

## Language and Identity Construction in Multilingual Settings: A Case Study of the Nigerian Situation

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**ABSTRACT:** This article discusses the concepts of and the intricate relationships between language and identity in the Nigerian multilingual situation, examining various theories on identity and representation in language studies and the different identities present in the Nigerian multilingual context. Drawing on existing studies on language and identity, we explore how multilingual individuals navigate and negotiate their identities across languages and cultural contexts by investigating the relationship between language and identity, examining types of identity, analyzing the role of language in shaping social identity in the social media space, and looking into the implications of language and identity research for language education and policy. Four theories—Social Identity Theory, SFG—Transitivity Processes, Representation of Social Actors, and Theory of Otherness—are reviewed, emphasizing their usefulness in investigating identity in a text. National identity, gendered identity, ethnic identity, political identity, religious identity, personal identity, and virtual identity are the identified forms of identity construction in Nigeria, drawn from real-life instances. There is a strong interconnection between language and identity, with language serving as a key site for identity construction, performance, and negotiation. The Nigerian multilingual setting provides discourse participants with opportunities to explore different identities through language usage. It is therefore recommended that Nigerian language users be oriented, cautious, and aware of the identities being constructed to ensure their appropriateness in each evolving context.

**KEYWORDS:** Language, Identity, Multilingualism

### INTRODUCTION

Language is very core to any human society. It is the vehicle through which communication takes place among people in a society. Language is the code used to communicate. It is used to express feelings, desires, information, etc. There are written and spoken, verbal and nonverbal language means of communicating, and four basic communication skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Language is used to interact. Many languages are spoken in Nigeria and the world at large, like English, French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, etc. Iwara (2008:8) explains language as a human means of communication to be:

A system of symbols or representations of things, such that the words it employs to communicate stand for things, but are not of themselves things, and the meanings of these symbols are inside people's heads, where they are associated with, and shaped to some extent, by individual experiences.

This definition of language incorporates the features of language: arbitrariness and conventionality. This means that the things or ideas the words stand for are not actually in themselves those things, but what people have associated them to be. Invariably, a cat is not a cat because it is 'catty', but because language users agree to the convention of calling it that, which is possibly also shaped by experience. The same applies to most words in a language. The definition also establishes the fact that language is symbolic, which is portrayed in designation- capturing mental meaning, according to how Bloom (2003:10) puts it. Ogunsiyi (2018:548) asserts that language is the product of human society, but it also structures and influences society, and the fact that language is significant to human society authenticates the power of language. He goes further to state that the power of language could be the type of language exhibited by itself intrinsically, such as communication which involves avowing identity, conveying emotion, declaring wants, establishing and maintaining social interactions, among others, or extrinsic hegemonic variety bestowed upon it by the human society. This establishes the fact that, among other functions, language performs, it serves as a means of constructing and negotiating identities.

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### Identity

Hall (1990:222) posits that identity is neither transparent nor unproblematic but is a form of production that is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representations. This implies that identity is not static but dynamic as contexts unfold to portray representations. Burke (1980), cited in John (2018), explains that identity encapsulates both general views and idealized views, though often negotiated. The general view is like 'working self', while the idealized view is considered as 'self-image'. Tsushima & Burke (1999) aver that these two views guide moment-to-moment interaction. This implies that the general view and idealised view conditions what could be said, how, where, and when in any interaction.

Identity is explained as being contingent on subjectivity, according to Barker (2012), considering identity to be some set of assumptions that we hold about ourselves as persons, and the expectations of others about us. Althusser (1971) explains that social identity is called forth by hailing. Giddens (1991) posits that identity is constituted through the sustenance of a narrative about self; though Hall (1997) argues that the sustained narrative of our identity is dynamic and thus can be changed at any point, positing that identity is never stable nor whole, but fragmented and shifting.

Ango (2019) avers that identities are constructed either linguistically or historically, existing only within language and representation, and that identities may be socially, culturally, or institutionally assigned. Language and culture are interwoven and are essential concepts in identity construction. Taiwo (2019) posits that culture and identity are closely related, and that once language is used, it communicates values, beliefs, and customs of the user. Thus, people with the same culture share similar conceptions, production, and interpretation of meanings. Yeibo (2017:37) avers that culture is an identity marker that separates a group from others. Adedimeji (2008:72) asserts that every community has its distinctive cultural patterns through which the totality of what, how, where, and when of being in a context is known. This explains the fact that the acceptable cultural norms of any community direct the actions of the people. Culture is a complex pattern of behaviour and material achievement which are produced, learned, and shared by members of the community (Ameh 2002:163). Establishing the nexus between language, culture, and identity, Hausser (1986) describes identity as consisting of three components, namely: self-concept, self-esteem, and belief in control. He establishes that cultural cognition becomes explicated during interaction, revealing disposition to patriarchal proclivities, administration, supernatural beliefs and myths, abominations and incantation, respect for elders, polygamy, and traditional time management.

Hall (1997) identifies the 'circuit of culture' while linking culture and identity. It consists of five moments: production, consumption, representation, regulation, and identity. Production is the creation of a special meaning for an object; consumption means internalizing the produced meaning; representation entails projecting the meanings and introducing them to others; then regulation involves regulating the right uses of meaning in context, while identity deals with when the object becomes a means of identifying the group. Just as Miller (2000) cited in Taiwo (2019) affirms, individuals enact varieties of identities, which are not fixed, but multifaceted in complex and contradictory ways, tied to social practice and interaction.

Ango (2012) expounds that the identification process is fluid, ever-shifting, and open-minded, which is always being constructed by the shifting power of language and discourse. He further highlights different identities as national identity, which is a marker of citizenship such as birth certificates, indigene certificates, passports, etc.; gendered identity having forms of dressing, manner of speaking, walking, social etiquettes as gender-specific markers; ethnic identity includes cultural signs, symbols, practices and dress codes as markers; religious identity includes symbols, practices, dress codes as markers. Taiwo (2019) adds that there is personal identity which marks off the peculiarity of a person, such as name, manner of speaking, dressing, etc. Cheng, Farnham & Stone (2002) in Taiwo (2019) observe that the young learners we deal with are increasingly embracing the virtual world to explore their identity in creative ways, asserting their sense of self in a highly personal form, customizing their sites with unique photos, texts, tags, and avatars. This substantiates virtual identity as a new form of identity where people mark their identities through unique usernames, pictures, videos and animations, texts, etc. This is obtainable in the digital era we are currently in the world; Nigeria is not being left behind.

### Multilingualism and the Nigerian situation

Human societies exist in various linguistic peculiarities such as monolingualism, bilingualism, and multilingualism, each with its challenges (Ogunsiji, 2018). More language challenges occur in a bi/multilingual society owing to issues relating to language attitude, choice, and policy. This can engender conflict, whether internally or externally, as a language is usually more favoured than the other(s). Multilingualism refers to the phenomenon of language pluralism in a single polity (Ogunsiji, *ibid*). The interplay between language and identity has long been an interesting topic in sociolinguistics and education. In a multilingual setting where individuals exhibit multiple languages and cultural contexts, this interplay becomes increasingly complex as individuals navigate through complex identities, selecting the appropriate one for each context. This article seeks to explore the intricacies of language and identity in Yoruba multilingualism, examining how individuals construct and transform their identities across languages. The study, therefore, seeks to discuss the concepts of and interrelationship between language and identity in the Nigerian multi-linguistic situation, examining some theories on identity and representation in language study.

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The United Nations 2018 report states that Nigeria is a country of over 197 million people. The administration has a three-tier structure: federal, state, and local governments, which are largely structured along ethnic affiliation such that a particular state or geo-political zone has the same ethnic orientation (Ango, 2012). The country, as a multilingual society, is characterized by diversity of religions, having the major ones as Christianity, Islam, and indigenous. In terms of religion, the Southern part of the country predominantly practises Christianity, while the North has Islam practised by a large majority. Ango argues that due to trade, commerce, etc., citizens from other countries also live in the country, thereby intermingling with the already existing people, languages, and cultures. All these factors thus contributed to the existence of newer forms of identities, with each negotiating its own space within the nation.

Nigeria is an example of a multilingual society where most of the people are either bilingual or multilingual, though quite a good number of monolinguals who can only interact in their indigenous languages also exist (Ogunsiji & Olaseinde, 2018). There are myriads of languages in Nigeria, especially indigenous languages, in addition to foreign languages like English, French, and Arabic. Nigeria has up to 415 languages (Brann, 1988 in Gramley & Patzold), 440 languages (Crozier & Blench, 1993), 471 languages (Obanya); “about 400 different languages” (Bediako, 2001). The main idea in all these is that Nigeria has at least 400 languages, thus making this country one of the most linguistically complex in the world. This large number of languages within one nation makes it a multilingual entity and probably explains why Nigeria does not have an indigenous lingua franca/national language.

There are three major indigenous languages in Nigeria, each with its own estimated number of speakers. These are Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. Yoruba, used mainly in the South-western part of Nigeria; Hausa, the main language in the Northern part of the country; and Igbo, which is the indigenous language used in the Eastern part of the country. In addition to these three major languages, nine other languages are gradually moving towards the “prestige” position of the “big three”. These are Fulfulde, Kanuri, Igala, Tiv, Efik, Edo, Ijaw, Nupe, and Urhobo. These languages are used by the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria in news broadcasts. It is argued that hundreds of Nigerian languages have not been codified (Tomori, 1985), and only about 120 of these have been studied (Bediako). Each of the major languages has its role and status in the country and is used in diverse contexts. For instance, the National Policy on Education (NPE) (1977) has stated that in the pre-primary school:

...Government will ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community... (p.10)

(Section 2, sub-section 11(3))

It further allows learning any of the three indigenous languages outside their indigenous environment, thus:

In selecting two Nigerian languages, students should study the language of their own area in addition to any of the three main Nigerian languages- Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba, subject to the availability of teachers. (p.17)

(Section 4, sub-section 19(4)).

Linguistically, Nigeria has over 500 indigenous languages, evoking diversities of identities (Emeka-Nwobia, N., Onuigbo, S., and Ogayi, M., 2019). The dominant languages used in Nigeria will be briefly discussed in turn.

### The Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa Languages

The Yoruba language is a Niger-Congo language spoken in West Africa. The number of speakers of Yoruba was estimated at around 40 million in 2012, according to Wikipedia (Irinoye, et al. 2017:175). Ogunsiji & Olaseinde (2018) state that the Yoruba people can be found almost everywhere in Nigeria and diaspora, being conditioned by factors such as trade, industry, marriage, and employment. They mention Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos, and large parts of Kwara and Kogi states as the home base of the Yoruba people. The language is spoken, among other languages, in Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and in communities in other parts of Africa, Europe, and the Americas (Irinoye, et al. 2017). Explaining the factors that led to Yoruba English bilingualism, the slave trade, the Christian religion, and colonization are considered responsible. The language performs several functional roles in the country in education, administration, commerce, media, religion, judiciary, etc. Awoniyi (1973) notes that despite the sound pedagogical advisability of ascribing a special role to Yoruba language in the pre-primary and primary school system, it is given a secondary role, most especially in the private nursery and primary schools.

Igbo is one of the largest languages in West Africa and is spoken by 44 million people in Nigeria (CELT). It belongs to the Benue-Congo group of the Niger-Congo language family. Igbo speakers can be found over a wide area of Southeastern Nigeria, as well as in Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. Elements of the language were retained as well by enslaved peoples in the Americas, including Cuba, Barbados, and Jamaica. The language is now a global diasporic language spoken in the US, Canada, Great Britain, and elsewhere.

Hausa is a tonal language that is classified as a member of the Chadic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family of languages. It is the best-known and most important member of the Chadic branch. It is spoken by an estimated 40 to 50 million people as a first language, and thus also one of the most spoken languages in Africa. Most Hausa speakers live in Northern Nigeria and Southern Republic of Niger. In Nigeria, the Hausa-speaking area encompasses the historical emirates of Kano, Katsina, Daura, Zaria, and Gobir, all of which were incorporated into the Sokoto caliphate following the Fulani Jihad led by Usman Shehu Danfodio in the early 19th

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century. Hausa is also spoken in the diaspora by traders, scholars, and immigrants in urban areas of West Africa, for example, southern and central Nigeria, Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Togo, as well as Chad and the Blue Nile Province and western region of the Sudan. Hausa has several geographical dialects, marked by differences in pronunciation and vocabulary. The Standard Hausa variety is used as the Subject and Course of study, as well as the language of instruction in schools, colleges, and universities. It was first written in Arabic script known as *Ajami*.

### The English Language

When Nigeria was colonized by the British, they brought along with them English, their language at that time. English was the language of colonialism because it was spoken mainly by the colonial masters and their servants. Gradually, English acquired some functions, like the following:

It was used for administrative and judicial purposes where the District Officer (D.O.), usually a Whiteman, would give instructions through an interpreter or a subordinate who understood some English. People discovered that knowledge of English opened new vistas for them since no interpreter could cheat them by asking for something the D.O. did not ask for. It was also observed that people who spoke English were accorded enormous respect.

English became the language of religion. The colonialists came not only to colonize, but they also brought the Bible, introducing Christianity through the Bible, stories, etc. Gradually, other materials were translated into some Nigerian languages. But before then, religious literature was mainly in English. Then, in churches, English was the main language used, and an interpreter was required to interpret whatever was said. It was also used as a language of social interaction among the elites. At gatherings, people went to great lengths to show their competence, dexterity, and mastery of the English language.

Due to Nigeria's contact first with Portuguese traders, and later with missionaries, English was introduced to the people. English is viewed from different standpoints in Nigeria. It is indeed foreign to our culture and values, at the same time, it is, without doubt, a unifying factor in the country. This cultural dimension also does not welcome the idea of having English as a lingua franca in Nigeria. This is because it could be argued that would a nation with a multiplicity of indigenous languages pick a foreign language, and by implication, its culture as a national language. Thus, English is Nigeria's official language owing to the country's heterogeneous nature. It has been functioning in education, administration, trade, commerce, industry, media, religion, and the judiciary.

The educational dimension is, indeed, the most important. This has seen a change in the status of English from a subject in the primary school to a medium of instruction from primary to university level. A pass at the credit level is a requirement for admission into the university degree programmes. We are thus not surprised that English now enjoys pride of place in such areas as the media, legislature, judiciary, science and technology, and, indeed, in all official transactions. The implications of all these are that English has influenced the Nigerian linguistic and cultural "Landscape" in the sense that the vocabulary, sound system, words, phrases, and usages have been affected. Not only that, but there is also a wide range of code-mixing, where one or more Nigerian languages are mixed with English words/usages. English has been nativised (Kachru, 1992) in Nigeria not only in the generally accepted patterns of lexis, syntax, and semantics but also in such areas as proverbs, usages, culture, values, and even in contextual situations.

Thus, Enahoro (1992:160) argues that "English is our lingua-franca, the most widely spoken vernacular in Nigeria". This is obvious since the language has evolved its own special boundaries in our country. English fulfils multiple functions in Nigeria, largely because no mutually intelligible language would serve any of these functions.

### The Nigerian Pidgin English

A pidgin is a variety of language that developed for some practical purpose, such as trading, among groups of people who had a lot of contact, but who did not know each other's language (Yule, 2010:247). It originates from a Chinese version of the English word "business". It is a variety of languages that were developed for some practical purpose, such as trading among groups of people who had a lot of contact, but who did not know each other's languages. There is English Pidgin, if English is the lexifier language, i.e., the main source of words in the pidgin. It does not mean that those words will have the same pronunciation or meaning as in the source language. Pidgins are characterized by an absence of any complex grammatical morphology.

Nigerian Pidgin (NP), also known simply as Pidgin or *Naija* in scholarship, is an English-based creole language spoken as a lingua franca in Nigeria. It existed during the 17th and 18th centuries due to contact between Britons and Africans involved in the African slave trade (Wikipedia). A common orthography has been developed for Pidgin, which has been gaining significant popularity in giving the language a harmonized writing system. It is spoken as a pidgin, or as creole, since it has become the mother tongue and first language of some Nigerians, especially in the South- southern region of Nigeria. It is spoken across West and Central Africa, in countries such as Benin, Ghana, and Cameroon. Pidgin is used in Nigeria in many contexts, including politics, advertising, mass media, and even religion. Though many Nigerians have a negative disposition to Pidgin as being an informal language, the language of the lower class (Affia, 2023) or the language of the illiterates, it is being used as a lingua franca, fostering smooth inter-ethnic communication, in scholarship and by literates.



### THEORETICAL MODELS FOR IDENTITY

**Social Identity Theory (SIT)** is a framework proposed to understand the means through which people form and maintain social identities. The theory proposes that individuals usually desire to form positive identities for themselves, which are formed and maintained by social comparison with others. It also argues that people are members of groups that are based on shared age, gender, race, and nationality, with the groups shaping their belief system, self-concept, and self-worth (Theory Hub, 2015). The theory examines the psychological processes underlying group formation and maintenance, though criticisms have been raised bordering on its inability to account for the role of individuals in shaping such group formation and maintenance. Though it has been argued that the theory only focuses on shared group membership and social comparison without addressing other factors like personal experience, culture, etc., which can further shape one's identity.

**SFG- Transitivity processes:** MAK Halliday's transitivity processes of the Systemic Functional Grammar/ Linguistics (SFG/L) are also a viable theoretical leaning to investigate identity. According to Eggins (2004), the Systemic Functional Grammar is a functional semantic approach to language that explores how people use language in different contexts and how language is structured for use as a semiotic system. There are three meta-functions identified in SFG, namely: Interpersonal, Ideational, and Textual. The interpersonal meta-function deals with interaction between the speaker and the addressee for establishing, changing, and maintaining interpersonal relations; having subject, finite, predicate, and complement as the building blocks. The ideational function of the clause is likened to "representation" (Halliday 1994), construing our experience of the world around and inside us. While the textual is concerned with the creation of text with the presentation of ideational and interpersonal meanings as information that can be shared by the speaker and hearer in text unfolding in context, examining rheme and theme. The ideational function can be used to analyse identity. The grammar of the clause consists of three elements of the process: the process itself (which is realized by a verbal group), participants in the process, and circumstances associated with the process. The types of process are material process- process of doing; verbal process- process of saying; mental process- process of sensing; relational process- process of being; behavioural process- process of behaving; and existential process- process which indicates existence. Actor and Goal are the participants for material process; Senser and Phenomenon are the participants for mental process; Carrier and Attribute are the participants for relational process; Behaver and Behaved are the participants for behavioural process; Sayer and Verbiage are for the verbal process, while existent is the only participant for existential.

**Representation of Social Actors:** Departing from Halliday's theory of transitivity, this theory describes 15 types of action and their typical grammatical realisations, explaining the various transformations (like generalization, objectivation, digitalization, etc.) that social actions undergo during discourse. Van Leeuwen's contribution to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on the representation of social actors can be a veritable theoretical framework to examine identity due to its capability of identifying the various representations of social actors and actions in discourses. The theory discusses how social actors can be defined and or described in terms of the roles assigned to them either by reality or as represented in the given text. There are ten categories identified by Van Leeuwen (2008): exclusion, role allocation, genericization and specification, assimilation, association and dissociation, in determination and differentiation, nomination and categorization, functionalization and identification, personalization and impersonalization, and over determination. Exclusion considers how social actors are either completely left out or become de-emphasised in a text through backgrounding and suppression. Role allocation is the process of representing social actors in a text by assigning grammatical roles to them. Generalization and Specification group and classify people and consider them as specific individuals that can be identified. Assimilation refers to social actors as either individuals or as a group through collectivization and aggregation. Association and Dissociation represent social actors as forming or dissolving a group, respectively. Indetermination and Differentiation explain how social actors are either presented as unspecified individuals or groups, or how they differentiate between "us" and "them". Nomination and categorization identify individuals in terms of their unique identity, and in terms of the identities and functions they share with others. Functionalisation and Identification focus on how social actors are described in terms of the activity they do or role being taken on, and in terms of what they are permanently. Personalisation and Impersonalisation represent social actors as either humans or as abstract entities or objects. With this theoretical framework, identity construction can be examined in texts to tease out the category of identity and the linguistic items used to portray that.

**The Theory of Otherness** focuses on the social processes by which a dominant group creates a positive identity for itself, but stigmatizes out-groups based on perceived differences, which may lead to discrimination. Shash (2021) explains social processes as the ways our thoughts, actions, and feelings are influenced by the people around us, which are shaped by our group membership, personal relationships, and pressures from others. It involves categorizing individuals into hierarchical groups of 'us' versus 'them'. He further explains that the concept of 'other' derives from the binary classification between others and our own, we vs. other groups. Staszak (2009) explains that otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ('us', the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ('Them', Other) by presenting a real or imagined difference as a negative identity aimed at discrimination. The process of creating otherness is also referred to as 'othering', which involves using principles and criteria that allow people to be categorized into two hierarchical groups: them and us, presenting them as lacking identity. Shash (2021) explains othering as the set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any full range of human differences based on group identities. He explained the types of othering, namely individual-based othering,

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group-based othering, crude othering, and sophisticated othering, explaining that central to getting an identity for oneself is the 'stir' from the other. Thus, stereotypes are erected, which are significantly stigmatizing and obviously simplistic. Therefore, by stigmatising certain social groups as others, they are relegated to people who can be dominated or exterminated to the margin of humanity; otherness can be produced by spatial marginality. Through otherness, a status of superiority is fashioned for the self, thereby apportioning inferiority to the other. This theory presents the identity imposed on others on the self, but lacks in explaining the place of personal influence and imposition of identity on the self.

### Identity Construction in Nigerian Multilingual Setting

This section is a detailed description of the diverse identity constructions in the Nigerian multilingual setting. Based on the instances provided, social, ethnic and regional, political, religious, personal, and virtual identities are constructed by individuals in Nigeria. Each of these will be explained in turn.

**Social Identity:** To this article, social identity encompasses social issues like age, gender, group membership (football club, organisations, institutions, etc.), ethnicity, etc. These are usually marked by forms of dressing, manner of speaking, gender-specific matters, etc. Holmes (2013) asserts that women and men speak differently, same as children and adults. She affirms that the linguistic forms used by women and men contrast, to different degrees, in all speech communities, explaining the claim that women are more linguistically polite than men, for instance, and that women and men emphasise different speech functions. For instance, in the Yoruba community, it is taboo for a child to use proverbs while speaking with an elder. However, in cases of unavoidable use, a preemptive expression: *'to to se bi owe o...'* signals respect for and seeks permission from the adult. Also, young people make use of slang expressions than adults in all speech communities, including Nigeria, not excluded. Nigeria youths use slang like 'what's up?', 'How far?', 'steeze', 'purr', and so on, to mean 'what is happening?', 'how are you doing?', 'composure and good self-esteem', and 'cheers' respectively, though context determines which may be more appropriate in meaning. An instance based on gender identity is the belief that women give too many details while speaking. An excerpt from a police-suspect interrogation of a female suspect is presented to show this:

IPO: àtìgbà wo lo ti n sísẹ̀ nílẹ̀ Chief? [Since when have you been working in the chief's house?]

SUS: Mummy XYZ tó jẹ̀ àbúrò Chief ni wón sọ fún mi wípé sẹ̀ mo lè sísẹ̀ kùkù nílẹ̀ Chief nígbà yẹn, tí mo sì gbà látí sẹ̀ é... [Mummy XYZ, the chief's younger sibling, asked whether I could work as the chief's chef then, and I agreed to do it...]

IPO: ìgbà wo gangan ni?

This excerpt provided the interrogating Police Officers (IPO's) a simple question on when the suspect started working in the chief's house. This question requires a simple numerical answer; however, the suspect, being a woman, took the IPO down memory lane to explain how she got the vacancy information to work in the chief's house, and who informed her of that information. When she was unnecessarily being wordy, the IPO interrupted to ask her, 'When exactly was that?' This gender identity comes into play usually when a female is asked, 'how was your day?', and the person starts a highly detailed narrative to describe how the day went, going back intermittently at times when certain information considered important was skipped. Thus, the manner of speaking may portray gendered identity. Similarly, some features also index a person's social status while speaking, like using high-sounding vocabulary, formal use of words, choice of structures, etc. Another social identity will revolve around linguistic features marking group membership, like football fans' slogans like 'Red Devil', 'Gunnars for Life', and so on. Using these slogans by individuals construct the social identity of belonging to the football club.

**Ethnic and regional identity:** Just as Holmes (2013) asserts, when people belong to the same group, they often speak similarly. But there are many different groups in the Nigerian multilingual society, and so any individual may share linguistic features with a range of other speakers. There are linguistic clues to a person's ethnicity and region, and 12 closely related to all these are linguistic features which are responsive to social pressure from those we interact with most frequently, our social networks. Individuals draw on all these resources when they construct their social identities. Where a choice of language is available for communication, it is often possible for an individual to signal their ethnicity by the language they choose to use. Even when a complete conversation in an ethnic language is not possible, people may use short phrases, verbal fillers, or linguistic tags, which signal ethnicity. Ethnic and regional identities may include cultural signs, symbols, practices, and dress codes as markers. In speaking, interactions which appear to be in English, for example, may incorporate linguistic signals of the speakers' ethnic identity, how a Sokoto-based Hausa man would pronounce some words would be different from how a Kaduna-based Hausa man would; the same applies to how *Oke-ogun* and Ibadan, Ijebu citizens would pronounce words; similarly, Imo, Anambra, Ebonyi also have certain dialectal differences. These differences call forth the speaker's ethnic/regional identity once they speak.

**National identity** is used as a marker of citizenship in the Nigerian setting, using markers such as birth certificates, indigene certificates, passports, NIN (National Identification Number), etc. For the linguistic aspect, the languages being spoken in Nigeria construct a national identity for the person speaking them. Also, there are some expressions peculiar to Nigerian usage, be it slang expressions, Nigerian English expressions, the national anthem, the national pledge, and so on. Expressions such as *'bottom power'*,

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*long leg*’, *‘cash madam*’, *‘Greatest Nigerian Students!’*, *‘Aluta Continua, Victoria Ascerta’*, etc. The utterance of any of these expressions constructs the national identity of being a Nigerian.

**Political identity:** relates to the identity evoked by being a member of a political group in Nigeria. It may be a student’s political group, an institution-based political group, or a national political party. S.U.G (Students’ Union Government) in Nigerian universities has political symbols, slogans, and expressions used, as well as the national political parties. Popular catchphrases like *‘Change’*, *‘Renewed Hope’*, *‘Next Level’*, *‘Articulate’*, *‘PDP...Power’*, *‘APC...Change’*, *‘Labour Party’*, *‘PVC’ (Permanent Voters’ Card)*, etc. contribute to the construction of political identity in the Nigerian multilingual sphere.

**Religious identity:** Religious identity in the Nigerian setting is marked using some symbols like the rosary for Catholics and Muslims, some practices, and dress codes. From the linguistic aspect, people couch identities for themselves by uttering such expressions as *‘Jesus!’* as exclamations, *‘it is well’*, *‘praise God’*, *‘the Lord is good’*, etc. by Christians, even in non-church settings; *‘alhamdulillah’*, *‘ahusubilahi’*, *‘salamalaykum’*, *‘in sha Allah’*, etc. by muslims even in non-Islamic settings.

**Personal identity-** this identity construction deals with creating a personal niche for oneself in the Nigerian multilingual setting, just as Taiwo (2019) avers that there is personal identity which marks off the peculiarity of a person, such as name, manner of speaking, dressing, etc. Thus, the name a person bears is a personal identity which tells a whole lot about the person, take for instance, *‘Taiwo and Kehinde’* and *‘Hassan and Hassana’* in the Yoruba and Hausa communities as instances. These names are used for twins; so, merely the bearer of such names provides information about their ethnicity, the situations surrounding birth, etc. Closely linked to this is the manner of speaking. This is evident in the prestige associated with bilingual Nigerian elite, who in the ’50s, exhibited their proficiency in that language using bombastic language and even Latinized expressions (see, for instance, Wole Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel*; and T.M. Aluko’s *One Man, One Wife*):

.... Next, this Headmaster ejected and rejected and expelled ...the mercilessness of the pastor has spoilt and split and damaged and destroyed the career and carriage of this promissory youth..... (Aluko:p. 148).

With this, the speaker creates an educated personal identity for himself. In the Nigerian setting as well, there is a proliferating creation of westernized forms of names, where Arike now answers *‘Ariky’*, Kehinde answers *‘Kenny’*, *‘Asabe’* answers *‘Sabby’*, *‘Nafisat’* answers *‘Naffy’*, and so on, where localized names are now *glocalised* (a blend of global and local). Also, some Nigerians now bear Western or English names, showing a preference for them over their indigenous names. The styles of singing used by Ebenezer Obe, Davido, Olamide, Adekunle Gold, Falz, Beautiful Nubia, etc. have constructed personal identities for them through their use of words in songs and rap. Similarly, identities are constructed for Nollywood actors and actresses through their styles of talking while acting. Individuals, through this, carve out unique personal identities for themselves.

**Virtual identity:** due to the digital advancement in Nigeria and high social media involvement, virtual identities are created for users, which may or may not be in sync with their ethnic, social, or even religious identities in real life. Little wonder that it is popularly said that the social media portrays ample fake lifestyles. Virtual identities as a new form of identity are portrayed where people mark their identities through unique usernames, pictures, videos and animations, texts, tags and hashtags, and avatars, etc. Through the affordances of WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, and other online sites, identities are constructed for users like Taoma (Quadri), Peller, Aycomedian, Kennyblaq, etc.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the foregoing, it is established that identities are not static but evolving based on the interactional contexts. It is therefore expedient to suggest that Nigerian users of language must be oriented to this fact and be cautious and conscious of the identities they are constructing to ensure their appropriateness as per each evolving context. Also, languages that fall into the minority categories need to be codified to further establish their stance in the Nigerian sphere to avoid endangerment and extinction (should that have not happened). This will enable awareness of such ethnicity and their identities in Nigeria, further boosting their linguistic pride. Language users in the virtual world should also be encouraged to portray a positive identity to others for the sanity of the virtual space.

## CONCLUSION

This article has explored the complex relationships between language and identity in multilingual settings, using the Nigerian situation as a case study. It critically examined the concepts of language, identity, and multilingualism, especially as portrayed in the Nigerian setting. The article also reviewed important theories of identity and representation, highlighting their major tenets and contributions to identity studies. It is established, as averred by previous studies, that language is highly germane in shaping identity in society, especially in a setting where diverse languages co-exist. The social, political, ethnic, religious, personal, and virtual identities were identified as being constructed in the Nigerian multilingual setting and discussed with appropriate instances. We argue that language education should prioritise linguistic diversity and promote inclusive identity formation, recognizing the complex and dynamic nature of language and identity in multilingual settings. The reasons why people adopt one form and not another are complicated. The study concludes just as Holmes (2013:123) asserts, language constructs aspects of identity and membership of groups as well as nationhood.

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