coherence, skewed towards individual identity and not supported by empirical evidence (e.g., Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Côté & Levine, 1988; Marcia, 1988; 2001; Schwartz 2001), resulting in "a theory that was eloquent and artistic but from which operational definitions were difficult to extract" (Schwartz 2001, p. 11). Nevertheless, Erikson's model laid the foundations of the conceptualisation of identity as *relational* and *social*.

Another very influential theory of identity, especially in linguistics, is Tajfel's social identity theory. In a series of discipline-shaping publications (e.g., Tajfel, 1978; 1981; 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), Tajfel presents a model that sums up the social dimensions of identity, in which he conceptualised identity as "the individual's knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership" (Abrams & Hogg, as cited in Curley 2009, p. 651). Tajfel's theory of social identity placed a great deal of emphasis on the sense of belonging, the sense that individuals often *define* themselves in relation to their membership of a group, which shows how individual identities closely intertwine with group identities, given that identities are almost always socially constructed. This sense of group identity marks almost all communities of language use, even if it is only "imagined" (Anderson, 1991). Joseph (2010) notes that this model has become the most influential model for analysing language identity since people who speak a common language often feel that "emotional and value significance" among themselves. At the heart of the theory is the emphasis that what matters most is membership and an individual's understanding or awareness that the emotional significance of this membership is an integral aspect of their identities.

Essentialist vs nonessentialist approaches to the theory of identity

In general, identity theory has been conceptualised based on two broad approaches—the essentialist and the nonessentialist. It is these two broad approaches that have given birth to the several theoretical orientations that now undergird identity research in the humanities and social sciences. Whilst the essentialist approaches are sometimes referred to as naturalist (Joseph 2004) or structuralist (Omoniyi & White, 2006) approach, the nonessentialist (also anti-essentialist) are generally regarded as constructivist (Llamas & Watt, 2010; Berg-Sørensen et al., 2010) or poststructuralist (Omoniyi & White, 2006). Even though there is no straight-jacket, one-line understanding of these two approaches, "it has become common to distinguish between essentialist and constructivist understandings of group identities" (Berg-Sørensen et al. 2010, p. 40) as broadly as possible to enable a clearer understanding of the concept as it is used in the literature and to situate any discussion of identity within one of these broad models.

The general perception of the essentialist school is that identity is fixed, static and single. This view takes social roles as given, and as constructs that define a person or a group notwithstanding the changes the person/group undergoes. Berg-

Sørensen et al. (2010, p. 40) paint a picture that illustrates the overarching understanding of the essentialist approach:

> ... essentialist position involves or simply consists of stereotypical and/or partially self-fulfilling generalisations about what it is (and must be) to be (fe/)male or to 'belong' to a certain race, culture, or religion. Furthermore, it is often assumed that such generalisations constrain individuals and tie them to expectations, roles, and identities that oppress them....

In sum, essentialism views identity as the "stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always-ready 'the same', identical to itself across time" (personal identity); or that "collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common …and which can stabilise, fix or guarantee an unchanging 'oneness' or cultural belonging" (group or collective identity) (Hall 1996, p. 3-4).

Incidentally, this understanding of identity underpinned most of the earliest research interests in identity research until the late 20th century when it came under attack from the various constructivist theorists. While criticising this naturalist view of identity, Phillips (2007) argues that "cultures are not bounded, cultural meanings are internally contested, and cultures are not static but involved in a continuous process of change" (p. 27). This 'new' understanding that cultural phenomena are in flux underpinned a great deal of thinking in the humanities and social sciences towards the end of the 20th century. Similarly, Hall (1990; 1996) and Jenkins (2004) maintain that any view of identity that essentialises human behaviour in relation to social relationships is not just myopic but is artificial, for it will not represent the authentic facts about the identity(ies) of an individual or group.

Given the magnitude of the criticism heaped on the essentialist view of identity, "'essentialism' is used by most people in social sciences and humanities as a slur word" (Berg-Sørensen et al. 2010, p. 40), in light of wide-ranging research evidence which has shown that identity is not naturally ascribed. Essentialism reifies and ossifies identity, which grossly falls short of the varied, multiple and changing identities, both at the individual and collective levels; hence the criticisms it has received. However, Joseph (2004) claims that most critics of essentialism cannot completely rid themselves of certain "essentialising assumptions", which he acknowledges might be an indication of how much influence this view has wielded on the "destiny" of identity research in the human sciences before it came under attack. According to Okolie (2003), the inherent capacity of identity to define, to classify, to name, to identify, or to denote is not questionable, so no matter how fluid and shifting identities may be, there will likely remain what he calls the "core identities", one of which is language (Okolie, 2003).

The criticisms directed against essentialism paved the way for the nonessentialist, constructivist tradition. This is because a range of factors, such as globalisation, modernity, increased migration, radical movements such as decolonisation and gender and sexual rights, and other shifting human conditions, has significantly redefined the dynamics of human experience and social relationships. It is now

unfashionable to think of any social phenomenon as static. These factors have continued to shape social relations, and our ways of perception, setting the stage for new meanings, new interpretations, new ways of being, and ultimately new ways of thinking about and *defining* ourselves and *others*. Current world events continue to make us believe that these trends shall continue to increase and take new shapes, thereby continuing to expand and shift the horizons of the tasks of social sciences and humanities. Dillon et al. (1999) capture this more succinctly:

> …given that the world is in flux—with jobs tending to become more transient, major shifts in the views of political parties, and globalisation bringing ostensibly a more diverse though possibly eventually more uniform cultural life—it is possibly more useful to see identities as being transient, more controllable by ourselves and others, and more useful in the bricolage of everyday life (p. 398).

Since language is at the centre of all these social conditions, it matters that the frontiers of linguistics, particularly sociolinguistics, should be broadened to develop new tools that can account for these new and challenging realities of our time. This situation has necessitated a new way of thinking about identity, which gave rise to the constructivist (i.e., nonessentialist) approaches to identity theory.

The constructivist paradigm holds that social meanings are the result of human interpretation and that social phenomena are enacted and appropriated by people (Omoniyi and White 2006). Approaches within this paradigm understand humans as intentional beings capable of interacting and making meanings that define them. According to Hall (1996, p. 4), in constructivism "…identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different…discourses, practices and positions… [and] are constantly in the process of change and transformation." Hall also recognises that language is one of the tools or resources for the enactment of identity: "identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented…" (p. 4).

This viewpoint reaffirms the ultimate goal of this school: that identity is multiple, not easily summarisable in one fell swoop, not static, and that identity is ultimately a "process". This idea of process pervades the writings of Jenkins (2004) who thinks that "identification" rather than "identity" more appropriately captures the sense of identity being a process, similar to what Ugwuanyi (2021) has referred to "identitying". However, Jenkins does not completely jettison the use of the term "identity" but cautions that whichever term one prefers, the more important thing is how and what one talks or says about them, espousing that any theorisation of identity in modern times must necessarily acknowledge that identity construction is essentially a process—something that we do, not something one has or does not have.

Within the broad school of nonessentialist approach to identity, there are sub-approaches, such as the narrative theory of identity within which identities are "conceived as narratives, stories that people tell themselves and others about who

they are, and who they are not, as well as who and how they would like to/should be" (Yuval-Davis 2010, p. 266). Other related approaches include those that see identities as evident in conversations (dialogic) or as performed (performative) (Lawler, 2008). But according to Yuval-Davis (2010), the narrative, dialogic and performative approaches share a commonality which she summarises thus:

> ...the dialogical approach can be seen as assuming the construction of identities as specific narratives that collude or diverge from each other in the on-going process of 'becoming' involved in the dialogical process. In this way, like the performative approach to the study of identities, it can be encompassed by the theoretical perspective that defines identities as narratives (p. 272).

This interplay emphasises that identities are primarily socially constructed through meaning-making "texts" which can be conceived as narratives, performance and dialogues/discourse. Importantly, such an integrative model of identity offers us a broader, more nuanced, and much more multi-layered understanding of identity. One of the most radically de-essentialised theories of identity is the postmodernist view that identity is extremely fluid, decentred and sometimes intractable, or even *unknowable* (Noonan, 2019). However, the milder "sociological variant of the postmodern approach" (Côté 2006, p. 13) simply emphasises that identity is multiple and context-dependent (Rattansi & Phoenix, 1997), more abstract and ambiguous, and enacted in interaction/discourse (Wodak et al., 2009).

Taken together, all the nonessentialist approaches to identity theory hold much in common: that all forms of identities are negotiated or constructed socially, contextually and discursively, and are multiple, fluid and shifting. This understanding pervades the discipline and gives impetus to most current studies concerned with any aspects of identity construction, particularly in language sciences. In the following section, the language-identity connection is examined.

Language-identity Nexus

Prior to the radical yet liberating theoretical movements in the humanities and social sciences which occurred around the mid- to late 20th century, linguistics was purely concerned with the analysis of the constituent parts into which a sentence is analysable—that is, the sounds of the language (phonology), the possible combinatory rules that govern word formation (morphology), the patterns of syntagmatic relationships that hold between words in sentences (syntax), and the meanings of the (individual) words of a language (semantics). Even the Saussurean tradition that revolutionised the discipline at the dawn of the twentieth century and dominated the major thoughts in language studies for most of the century still viewed language as a self-contained system of *signs*, which does not need the context of use or social conditions to establish its meaning. Debates on the nature and functions of human language occupied the centre stage of most discourses in mainstream linguistics and sister disciplines such as the philosophy of language for most of the twentieth century. In terms of the functions of language, linguists and philosophers of language believed that language functions primarily as a means of representation and communication.

However, a major shift in linguistic thought in the second half of the 20th century brought the social aspects of language into the discipline. This shift saw the birth of many schools of linguistics that moved away from a purely structural analysis of parts of sentences into a more social use of language. It was then argued that the meanings of the sentences we speak are not necessarily located at the intersection of the individual meanings of the words that constitute the structure. With this understanding gaining traction in the discipline, linguists began to consider social factors such as context in their analyses of human interaction. Specifically, sociolinguistics became so popular for inaugurating the principle that language is, primarily, a social phenomenon, which is appropriated by humans in contracting and maintaining social relationships. It became evident that when people speak, they do more than communicate (or represent). When one listens to a string of speech by a speaker, one does much more than abstracting messages. Something deeper is often at play. Interlocutors abstract more *personal* information about the speaker: information such as the speaker's attitude, level of education, social status/origin, etc. It is all these that form an idea of who the speaker is—their *identity*. Our use of language *defines* who we are and what our dispositions might be. We mostly make decisions about who a person is first by their way of speaking, and their language.

This understanding was the foundation of the connection between language and identity, which has opened a wide research path for sociolinguists and other applied linguists who, since then, have continued to explore in more intricate ways how language (use) is primarily about identity construction. In fact, implicit in the emergence of sociolinguistics as a sub-discipline of linguistics is the concern for identity, and according to Edwards (1985, p. 3), "sociolinguistics … is *essentially about identity*, its formation, presentation and maintenance" (italics not mine). A great deal of research evidence has demonstrated that there is not just a mere connection between language and identity, but that, more than anything, the primary role of language is identity formation (Ugwuanyi, 2021).

Joseph (2004) has strongly argued that identity overlays even the two traditional functions of language—representation and communication. He adds that it makes no difference to say this or to say that identity itself constitutes a third function that underlies the two. In my view, identity marking is, in essence, a fundamental role or function of language—not even a third in terms of rank, but the principal function of language. One fact that validates the point that identity marking is the primal function of language is that language is not necessarily indispensable in representation and communication. There are numerous non- and para-linguistic symbolic representations as well as other means of communication that do not entail language, strictly speaking. Though there are other indexicalities of identity such as gender, race, religion, etc., they are all also actualised in and as language.

To further support this thesis, Joseph (2004) avers that if communication were the sole function of language, we should expect all L1 speakers of a language to speak more or less the same. But this is never the case. When a person uses language, they give us information with which to form an identity (of who they are). Concerning group identity, a specific group identity (e.g., religious, professional, gender, national, etc.) can be enacted by the use of particular norms of a language/variety.

Quirk (1998) argued that a person's language is as unalienably unique to them as their DNA, evidenced by the features of personal style such as accent, peculiarities of word choice and idioms, and voice quality (which can even be discerned in a phone call). All the linguistic features that constitute an individual's idiolect help to index that individual's linguistic identity(ies). Language (use) establishes boundaries to separate one speech community from others or distinguish a speaker from another (Trudgill, 2000), which underscores the fundamental relationship between language and the formation of identity both at the individual and group levels.

When we talk about language identity, we either refer to individual or group identity. But they should not be understood as essentially different, for there is often "I" in every "We" and vice versa. However, many identity researchers agree that the discrimination between the two remains necessary, especially when a researcher wants to deal with the peculiarities of each (Edwards, 2009; Rassokha, 2010). Individual or group, language identity pertains to "the ways in which people position or construct themselves and are positioned or constructed by others in sociocultural situations through the instrumentality of language and with reference to all of those variables that are identity markers for each society in the speech of its members" (Omoniyi & White 2006, p. 1).

This definition lends credence to the current constructivist understanding that identity is discursive, multiple, impermanent, fluid and changing (Bendle, 2002; Block, 2013), given that a speaker can take different positions to enact different linguistic identities in different 'sociocultural situations,' as Omoniyi and White (2006) tell us. Different contexts present speakers of a language occasions to 'wear' certain identities that will reflect the occasion; it is important to note that this 'wearing' takes place in and as language. For example, the use of a conventional standard variety of a language, say English, in an academic context, will give the user a certain identity (professional, educated), an identity the same individual loses once s/he switches into an informal or colloquial use of the same language in a different context. This is because, according to Norton (2000), identity is constructed or performed over "historical time and social space" (p. 125).

From our working definition, it can also be seen that language works with(in) 'variables that are identity markers for each society in the speech of its members'. This implies that language identity manifests within other socially determined variables. The individuals who use language to construct certain identities do so within the bounds of their sociocultural histories which shape, and in turn are shaped by, these individual/social identities. These 'histories' constitute these other variables that interact with language to index a person's or a group's identity/ies.

These are the principles that underlie the current research in language and identity, and which inform most of the studies and their theoretical paradigms. Identity has been linked with language in several areas. Joseph (2016) writes that "identity relates classically to who individuals are, understood in terms of the groups to which they belong, including nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, generation, sexual orientation, social class and an unlimited number of other possibilities" (p. 25), which shows that LIR has been carried out in a range of domains. In the next

section, a more detailed discussion of the relationship between language and identity is undertaken vis-à-vis a range of directions or domains that have engaged the attention of linguists.

Directions/Domains in Language and Identity Research

As already highlighted, identity has been employed as a conceptual or theoretical construct in diverse areas of linguistics. Joseph (2016, p. 25) believes that "it would be difficult to find an aspect of applied linguistics in which no identity issues arise". Nevertheless, scholars have acknowledged that there are areas of linguistics in which identity debates have been more salient. Pavlenko and Norton (2007) identity 5 of these areas which they called "identity clusters" (p. 671). Similarly, Joseph (2016) identified 5 sub-categories, while Preece (2016) identified 8 categories, some of which overlap. Even though these scholars recognise that these areas or clusters, or domains/directions (as I choose to refer to them), are mostly inseparable, they insist that "distinct lines of research are identifiable for each of the areas" (Joseph 2016, p. 25). For this review, I have identified 7 broad domains in which identity has been extensively influential, evaluating the key works in these areas and their findings. The identification of these 7 broad categories does not claim absolute comprehensiveness.

Language and personal identities

The earliest identity studies focused largely on individual identity. The point that individuals construct a certain kind of identity by the discursive positions they take, and the linguistic choices they make, has already been established in sections 2 and 3. For Bauman (2001), individual identity is "the situated outcome of a rhetorical and interpretive process in which interactants make situationally motivated selections from socially constituted repertoires of identificational and affiliational resources and craft these semiotic resources into identity claims for presentation to others" (p. 1).

The foremost identity marker of an individual is their name, which also is a linguistic phenomenon. It is almost impossible to think of a human being without a name to identify them. A person without a name is considered to be without an identity. All human beings, animals, places, institutions, and specific events are given unique names to mark them out from the rest of their kind. Joseph (2004) summarises a study he conducted in Singapore in 2000 in which his participants were asked to give a personal narrative of the meaning, history and any social or cultural signification attached to their names. To many of them, their names signal to them their family history, ethnic or even religious identity, or some sort of personal history. One of them had to take up a new name, discarding her first name, which she said reminded her of her "frivolous party days". In modern times, young people, especially, change their names when they want to take up new forms of identity. To take an example from a situation close to me, my elder brother changed his name from Callistus to Daniel. According to him, the latter signifies his Christian identity more directly than the former. Later, I shall return to demonstrate how personal names can index religious, ethnic, and other forms of identity below.

One of the earliest works—if not the very first—that showed a direct link between language use and identity is Labov's (1963) study of the English dialect of Martha's Vineyard, an island off the coast of Massachusetts. He used this study to show that an individual's language use can index their identity in terms of where they come from. The findings of this study and its methodological grounding set the stage for most of the works that followed. Other studies that bordered on individuals' language use and the formation of identity include the works of Gumperz and Roberts (1991), Erickson and Shultz (1982), Kandiah (1991), Giddens (1991), Roberts and Sarangi (1999). Overall, these works were largely premised on interactional sociolinguistics, drawing on a variety of data sources such as interviews, observations, field notes, written documents and other forms of naturally occurring talk to demonstrate individual language user's patterns of identity formation—or construction—in discourse.

Lakshmi (2011) has shown how a particular language/variety can inform and influence an individual's identity. He holds the view that the identities of individuals are continuously influenced or shaped by many factors such as migration, education, living conditions, globalisation, etc., which all converge to shape the sociolinguistic identity of individuals primarily as selves but also as members of a group. Though conducted from different sources, places and times, with different theoretical orientations, the studies mentioned above all make a common affirmation: that the way individuals use language shapes and is shaped by their (socio)linguistic identities.

Most language identity studies have again and again been criticised for being too narrowly individual (Edwards, 2009). For Block (2013), so much identity research focuses on individual case studies, a situation he described as having made LIR "over-agentive". Though these criticisms are generally justifiable, it is not clear in the literature how likely it is to characterise group identity without the identity of the individuals that make up the group—for, again I insist that, in every 'we', there is always 'I'. This further shows us the interconnectedness of individual and collective identities.

Language and social group identities

One of the theories from social psychology that became the "single most influential model for analysing linguistic identity" (Joseph 2010, p. 13) at the time was Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (see section 2 for a detailed discussion). In Tajfel's words, social identity is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). It is important to note here that Tajfel's model set the stage for the study of social groups that characterised language identity research of the 1980s. The model emphasises the value and emotional significance the individual attaches to their membership of groups.

This understanding influenced the works of Milroy (1980), who investigated aspects of the relationship between language and social class. This work and others that came after it (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Fish 1980) deepened the awareness that social class and other forms of social group identities

are linguistically constructed. Omoniyi (2010, p. 238) acknowledges that there is "a growing body of literature in urban sociolinguistics which deliberate upon complexities of identity construction across various social arenas." Milroy's (1980) work deserves special mention for provoking even deeper interest in drawing a connection between language and class identity. The study reported that what influenced the forms of particular linguistic variables a person would enact in each given occasion is not only 'social class', but the person's 'social network', which, according to her, refers to the "informal social relationships contracted by an individual" (Milroy 1980, p. 174). Other more extensive elaborations on the place of 'groupness' in identity formation include the works of Edwards (2009), Joseph and Taylor (1990), Blommaert (1999), Kroskrity (2000), and Joseph (2004), all of which have demonstrated that social group identity is indexed by the nature and nuances of language use.

Developing this aspect of LIR further, Fish (1980) introduced the term 'interpretive community', Anderson (1991) devised the concept of 'imagined community', while a similar term, 'communities of practice', was introduced by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992). While it may be misleading to think of these terms as denoting precisely the same notion, all 3 terms can be interpreted to refer to an aggregate of people connected by shared beliefs, values, and ideologies. And it is important to note that what is being shared almost always includes language. One significant contribution of the notion of community or groupness, particularly in relation to its abstractness, is that it breaks away from earlier perceptions of group identity as somewhat static. What the "community-of-practice" or "imagined-community" model popularised is the idea that what matters is that there are shared values. The idea introduced by these terms is indeed contiguous with all forms of group identity: religious, ethnic, national, etc. I shall then discuss some of these group identities and further show, from the research in the field, how language is used to index them.

LIR, gender and sexual identities

As it became the norm to talk about this interplay between a person's language use and identity, the focus soon moved to linguistic gender differences. A seminal work in this direction is Lakoff (1973) in which he argued that the language norms of women are, in both structure and actual use, markedly different from those of men. He went further to point out that such structures as pause markers, tag questions and intensifiers are more common in women speech unlike in men. The most obvious example that marks this gender difference is the case of the English pronoun system. As the notion of gendered linguistic difference came to be accepted among sociolinguists, others like Gumperz (1982), Edwards (1985), Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), Fishman (1999), and Benwell and Stokoe (2006) have conducted studies that not only continued to support that view but set the pace for more linguistic study of the identity of other social categories. In support of this, Joseph (2010, p. 13) notes that as the notion of linguistic gender differences was accepted, 'the more general notion of the language-identity link was let in through the back door, leaving the way open for the study of group identities of all sorts….'

Some of the more recent studies in this regard have been more pointed. For instance, in a meta-analysis of 150 studies, Leaper and Ayres (2007) demonstrated that women speech is more 'affiliative' while men speech is more 'assertive'. However, Cameron (2007) has criticised the position, maintaining that there is no substantial difference in women and men talk, dismissing it as rather too feministic. Joseph (2016) has further challenged the view that the linguistic features of women speech show powerlessness. For him, there is sufficient evidence that those women whose talks were analysed in earlier works on the language indexation of genders were being linguistically innovative, rather than conservative.

While Cameron (2007) criticised the dominant view at the time, her earlier work (Cameron 1992) alongside Butler (1997) shifted the focus to a different direction: sexual-orientation identity in language. Another ground-breaking work, the collection by Ehrlich et al. (2014) and other works such as Baker (2002), Cameron and Kulick (2003), Bucholtz and Hall (2004), McCormick (2010), Milani (2013) and Gray (2016) have theorised how sexual identities are indexed by language norms. Studies focusing on how non-normative sexual identities are enacted grew in importance and scope with the rise of neoliberal rights movements. These studies, generally, found that sexual identities, especially non-normative sexual identities, are predominantly linked to certain linguistic codes that are most times understood only by members of this group. Such in-group jargonistic codes have continued to be increasingly used by people who identify with non-normative sexual identities since they are still being discriminated against by many quarters of society.

Language and religious identities

One of the most contentious of all identities is religious identity. This kind of group identity is particularly important to people because it is a matter of faith, and so is always very emotionally charged. Any religious group as a community of practice has many semiotic practices that hold them together as shared *habitus*. Language, the most complex and culturally indexing of all semiotic practices (Chandler, 2007), plays a central role in the identity marking of any religious group. First, personal names are the readiest "texts" of identity, many of which are associated with certain religions. Personal names, as pointed out in section 4.1, are linguistic texts that cannot be ignored by identity linguists. For instance, even though the nonessentialist view of identity has established that identities are not given, if one introduces oneself as 'Ibrahim' or 'Mary', the first assumption is that Ibrahim is very likely a Moslem, while Mary, more than anything else, is a Christian.

Further, certain languages almost readily mark individual religious identities, especially in the pre-modern world before the (super)diversity of today's world. Latin, for example, was considered the language of Christianity in pre-modern Europe. To date, many people have continued to associate Arabic exclusively with Islam, Hebrew with Judaism, and English with Christianity. In Nigeria, part of the ethos of Boko Haram, an Islamic terrorist group operating in Northeastern Nigeria for close to a decade now, is that anything Western is evil, particularly English since it believes that English marks the identity of a certain cultural or religious group. Whilst some of these associations are simply attempting to essentialise identity, it cannot be gainsaid that aspects of a speaker's religious identities can be enacted by

the linguistic norms or codes which the speaker uses. Even within a given religion in a specific context, the use of certain norms of a language might signify one's sect or level of devotion to the religion.

Today, when forces of modernity such as globalisation and interculturality are causing a great change and growth to many languages, many religious sects continue to stick to older varieties as the 'true' marker of their religion. For instance, many Moslems believe that Koranic Arabic is a mark of deep-seated religious knowledge and piety. The Quakers, a popular Christian sect, have continued to prefer Middle English norms (e.g., the personal pronoun *thee* instead of *you*) as a 'truer' marker of Christian identity. Joseph (2004) gives startling examples of where language use signifies a religious belonging in Malayalam, a language spoken by a community of Christians, Muslims and Hindus in southern India. Interestingly, this case shows that there are different words used by members of different religions to express the same idea in the same language. In Malayalam, *father* is *pitaav∂* or *acchan* for the Hindus, *appan* for the Christians and *uppa* or *baappa* for the Muslims. Apart from this, a lot of other studies have focused on establishing this connection between language and religion.

Earlier works (e.g., Ferguson, 1982; Spolsky, 1983; Spolsky & Walters, 1985; Schiffman, 1996; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997) connecting language and religion deserve recognition for laying the foundation of what later metamorphosed into a sub-discipline of sociolinguistics. Later works such as Sawyer and Simpson (2001), Spolsky (2003) and Omoniyi and Fishman (2006) drew closer interface between religion and language identity. Apart from Joseph (2004), another work that deserves special mention for fully showing the relationship between language and religious identity is the edited volume, *Language and religious identity*, by Jule (2007). Though it takes a feministic bent, the studies in the volume gave the field not just more evidence of this relationship but offered interdisciplinary methodological approaches to the field. Other works such as Safran (2008), Edwards (2009), Harmaini (2014), and Souza (2016) have lent more credence to this, further establishing the nuanced ways in which religious identities are embedded in discourse.

Ethnic, cultural or racial identities and LIR

Safran (2008) argues that there is a connection between language, religion and ethnicity in that both religion and language are situated within a given ethnocultural milieu. Whilst it is possible to consider ethnic and racial identities as contiguous, and sometimes both also related (or confused with) national identity, they are distinguishable one from another. For instance, a person's ethnic identity can be Zulu, racial identity Black and national identity South African. On the other hand, while national identity is based on political sovereignty (nation-state in modern societies), ethnic identity focuses more on common descent and cultural heritage. In rare cases where political sovereignty and cultural affinity are shared by a people, it then becomes possible to think of ethnic and national identities as referring to the same phenomenon (national identity will be discussed in detail in the next section). It does not appear beneficial to this study to go deep into the terminological contestations surrounding these terms; however, it is necessary to

make this basic distinction. Of course, one should always be wary of being trapped by the temptation of understanding these identities as fixed. The interest here, however, is to show how norms of language can mark a people's or person's ethnic identity; that is, to show how such collective identity is linguistically constructed.

Although it is possible for one language to sustain many cultures as is the case with English and Arabic which are *carriers* of many cultures, Joseph (2004) argues that that is not enough reason to think of languages as being culturally *neutral*. Though the *same* English, different cultures of the world have different Englishes. Each *English* is unique in its own right and thus can signal, or be used to create, a given ethnic or national identity (Ugwuanyi, 2019; 2020a; 2021).

Similar to the scenario painted in the discussion of religious identity above, a mere personal name can suggest, though not absolutely, a person's ethnic origin. On a larger scale, the use of language or a given dialect/accent can also index it. Within the British Isles, for instance, Irish identity is heralded by an Irish accent. Jowitt (1991) gives an example from Nigerian English that supports this view. He gave revealing examples of certain accentual differences in the English of Nigerians, and how these 'accents' can suggest the region (and by extension the ethnic group) the person comes from. Another telling example of this connection between language and ethnicity can be found in the piece of interaction between Meir (the first Israeli ambassador in Russia) and Ehrenburg (a Russian writer of Jewish origin) given by Meir in her autobiography, *My Life* (as cited in Pavlenko & Blackledge 2003):

> Meir: I am sorry, but I can't speak Russian. Do you speak English?
> Ehrenburg: (looking nastily at Meir) I hate Russian-born Jews who speak English.
> Meir: And I am sorry for Jews who don't speak Hebrew or at least Yiddish.

This interaction shows how the interlocutors, and perhaps just like others of their (and other) ethnic origin, have certain linguistic expectations of themselves and others. For Ehrenburg, the Jewish identity should not be expressed using English; and conversely, for Meir, a 'true' Jewish identity can *only* be constructed in Hebrew or at least Yiddish. Though this is not — or no longer — as rigid as these speakers paint it, perhaps because this interaction took place in 1948, before the current wave of globalisation that has minimised such rigidity, concerns expressed in the conversation are not issues to be glossed over in any discussion of LIR in relation to ethnic identity.

Although it has long been of interest to researchers to talk about the role language plays in signalling ethnic identity, it became much more central within sociolinguistics in the late eighties and nineties. One of the earliest works in this direction, and which incidentally has the title *Language and ethnic identity*, is the volume edited by Gudykunst (1988) and later another with the same title by Fishman (1999). In another study of the relationship between language and ethnic identities, Gumperz (1982) developed what he called the 'we code' and the 'they code', respectively representing the in-group and the out-group. He found that when engaged in ethnically specific and informal activities, speakers tend to enact the 'we code', while the 'they code' is often "associated with the more formal, stiffer and less personal out-group relations" (p. 66). Though influential in the field and

widely cited, this work has been critiqued for making essentialising assumptions about the homogeneity of speech communities. Later works in this sub-field (e.g., Edwards, 2009; Fishman & Garcia, 2010; Joseph, 2004) while challenging these assumptions show that modern realities indicate that there is some sense of 'crossing' beyond ethnic boundaries among speakers (Lytra, 2016). These studies, conducted in different cultural contexts, indicate that speakers enact ethnic group identities by adopting the linguistic norms of different groups and that this form of identitying is constantly changing. These constructivist notions of the fluidity and impermanence of identities have underpinned the more recent work in this field. For example, Blackledge & Creese (2010), Blommaert and Backus (2013) and Otsuji and Pennycook (2010) all suggest that speakers use the range of linguistic resources available to them to simultaneously negotiate ethnic and cultural identities across contexts, thereby giving rise to of tensions and conflicts, which also raises the question of inauthenticity.

Language and national identities

As has been seen above, any discussion of ethnic identity almost immediately calls forth national identity. How the identity of a nation is constructed or shaped by language appears to be the most controversial aspect of LIR. Quirk (2000) outlines three models that explain how languages define—or do not define—nations. They are the 'one nation-one language' model (like Germany), the 'one nation-several languages' model (like Switzerland and South Africa) and the 'one language-many nations' model (like the case of English, Arabic or Portuguese). He notes that each model comes with specific identity dynamics but also acknowledges that national linguistic identity is more problematic with the third model.

Suleiman (2003 and 2006) has argued that starting with country names, questions of identity are already implied. Coulmas (cited in Suleiman, 2006) gives a very intriguing example with the position of Greece when Macedonia, a former Yugoslav republic when the latter was to be granted membership of the European Community (EC). Greece insisted that Macedonia would be admitted into the EC only on the condition that it changes its name. This was in order not to confuse this new national identity with that of the Northern Greek province of Macedonia. Bloomaert (1996) gave another curious example with Flanders (a Dutch-speaking northern province of Belgium), where the case is the name given to a language. He writes that "Naming the language(s) in Flanders is, in general, a very sensitive issue, and every option [whether to call the language Dutch, Flemish or Flemish Dutch] one may choose, however, well-motivated sociolinguistically or anthropologically, quickly becomes the object of controversy" (p. 254).

Other researchers have continued to research different aspects of this category of language identity research and the ways in which national identity can be constructed linguistically. For instance, Wee (2009) examined the language situation in Singapore and concluded that the simultaneous promotion of English and Mandarin does not appear to be successful, and had hardly been able to establish a common, single national Singaporean identity, which unfortunately is the (unrealisable or unrealistic) goal of most national language policies. In reaction to the growing number of English speakers in Iran, Rezaei et al. (2014) carried out a

national survey involving English language speakers in Iran. The study found that the speakers of English in Iran do form a certain identity, but do not see themselves as less Iranian when they use English. Lai (2011) examined language attitudes in Hong Kong after 20 years of colonialism and concluded that the postcolonial generation maintains a local instead of a national language identity.

Like in other domains, existing literature in LIR and national identity indicates that 'hybrid identity' is the norm rather than the exception, an argument that is the central theme of the collection edited by Rubdy and Alsagoff (2014). Some other works have investigated the question of national language identity using linguistic landscaping (e.g., Taylor-Leech, 2012). The edited volumes by Simpson, *Language and national identity in Asia* (2007) and *Language and national identity in Africa* (2008), explore this relationship within the two continents, coming from the standpoint of how the colonial languages in Africa and Asia have shaped their sense of national identities during and after colonialism. Related to this, Ugwuanyi (2020b) investigated the extent to which speakers of the local variety of English in a postcolonial context consider English as a marker of national identity. The study found some tensions between the role of English as the 'unifying' national language considering that none of the indigenous languages can be regarded as truly national and the lingering imperialist associations of English. Taking a discursive approach, Wodak et al. (2009) found that national identities are indeed constructed, maintained and transmitted in the discursive performances of nations or countries, which suggests the shifting and contextual nature of such identitying.

Language and L2 identities

Applied linguists have also become interested in the way speakers in a non-L1 linguistic environment enact their L2 or Lx identities (Rassohka 2010). This is not surprising as we know that a speaker's linguistic identity becomes more problematic in a different linguistic habitat. Many language users do not recognise how their identity is shaped by the language they use until they come into contact with speakers of other language(s) or find themselves in other linguistic environments. For instance, with the current political and economic uprising across the world, there is an increasing number of immigrants into different parts of the world, particularly Europe and the Americas. As these immigrant communities continue to grow, questions of language use (which ultimately connect to questions of identity) become more curious. Several studies have investigated the ethnolinguistic tensions that arise in these immigrant communities (e.g., Alzayed 2015; Park, 2013; Salomone 2010), establishing that linguistic identity is one of the major sites of struggle for the members of these communities.

Some other works, whose central focus was on the sociolinguistic identity of immigrants (e.g., Block, 2007; Fox, 2010; Gallucci, 2014; Harris, 2006; Kapp & Bangeni, 2011; Rampton, 2006), have argued that within these communities, different regional or national identities are also linguistically constructed. Peirce's (1995) publication on identity and second language learning opened up a new path in language identity research by drawing the attention of applied linguists to the question of identity in the discursive "interaction between second language learners and target language speakers," and calling for "a comprehensive theory of social

identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context" (p. 12). Following the awareness the work created, researchers such as Atkinson (2002), Block (2003), Watson-Gegeo (2004), Dewaele (2005) and Zuengler and Miller (2006) have further explored the link between language and learner identity.

In particular, Norton (2000) writes that her participants, members of a migrant community in Canada, "experienced a break with their pasts mediated entirely by their first languages" (as cited in Block 2007, p. 109), thereby taking up the new identities offered to them by the languages (and of course, cultures) of their host communities. Similarly, Halstead (2014) conducted a study with her students, German immigrants learning English in New Zealand, and found that the students were bothered with questions like: Who Am I? What do I look like when I speak English? Where do I fit in among people of diverse tongues? One of her respondents said: "It is truly wonderful to speak so many languages. There is only one problem: I don't know who I am." Another remarked: "I like myself better in English." Based on the findings, the study concluded that "learning a second language and adapting to the culture of the target language affect a learner's ethnolinguistic and sociolinguistic identity" (p. 3).

Another very momentous issue in LIR in applied linguistics is whether learners and speakers of English as an additional language have appropriated English to the point where they can develop a sense of ownership of it. Addressing the relationship between language, identity and ownership of English, Norton (1997) attends to some of the questions raised by the participants in Halstead's (ibid) study cited above, arguing that English belongs to the people who speak it, whether or not they L1 speakers. In a large-scale study, Ugwuanyi (2021) investigated notions of linguistic ownership in a non-native speaking context and found that speakers claimed ownership of (their own variety of) English based on use, perceived proficiency and affiliation to the language.

In sum, a number of other studies (e.g., Brock & Tulasiewicz, 2001; Bryson 2000; Jenkins 2007; Matsuda, 2002; Hennig, 2010) have addressed a range of issues in LIR in relation to language learning, all pointing out that the affective factors (such as motivation) based on which learners are characterised are socially constructed, constantly changing across time and space and might function in conflicting ways from speaker to speaker and even within an individual learner (Norton, 2012).

Directions for Future Studies in LIR: A conclusion

Although the main domains of LIR have been discussed in section 4, it is nevertheless exhaustive. As hinted earlier, there is no sphere of human life where LIR is not relevant, since language is a tool utilised in all human endeavours. In a rapidly globalising world, interculturality has become more evident, which is one area of LIR that has not only begun to gain traction (e.g., Tajeddin & Ghaffaryan, 2020) but will likely more significantly shape future directions in the field. More than ever, the concept of modernity is sweeping through all cultures, and the principal instrument of its propagation is language. As Joseph (2004, p. 23) puts it, "most of those giving up their traditional languages are... doing so as part of constructing an identity for themselves that is bound up with a conception of modernity as communication extending their village and their country to the world

at large." As our world gets more globalised, it also becomes more diverse, with people appropriating identities as global citizens. In other words, LIR will probably be greatly influenced by a desire to understand the fleeting nature of these identities. Since an individual's (or even group's) identities are enacted in light of a web of complexly intertwined social histories, individual life trajectories and evolving social milieus, the discursive enactment of identities encapsulating these constituents will continue to be prioritised in future studies. Further studies investigating LIR must, therefore, recognise that it is increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to investigate specific aspects of identities, since the lines of the range of identities speakers enact when they language become increasingly blurred.

This complexity is even more evident as more and more languagers get connected via social media. If users of the digital space must communicate, they must, for the most part, do so using *mutual* codes of communication. As Darvin (2016, p. 524) points out, "the digital [world] provides multiple spaces where language is used in different ways, learners [and indeed all users] are able to move across online and offline realities with greater fluidity and perform multiple identities." One implication of the discursive construction of identities in the digital space is that users can enact online identities which are different from their offline identities, or which straddle the two. As our lives continue to be increasingly digitised, there might be a greater need to understand how language users construct their digital identities over time, medium and context. All these have continued not only to problematise the study of linguistic identity but to make it more engaging, providing more opening for the use of identity as an analytic construct in (socio)linguistic analysis.

The discussion so far has shown that the language-identity nexus is a complex and highly contested terrain. From the range of studies, theoretical standpoints and domains presented so far, one thing is clear: language and identity research (LIR) has been a rapidly growing field of linguistic enquiry. One reason for this astronomical growth of interest in this field is the ever-changing, superdiverse, globalised and constantly globalising world. As a result, one can predict that identities will continue to grow more fluid and that LIR will continue to find more ways of understanding these dynamics.

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