

## Sequential Bilingual and Identity Meaning

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**Abstract:** Unlike objects whose substance is more or less easy to check, an individual is made of a set of traits making his identity very difficult to grasp. Indeed, an individual grows and builds himself in a community along which he does not only identify, but also interacts with. Moreover, each interaction constitutes for him an instant of identity construction. As such the individual's identity passes to be a sort of paradox which cumulates at the same time 'unity' and 'plurality'<sup>1</sup>. The paradox is reinforced when comes into play the urgent need to open up to other languages or cultures. The current analysis intends to check the perception and the content of the identity a sequential bilingual could claim.

**Key words:** Individual- identity- community- paradox- other languages-

**Résumé :** Contrairement aux objets dont la substance est plus ou moins facile à vérifier, un individu est constitué d'un ensemble de traits rendant son identité très difficile à appréhender. En effet, un individu grandit et se construit dans une communauté au sein de laquelle non seulement il s'identifie, mais aussi avec laquelle il interagit également. De plus, chaque interaction constitue pour lui un instant de construction identitaire. En tant que telle, l'identité de l'individu passe pour être une sorte de paradoxe qui cumule à la fois « unité » et « pluralité ». Le paradoxe est renforcé quand entre en jeu l'urgence de s'ouvrir à d'autres langues ou cultures. La présente analyse entend vérifier la perception et le contenu de l'identité qu'un bilingue séquentiel pourrait revendiquer.

**Mots clés:** Individu- identité- communauté- paradoxe-autres langues-

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Life is a set of experiences lived and expected by an individual and which helps him build his identity. These experiences encompass the community in which the individual is born, the place he lives in or attends, the people he associates with, the actions he takes and mainly the language(s) he speaks. These set of experiences all together with their opposite are among others the various things an individual can be identified with. Therefore, an individual is like a woven set made of various nodes. The nodes represent, as much as possible the different steps and encounters which can be appreciated either vertically and/or horizontally.

Vertically the individual is presented in his specificity. This side represents man in his uniqueness who stands and presents himself to life in the process of his growth. But this verticality will only be possible if horizontally, it is supported.

Horizontally, stand the set of factors and/or phenomena which impact or influence the individual's life, and in so doing, they build his identity. In the process of the construction of his identity, the individual will always base himself on his capacity to create his own life leaning on the lives of others. In that perspective, it can be said that the speaker is, at the same time, author, actor and observer of his own identity. He partakes its construction, and tells about it. For Mounier E. (1950), the individual is a work by himself which makes explicit, enriches and develops itself. It requires communication with others and accepts to expose oneself to alterity<sup>2</sup>. As such, life is as a mirage in constant construction during which individuals build their stories as well as their identity, and this is only possible by means of language.

Language constitutes the most natural and most used means to reveal one's identity. In fact, language seems to have two functions. It is, of course, a tool for communication but it may constitute an instrument to stress one's identity or one's difference from others. Therefore, it will sound redundant to say that an individual will only know himself and others and inversely, by means of language use. For Paul Ricœur (1985,

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<sup>1</sup>These two terms are used here to refer respectively to the background community and the various connexions the individual associates with.

<sup>2</sup>Cecile De Rickel and Frederick Delvigne(2010, p.232)

p.115), we relate stories before human. lives need and deserve being related<sup>3</sup>.Therefore, language is a strong marker of social identification.

In the context of education, and along with either the sociolinguistic profile of the learner or the curricula, various denominations are used to refer to languages. They (languages) may be first languages, languages of instructions, or foreign languages. In the current analysis, these various denominations will be taken into account. The focus on only one type will not help grasp the complexity in the process of learners' identity construction. Moreover, acknowledging the intricate relationships between languages can help perceive the difficult reality lived by learners through the agency of languages which in these circumstances beget a double speed identity. In fact, a language can be at the same time a language of instruction or not, and all the same, it contributes to the construction of learners' identity. The set of languages used by the learner somehow constructs his sociolinguistic profile not without constituting the complex identity which he may claim. Therefore, the topic of the current analysis reads as: Sequential bilingual and Identity Meaning.

Language serves as a mediation between the individual and his world, between the individual and others and above all, between the individual and himself (Joëlle Jaden, 2012, p.274). In the current paper, my objective is to analyze the mother tongue and language of instruction complex as means of identity production. More specifically, it aims at describing the role language can play in the identification of a person. It consists in analyzing the identity to claim by the bilingual in such a complex context. Leaning on the sociolinguistic theory of multilingualism as well as the theory of ethnography of communication the current analysis poses the issue of which identity should a bilingual claim? Along with this central question, subsidiary questions rise as: should a bilingual be identified only along with the language of his speech community? Can he reasonably identify himself by means of a second learned language which is by definition the language of a different speech community? Does identity confine to the specificities of one's community which is in itself collective or can one go beyond his community assets? But before answering these questions, what is a sequential bilingual?

## **II. BILINGUALISM AND ITS DIFFERENT TYPES**

*Bilingualism* is essentially a social and linguistic phenomenon. It differs from *bilinguality* which refers to a psychological state beyond the linguistic factors and which opens to different worlds associated each to a linguistic code (Sebastien Dieguez and Silke Hemmerle, 2014, p.184). In fact, language is a unitary and biological phenomenon, and languages are cultural systems which lean on the same functional organ. According to these authors, bilingualism is the prerogative of neurosciences and neuropsychology whereas bilinguality is a field opened to various disciplinary domains. Bilingualism often goes along with a decision making on political, territorial and identity issues.

The term bilingual can be used either for an individual or for a community. it indicates the possibility for an individual or a community to use more than one language. But for the purpose of the current research, reference to the bilingual as an individual will be the focus. anyway, in the world today, there exist a sound superiority of the number of bi/multilinguals over the monolinguals, who constitute the minority nowadays (Sebastien Dieguez and Silke Hemmerle, 2014, p.183). There are various types of bilinguals.

### **2.1 Different types of bilinguals**

Along with research projects and types, various types of bilinguals have been suggested. It is worth specifying that some individuals are ambilinguals (individuals with native competency in two languages) whereas some others are specific bilingual as they possess very high levels of proficiency in two languages (either in the written and/or the oral forms). Others display varying proficiencies in comprehension and/or speaking skills depending on the immediate area of experience in which they are called upon to use their two languages.

Much effort in the study of bilingualism has gone into developing categories which might make the measurement and description of these differences possible. The categories used to describe different types of bilinguals reflect different researchers' interests in focusing on specific aspects of bilingual ability or experience. Researchers who are concerned with the age of acquisition of bilingualism, for example, classify bilingual individuals as either 'early or late' bilinguals and further subdivide early bilinguals into 'simultaneous bilinguals' (those who acquired two languages simultaneously as first language) or 'sequential bilinguals' (those who acquired the second language (L2) after the first language (L1) was acquired). On the other hand, Researchers concerned with the difference between individuals who choose to study a second language and those who grow up in communities where several languages are spoken have used the terms 'elite, academic, and elective bilinguals' for the former and 'natural, folk, and circumstantial bilinguals' for the latter. In the current analysis the focus will be on the sequential bilinguals whose linguistic profile is often linked to (modern) education.

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<sup>3</sup>ibid, p.230

## 2.2 Characterizing sequential bilinguals

Sequential bilinguals may correspond either to the situation of children in Africa whose language of instruction is most of the time a foreign language, or to the case of migrants in a foreign country. In fact, either for children in Africa or for migrants, a sudden break is imposed upon them by the society in which they live: the necessity of (modern) education. In fact, a child can hardly see the importance of education to himself. He will only remark the weighing pressure created by the sudden separation from his moments of pleasures composed by the playing moments and the decided times to have something in mouth. Along with education, everything is regulated: the time to eat, the time to play, the time to speak, the choice of the language in which to speak, and an increased necessity to be focused. Thus, education looks like a trip which leads to an 'elsewhere'. For African generations, it is an elsewhere which leads not only to an elsewhere cultural and by so doing, an elsewhere linguistic. It also leads to an elsewhere geographic, though sometimes virtual. From home to school and inversely, his own story and by the same token his identity is being built. During years this will take place up to the moment he will start acknowledging the importance of modern education for his own self. Education becomes thus a move from oneself to the encounter of others with its by-consequences which result in a meeting with and between cultures and languages.

Education in a language which is different from one's mother tongue is an opportunity to open the learner's mind and to sensitize him to the 'normality of the difference' as underlined by Joëlle Jaden (2012, p.274). It is worth indicating that fundamentally, education aims at making perfect the individual submitted to its functioning. To this end, education forges an individual into a 'new man, by not only acting on his physical and mental being and by the same token, on his identity, though the final destination remains unknown, as it is in a trend of constant construction and configuration.

Moving towards the unknown, surprise and the stake allows to cut the bonds with the reality of education which sounds sometimes as too heavy for the freshman. It is as if the construction of the fresh learner's identity is being made in a simple form of the complex and mysterious anatomy of man (Catherine Briand, 2013, P.91-92). The complexity of man is not noticeable only at the level his anatomy.

Various categories of elements work for this complexity and thus, make of man different from the world's objects. In fact, the access and use of more than one language by an individual lead Sebastien Dieguez and Silke Hemmerle (2014, p.182) to address the issue of the double personality of the individual. For them, either the first language (L1) or the second language (L2) determines along with their use context one's self perception, emotional reactions, social stereotypes, decisions taking and different moral judgements. They define the term personality as made of various parameters such as attitude, behavioral tendency, a way to see the world, self, persons and things, a mood and/or humor. All along their analysis, the attention is focused on the possible differences within the same person, along with the language used and/or the context.

Ramirez-Esparza *et al.* (2004, p.27)<sup>4</sup> investigate the personality of English-Spanish bilinguals living either in Mexico or in the USA. They show that the personality of bilinguals changes along with the cultural *frame switching*. Therefore, there is a shift of self-perception along with what is typical to a culture.

For Matsumoto and Asar (1992), Ozanska-Ponikwia K (2012, p.31), the reactions of a bilingual are culturally adapted, and thus, he does not only change the language he uses but also the perceptions and expressions along with the linguistic context. The bilingual (individual) is thus "contextual". These authors believe that the choice of a language determines dissociated cerebral mechanisms, modulates the self-perception, the personality and the cultural profile<sup>5</sup>. As we can see, the perspective of a double personality or a multiple personality has been raised by various researches. The central question to which they try to answer is to check whether we see and/or imagine things the same way either in L1 or/and in L2.

Anyway, we know that being a bilingual, does not consist of the summation of a monolingual speaker of L1 + a monolingual speaker of L2. A bilingual is worth more than the association of two monolinguals (Dieguez and Silke Hemmerle, 2014, p.184). It is a walk in which the learner lives in and between two worlds; the world of homogeneity (made of the language of his community) and the world of heterogeneity (composed by his mother tongue and the language of education). The relationship between languages somehow underlines the sociolinguistic profile of learners, and by the same token, it helps think about the type of relationship they share. Beyond these relationships, the interest of the current analysis is rather the identity the user (the bilingual) may claim. However, what to define identity and what are its implications?

<sup>4</sup>Dieguez and Silke Hemmerle (2014)

<sup>5</sup>*ibid*, p.186

### III. IDENTITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Defining identity is as complex as the matrix of its constitutive elements. Identity may refer to the sameness or similarity between two or more objects from a specific point of view. It can also refer to the characterization of an individual. In the perspectives of this second definition which constitutes the focus of the current paper, various definitions have been suggested.

From the point of view of logicians, identity is the fact that two units or concepts refers to the same referent. In this sense, the two units or concepts are identic, for they co-refer; that is to say, they have to the same referent. In this perspective, identity may call on an idea of co-reference, similarity or simply synonymy.

For psychologists, identity is the set of various parameters by means of which an individual constructs a sense of himself. These various parameters are those which other individuals may lean on to refer to him. what is paradoxical here is that not all these parameters are referred to at the same time in the identification of the individual.

Moreover, identity is not a simple awareness, it is also a work of an act, for it implies temporary forms of coherence between subjective and normative capacities for the system of proper resources in stable situation (Anne-Marie Costalat-Founeau, 2008, p.71).The speaker will always select the aspects which suits the best in the context of communication. It is all about the way the individual perceives and builds his self-presentation, as well as, how other individuals perceive him. Self-presentation is sometimes congruent to the image the individual desires to present of himself. As such, identity is a self-presentation which is conceived in a dynamic socialization. In fact, man is the only object which can have some grasp of his own. This aspect is also raised by Uhl (2004, p.68)<sup>6</sup>for whom, the subject (individual) is the only object which can grasp itself reflexively.

Identity is a complex system from which emerge processes in interaction and which activate a dynamic of self-representation, and the representation of the society which might be qualified as identity. But identity will always only tell about a segment of the individual's reality. In fact, for each use of the term identity, its semantic properties confine to the syntagmatic combination. we are bound to speak of the unfindable meaning of the term identity. The variability of contexts, state of mind, time and space will always create a new instance of identification of the same individual. It is sometimes tempting to speaking about plural identities for the same individual. And yet, as Descombes (2015, p.62) well states it, speaking of plural identities for the same individual, implies he presents himself in various forms, various models and this contradicts the logical meaning of the term identity which ascribes a reference to the same referent.

Defining identity, Erickson (1972) will use the term *umwelt*, to refer to the surrounding world lived by the individual and this, contrary to psychoanalysts who divided this surrounding world into an exterior world and an internal world (Descombes, 2015, p.64). For Erickson as quoted by Descombes (2015), every organism bears within itself, the surrounding worlds it has lived in and in which it has grown. This falls true for human beings whose *umwelt* is made of a cultural world or a series of cultural worlds. By means of this assertion, Erickson, was somehow quoting Gregory Bateson according to whom, the character of an individual which he looks on as the individual's 'psycho-social identity' consists in a system of expectations and skills from the world which are necessary to allow the individual to operate and prosper within<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the surrounding world should be looked on as an external reality from which the individual can be separated. This surrounding world is present in the individual in the forms of dispositions and skills which become habitual and through which the individual comes about to insert himself in his *milieu*.

In the same perspective, we can simply say that a person can be identified in two ways: he can be identified along with a personal identity and/or along with a social or collective identity. Personal identity, which appears as more subjective, calls on his individuality, that is what is specific to him. Personal identity takes into account the notions of self-consciousness and self-representation. For Codol (1981), it's just a self-cognitive appreciation.

On the contrary, social identity is more objective, and it defines the category of the group to which he belongs, contrary to personal identity which defines along with some relevant aspects of the individual's psychological make-up. Social identity refers to all things that allow to define the individual from the exterior. It takes into account all aspects the individual shares with other members of the different groups to which he associates. Social identity is often seen as a prescribed or assigned identity in the extent to which the individual is not the one who sets its characteristics. For instance, communication leads the individual to situate himself along with the collectivity; that is, the society. In so doing, by means of his language, we can deduce his social background. In fact, much of our pscho-social behavior can be noticed through language. Language has always been the most prominent symbol of any culture and it remains one of the prominent elements which reveals the identity of speakers. Much of what ensures communication between speakers and co-speakers is affected by who and what they are.

<sup>6</sup>In Anne-Marie (2008, p.64)

<sup>7</sup>In Descombes(2015, p.64)

Generally speaking, individuals are eager to have or maintain a positive social identity; that is, they want the characteristics or their social or cultural background(s) to be positively depicted. In fact, the positive social identity is based on sets of comparisons which rank a social group as socially, economically, culturally or militarily beyond other groups. When a social group less responds to these criteria, its members will tend to leave the group in order to associate with another group which is positively characterized.

Next to the cultural basis which constitutes an identification repertoire, actions are also other aspects worth mentioning. The idea that actions have an identification function is not as such new, and it has been the interests of various works such as those of Goffman (1973), Costalat-Founeau (2008), Catherine Briand (2013), to quote just a few. Talking about action as a basis of identification entails to discriminating between individual and social identity. In fact, action establishes the link between practice and communication with(in) the society, not without raising aspects of the quest for an autonomy (Costalat-Founeau (2008, p.64).

Broaching the issue of identity, Cécile de Rickel and Frédéric Delvigne (2010) give us to understand that in the history of an individual, there are two dimensions of identity which are articulated on one and the other. The idem, as a fix permanence undergone, and the ipse as a desired permanence. In all cases, that is to say, whether in the ipse or in the idem, there is always a production of meaning. They have somehow used the perspectives of Ricœur who conceives identity as twofold: idem and ipseity.

According to Ricœur, idem designates the set of durable provisions to which one recognizes an individual. He states that the emblematic figure of the idem is character. Ricœur links two notions to that of character: the notions of habit and identification. Habit can be defined as a disposition acquired through repetition. Habit would be the result of an action or a repeated action. Thus, the concept of habit has a double valence: contracted habit and acquired habit. This double valence of habit inscribes character over time.

Character is also the result of conscious and unconscious identifications such as norms, values, ideals and tempers along which an individual is identified (Cecile de Rickel and Frederic Delvigne, 2010, p.233). Ipsy refers to what is most autonomous in itself; that is, what gives us the intuition of freedom. Ipseity presumes a distance between self and character, self and history, self and body and self and experience.

Along with the diverse and varied definitions of identity we may assert that identity is a complex system from which emerge processes in interaction and which activate a dynamic of self-presentation, as well as the representation of the community to which we belong. However, how can we characterize the identity of a bilingual, and more specifically the identity of a sequential bilingual?

#### **IV. IDENTITY OF A SEQUENTIAL BILINGUAL**

The bilingual is at the junction of the individual identity forged by individual specificities and the collective identity which rise from the basis of linguistic and cultural mediations. He is characterized by three states. The former state is the state of the individual before learning the second language either by means of a personal decision or by means of education whereby a second or foreign language is used. The second state corresponds to the process of the second language learning. As for the last state, it corresponds to that of the result, that is, what the learner has become after having acquired the second language.

Either in the case of migrants or that of learners in Africa, education is often received in a language different from the language used by the community of the learner. In such cases, education represents a move from oneself to the encounter of others with its by-consequences resulting in an encounter between cultures and by the same token, it is an encounter between languages.

Torn between different cultural systems can the learner of the second language, otherwise called a sequential bilingual, exist in two copies? This being impossible, the learner falls into an indecision. It becomes difficult for him to define who he actually is, a definition which will help him be satisfied with himself and that others might also be satisfied with him. In fact, leaning is achieved through a process of collective bargaining of meaning in the community of practices within which we develop (Silvia Gherardi, 2008, p7). In so doing, it leads to an identity crisis which appears both as a crisis at the individual level, and a crisis at the collective level or the level of the group. Besides this identity crisis also sounds as the crisis of future, in as much as, every society, through the agency of its composing members, is supposed to transmit its cultural assets and values to future generation. But, through education in a second language, there is at the same time the desire to ensure continuity and discontinuity (rupture), transmission and refusal to transmit (Descombes, 2015, p63). This is explained by the fact that new generations are supposed to take their independence from the old ones and at the same time, they must ensure the sociolinguistic vitality of their community.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

As we can see, identity is a construct which modifies along with the social and political conditions of individuals. Identity is subject of permanent negotiation and reconstruction made by two main processes, that is attribution and/or incorporation, to use the terms of Jérôme Tourbeaux et Béatrice Valdes (2014, p77). They explain these two terms stating that the incorporation aspect of identity is what leads individuals to construct for

themselves a social identity and which is interiorized by the individual along with his social trajectory. As for the attribution aspect of identity, it results from a process of relation between the individual and the institutions which creates a virtual identity within which the individual can define himself and by the same token, builds his social identity.

In the case of the sequential bilingual, and along with the use of a language different from the language of his community, his social and virtual identities do not coincide. In fact, the relationship that language entertains with identity is no more to demonstrate. Beyond its definition as a means of communication, language represents a mode of cultural expression. Therefore, it is a mirror of identity. In such a case, acquiring a language is not as such neutral with regard to identity. As Saussure (1916) well puts it, when a language is learnt during childhood, it structures the way of perceiving the social reality. It influences the world vision of the individual, his way of thinking, as well as the values of individuals. As such the sequential bilingual can somehow claim a double identity from a sociocultural standpoint. However, what to say of a sequential bilingual who is incapable of expressing himself in the language of his community?

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