

# **Language & Identity**

**A Case-Study of a Multilingual Family**

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# 1. Introduction

Everyone forms in his or her life an identity. "Identity is who and what you are" (Blommaert, 2005:203). However, identity is not a fixed state at which you can arrive. "The 'who and what you are' is dependent on context, occasion and purpose" (Blommaert, 2005:203). Individuals in an immigrant situation are faced with the task to redefine or reconstruct their identities to fit the new context in which they have arrived. "They develop an identity as a member of an ethnic group within the larger society" (Phinney et. al., 2001:135). The role of language is often stressed as a main factor of influence on ethnic identities or as a marker of ethnic identities in the fields of bilingualism (Edwards, 2004), history (Haarmann, 1999), nationalism (Safran, 1999), psychology (Padilla, 1999; Liebkind, 1999; Phinney et. al., 2001), sociolinguistics (Fishman, 1999), and second language acquisition (Spolsky, 1999) to name a few.

In this study I investigate the relation between language proficiency and ethnic identity by a case-study of a multilingual Sudanese immigrant family living in the Netherlands. In chapter 2 I provide a theoretical framework with regard to language, identity and ethnicity. In chapter 3 the methods of this study will be explained. Chapter 4 contains the results which will be analysed and discussed in chapter 5. Finally the conclusion will appear in chapter 6.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Language & Identity

In this chapter I will provide a theoretical basis on which I built the present research. As already pointed out in the introduction, the relation between language and identity is much researched in many disciplines. That there is a relation between language and ethnicity can already be seen in ancient history. Haarmann (1999:65) mentions the concept of the 'barbarian' invented by the ancient Greeks to raise their own culture relative to 'others'. "the Greek word *barbaros* means 'a person who speaks inarticulately'" (1999:65). All cultures who did not speak proper Greek were considered lower and therefore barbarian.

With regard to nationalism and ethnic revival, Safran (1999:80) states that "language serves as an important instrument for protecting collective identity and communal cohesion". Spolsky (1999:181) makes an even stronger statement by proposing that "language is fundamental in defining identity".

From a psychological perspective, Padilla (1999:115) states that "ethnicity [or: ethnic identity] refers to an individual's membership in a social group that shares a

common ancestral heritage.” According to Padilla (1999:115) constructing an identity is a socialisation process which takes place through the language of the home and community. In line with this view Liebkind (1999:143) proposes three main reasons why ethnic identity and language are so intrinsically connected. “First, language is very significant to the individual as an instrument for naming the self and the world. Second, the upbringing of a child is dependent on linguistic interaction. Third, spoken language is one of the most salient characteristics of ethnic groups” (Liebkind, 1999:143).

In his article Edwards (2004) discusses (among other issues) identity in relation to bilingualism. He argues that “speaking a particular language means belonging to a particular speech community and this implies that part of the *social* context in which one’s *individual* personality is embedded, the context which supplies the raw materials for that personality, will be linguistic” (Edwards, 2004:23 italics in original). If this is the case then speaking more than one language entails belonging to more than one community. According to Edwards (2004: 27) the deeper someone is involved linguistically and culturally in another community, the greater the impact it has on one’s identity. If this is the case then multilingualism, that is: speaking more than one language may result in a mixed group identity. In addition, L1 attrition, that is: (partial) loss of one’s first language, may have detrimental effects on one’s native/ethnic identity. Moreover, becoming more proficient in a second language (L2) may result in a shift of identity towards a new group. Thus, in studying the relation between language proficiency and identity in multilinguals, there are two main issues with regard to language proficiency, first, the level of language proficiency relative to monolingual group norms; second, the level of language proficiency relative to other languages within a multilingual.

For the present discussion first needs to be established what exactly is identity, how it is constructed (§2.2), particularly during adolescence (§2.3), how individuals can have multiple identities (§2.4), in addition, how ethnicity relates to identity (§2.5). Also, the relation between language proficiency and identity needs to be established (§2.6). Finally in §2.7 research question, hypotheses, and expectations are presented.

## **2.2 Constructs of Identity**

Blommaert (2005: 203), starting from the relatively harmless observation that “identity is who and what you are” (recall the Introduction), goes on to discuss the notion of identity from a discourse perspective. Following Le Page & Tabouret-Keller (1985, as cited in Blommaert, 2005:204) he argues that, in everyday life we constantly perform complex ‘acts of identity’ by which we show something of ourselves and situate ourselves in relation to groups and categories that exist in the society around us. In this light, he

proposes that "identity is identification" (2005:205). Meaning that identity is not a *property* of an individual, however that "identities are constructed in practises that produce, enact, or perform identity" (2005:205).

The 'acts of identity' that we perform may be very subtle. Rampton (1995) for example showed that multi-ethnic youth in London used linguistic cues like subtle differences in pronunciation (accents) as markers of identity. In line with his findings Nortier & Dorleijn (2008), found similar behaviour among youths in the Netherlands. They find that the use of an 'immigrant' or 'ethnic' accent called Moroccan Flavoured Dutch (MFD) plays a role in the in and out-group identifications of some youths in the Netherlands. MFD is Dutch with a Moroccan flavoured accent and is spoken among peers of various ethnic backgrounds, whether multi- or monolingual (Nortier & Dorleijn, 2008). Thus, also individuals from other ethnic backgrounds than a Moroccan background use it. With their research (Nortier & Dorleijn, 2008) show that people are able to construct identities using the subtle linguistic characteristics of other ethnic groups than they belong to.

However, constructing or establishing an identity is more than the 'acts of identity' performed by the individual him or herself. It also involves 'others'. According to Blommaert (2005:205), "in order for an identity to be established, it has to be *recognised* by others." In everyday life we constantly label 'others' by the way they look, speak, dress, what they buy, their profession, etcetera. Much of the construction of identities is not done by ourselves but by others (Blommaert 2005:205). Blommaert thus makes a distinction between the part of identity that we construct ourselves, that is, 'achieved or inhabited group identity', and the part of identity that is created by others, that is, 'ascribed, categorical identity' (2005:205-6). In this thesis in the discussion of the participants' identities I only regard the part of identity that is related to each individual's self-identification (i.e. achieved identity) and disregard the individual's identification by others (i.e. ascribed identity).

With regard to the construction of identity by immigrants Meaders (1997, as cited in Prescher, 2007:192), proposes a theory of *transcultural identity building*. According to this theory immigrant identity formation involves three phases of adjustment.

The first phase, the immersion phase, is described as the most dynamic and difficult one during which losses are acutely felt. Language is perceived as the most difficult challenge of this period since language is vitally important in communication, and in defining identity in relationship to others. In the second phase, the phase of bicultural identity, the conscious recognition of aspects of identity is reflected as rooted in both the original and adopted cultures. In the third, transcultural phase, finally, the migrant has developed his or her

'transcultural self' – biculturalism (including bilingualism) is no longer experienced as a conflict. (Prescher, 2007:192).

Identity formation in this respect involves the negotiation between two languages and two cultures. It involves decisions from the immigrants about how much of their original culture and language they wish to retain and how far they will go to assimilate to a new culture and a new language. Culture symbolises in this respect the material from which ethnic identities are constructed. Negotiating between two ethnic identities thus involves negotiating between two cultures.

### **2.3 Adolescent Identity Formation**

A stage in life in which identity formation is particularly salient is adolescence. In this section I will discuss some of the particulars of adolescent identity formation, especially the role of parents and peers.

In a case-study of their own three children Caldas & Caron-Caldas (2002) report changes in (linguistic) behaviour as their children move into adolescence. Most importantly they observe that during adolescence the children disengage from their parents and the influence of peer groups becomes very strong (2002: 511). This move is illustrated by the children's language choices. The children are raised bilingually (English-French) from birth and are able to speak both languages fluently. The parents promote the use of both languages and speak mostly French with them at home to compensate for the largely English input of the environment. During the school year the family lives in a predominantly English speaking environment, while during the summer months they move to a predominantly French speaking environment. Caldas & Caron-Caldas (2002) measured the children's language preference by measuring the amount of English and French they spoke at the dinner table at home combined with illustrative diary notes. Interestingly the children's language preference changed from predominantly French to almost overwhelmingly English in the English context; however, they continued to speak mostly French in the French context. In addition, in the English context at some point they even did not want the parents to speak French either. Caldas & Caron-Caldas explain this behaviour by the diminished influence of the parents' or even opposition to the parents' promotion of French and the increasing influence of the monolingual English norms of the peer groups. This is in line with Eckert (1989, as cited by Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 2002:511) who states that "a defining characteristic of adolescence is the child's search for, and construction of, identity apart from the parents, and within the child's peer group".

Similarly, Phinney et al. (2001) investigated the role of language, parents and peers in the formation of ethnic identity by adolescent immigrants. They found in a study of 81 Armenian, 47 Vietnamese and 88 Mexican families that across all groups the proficiency in the ethnic language and the interaction with ethnic peers predicted the adolescents' ethnic identity. In addition, parental cultural maintenance influenced adolescents' ethnic language proficiency. For all three groups the social interaction with ethnic peers was the strongest predictor of ethnic identity. Again this shows, in line with what was mentioned before, that peers play an important role in adolescent identity formation.

Thus, these two studies show that in the formation of identity by adolescents, peers play a vital role. However, language constitutes a large part of how these adolescents illustrate or present their identity. Language is clearly an identity marker for adolescents.

## **2.4 Multiple Identities**

As already mentioned in the introduction, identity is not a fixed state an individual can find him or herself in. Blommaert (2005: 232) argues that "the performance of identity is not a matter of articulating *one* identity, but of the mobilisation of a whole *repertoire* of identity features". Identity is thus, a multidimensional and multifaceted phenomenon. Individuals may shift their loyalties to groups according to context. A Moroccan-Dutch individual may, for example, wear an orange cap and hang out the Dutch national flag if the Dutch national soccer team plays against Belgium, however, he may change loyalties if the Dutch soccer team play against Morocco. Everyone belongs to various groups or categories and according to context may situate oneself within or outside of a particular group. Edwards (2004:25) adds to this by stating that "each of us may carry the tribal markings of many groups" and "that our 'group identity' is itself a mosaic rather than a monolith". In the case of multi-ethnic individuals the particulars of such a mosaic may be even more salient than for the average western mono-ethnic individual.

## **2.5 Identity & Ethnicity**

For the present research I am mainly interested in the part of an individual's identity that is related to ethnicity, namely: ethnic identity. Fishman (1977) defines ethnicity as consisting of three main components: paternity, patrimony and phenomenology. Paternity in this respect contains the inherited or biological part of ethnicity that is relatively fixed (1977:17). Patrimony is the system of behaviours,



implementations and enactments that are the product of this inherited ethnicity (1977:20). Phenomenology concerns the meanings that are attached to this being (paternity) and behaving (patrimony) (1977:23). These three concepts may overlap and interact at some points; however, together they are able to explain much of the complex phenomenon of ethnicity. Ethnic identity is then the individual's self-recognition and feeling of belonging to an 'ethnic collectivity', an ethnic group (1977:26). This identification may be stronger at one level than the other. For example, an individual's ethnic identity may be strong at the level of paternity by a strong sense of ancestry and bloodlines and weak with regard to patrimony or phenomenology by a loss of knowledge about certain rituals or specific meanings.

Language has a strong link to ethnicity and therefore also to ethnic identity since it is "the recorder of paternity, the expresser of patrimony and the carrier of phenomenology" (Fishman 1977:25).

## **2.6 Language Proficiency & Identity**

That there is a relation between language and identity is well established as can be seen from the previous sections. However the relation between language proficiency and identity is much less researched and therefore much less clear. In this section I will discuss some existing research on this topic.

### *2.6.1 First Language Attrition & Identity*

Recent evidence for the relation between language proficiency and identity comes from research on first language (L1) attrition in a bilingual setting. Prescher (2007), reports on ongoing investigations of the relation between L1 attrition and identity. Her study concerns the self-reported first person accounts of ten male and ten female L1 German immigrants in the Netherlands. During in-depth interviews participants were asked to relate their experiences with L1 attrition and adaptation to a new language and culture as well as reflect on their identities. Interestingly, in all interviews participants reported at least some L1 attrition while each of them also reported to make an effort in trying to retain their L1. With regard to identity Prescher (2007:196-7) also reports some interesting findings. Many participants reported that they assimilated very quickly and almost entirely stopped speaking German. This behaviour had a twofold result; first, they experienced L1 attrition, and in addition, they felt like they suffered a kind of loss of personality. They felt they had difficulty expressing themselves in both languages. However, even when the L2 has become the dominant language of these bilinguals, still their L1 remains to be the most familiar to them (2007:198). Many participants also

reported to feel like they did not belong anywhere anymore. They use terms like "in-between", and "living in a no-man's-land" (2007:198). Some of them even felt foreigners in their own country of birth (2007:199). Prescher (2007:199) reports that they all express a desire to integrate their lives before and after emigration into one self. One of them even used psychotherapy to try to integrate her two identities.

Prescher (2007:201) concludes that "most of them try to preserve their L1 skills as an essential part of their identity." However, her results show that even while they try to preserve their L1 skills they are in some ways unsuccessful, moreover, that they even experience some loss of identity in relation to this loss of L1 skills. In addition, Prescher (2007:201) concludes that "in the end, immigrants are used to being different; they accept their 'nationlessness', their imperfect languages, they have created their 'home' in their own transcultural selves. (2007:201)"

### *2.6.2 Second Language Acquisition & Identity*

More evidence for the relation between language proficiency and identity comes from research by Kanno (2003). She investigated the negotiating of the bilingual and bicultural identities of four Japanese adolescents. The four moved from Japan to the English-speaking countries of North-America (USA & Canada) during adolescence because their parents' companies stationed them for some time in these countries. After having lived for a few years in English-speaking countries they moved back to Japan to enter Japanese universities. Kanno provides with this investigation a longitudinal study of the changes in bilingual and bicultural self-perceptions of second language learners on their way to becoming bilingual. Participants wrote auto-biographical accounts of their experiences with migration to another language and culture, their re-entry in Japan, and their final reconciliation with their bilingual and bicultural identities. In addition they were interviewed by Kanno at several points in the study.

Kanno (2003:108) reports that for three of the adolescents (the other one already spoke English upon arrival) "the learning of English was a formidable challenge, inextricably intertwined with their struggle to negotiate their identities in the host country." Their lack of language proficiency prevented them from integrating in the host country and constructing their social identities in relation to peers. In relation to this Kanno states that "language proficiency is one of the most fundamental conditions of social participation – as Sawako [= one of the participants] said, 'nothing starts unless you speak the language'" (2003:111). In the previous sections it has become clear that constructing an identity involves situating oneself in relation to others. If lack of language proficiency prevents the social participation needed for identity formation, this lack of language proficiency may consequently have a detrimental effect on someone's identity.

Besides their immersion in an English-speaking environment the four students were all enrolled in a Japanese Saturday-school. Each of them felt like it was a sanctuary where they could feel free to speak Japanese (2003:112). They had a strong identification with Japanese language and culture and believed it would never be replaced by English. In terms of identity they felt different from the monolingual English-speaking residents of their host country, and did not feel like they belonged. This was mostly due to their feeling of not being accepted by the English speakers because they could not speak English well enough.

However, after having lived for some years in an English-speaking country, they returned to Japan to enter Japanese universities. Some interesting things happened to their identities upon re-entry into Japanese society. In Anglophone countries they had guarded their Japanese language proficiency since that was a main part of their Japanese identities. However, upon re-entry in Japan, some of them started to guard and promote their English. As Kanno mentions: "Somewhat ironically, it took their removal from the English-speaking world for English finally to become *their* language (2003:119 italics in original). Again the participants reported that they felt different, and some of them even reported that they felt like they did not belong anymore. Much of these identity issues were related to the fact that the participants lacked the subtle language skills of conversation (speech manners) in a country that has highly codified norms (Kanno, 2003:115). Still, as was reported by Prescher (2007) in relation to L1 attrition, Kanno (2003:122) relates how her participants after some years in Japan finally come to terms with and accept their bilingualism and biculturalism. She states that they "realized that in order to belong to a society, one does not necessarily have to sacrifice parts of oneself" (2003:122).

In conclusion, the research by Kanno (2003) demonstrates how second language skills can be related to issues of identity. Especially in early phases of adolescent L2 acquisition the lack of language proficiency may have effects on the L2 learning individual's identity.

## **2.7 Research Question, Hypotheses & Expectations**

In the present study I investigate the relation between the language abilities and the identities of the seven members of a multilingual immigrant family. I discuss not just their L1 or L2 in this respect but all the languages they have knowledge of. The main question to be answered is: **What is the relation between language proficiency and ethnic identity? In particular, what is the influence of proficiency in the various languages of a multilingual individual on the ethnic identity of a multilingual individual?** On the basis of the studies reported in the previous sections I hypothesise

that there is indeed a relation between language proficiency and ethnic identity, however, that it is not the only factor playing a role in multilingual identity formation. Other factors, as for example the influence of peers, may also play a role.

With regard to the language proficiency and ethnic identities of my participants I expect that mostly the proficiency in their L1 and in the language of the host country (for ease of reference L2) play a role in their identity. I expect less effect from other languages they speak, such as lingua francas. The participants' L1 and L2 probably have more influence on their ethnic identity, since these languages can more easily be linked to certain geographical areas and specific cultural phenomena which are part of particular ethnic backgrounds, than the lingua francas they speak. My expectations are fourfold.

1. If participants have a high proficiency in both languages (L1 & L2) I will expect them to have 'mixed' identities.
2. If participants have low proficiency in both languages (L1 & L2) I will expect them to have a sort of 'crisis' identities.
3. If participants have low L1 but high L2 proficiency I expect them to have 'assimilation' identities.
4. If participants have high L1 but low L2 proficiency I expect them to have 'preservation' identities.

These four types of identities will become clearer in section 3.4.

In asking and answering these questions whenever I speak of 'identity' I mean by that 'ethnic identity' (which is directly related to but different from ethnicity) as has been established in section 2.5. Therefore when I introduce a measure of identity in chapter 3 many of the questions will be related to the feelings about and identifications with ethnic groups that the participants may or may not have.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants**

To investigate the relation between language and identity I have done an in-depth case-study of a multilingual Sudanese family who came to the Netherlands as refugees. Family members are a widowed mother of 36 (Joyce), three older children who arrived in 2006 (after age 12) in the Netherlands (Harriet 21, Helen 18, Alex 17), one deaf girl of 15 (Gloria) and two younger girls of 14 (Gladies) and 13 (Lea) who arrived in 1999 (before age 5) in the Netherlands together with the mother. All family members were born in Jei, Sudan. This chapter provides a description and explanation of the methodology of this research.

### *3.1.1 Social & Geographical Background*

In Sudan the family lived in a rural setting in southern Sudan. They fled the country because of the civil war between the Muslims in northern Sudan and the Christians in the south. During the flight the three older children got separated from the mother and the younger three who fled to Uganda where they lived in a refugee camp for some time. They were eventually invited by the Dutch government to come to the Netherlands in 1999 together with a large group of other Sudanese refugees who spread out over the country. In the town where the family lives resides the largest active Sudanese community in the Netherlands consisting of about 40 people.

The other three children were eventually found and lived for some years with relatives who had moved to Kenya. After a long period of bureaucratic procedures they came to the Netherlands in 2006 by family reunion.

The family are active members of and socially connected with both a Sudanese and a Dutch community. They have Sudanese friends in the Netherlands, Sudanese relatives in Africa and Dutch friends in church, neighbourhood and schools.

### *3.1.2 Linguistic Background*

According to the mother, all family members except for the deaf girl (Gloria) speak Bari from birth. Bari is a native African language that they acquired in a rural family setting in southern Sudan. Bari is however the name of the written form of the language that is actually more like a language family. Their actual native language is Pojulu which falls under the category Bari (as well as for example Kakwa). For ease of reference we will however use the name Bari since it is what they mostly use themselves. However, the children were actually raised more or less trilingually in Bari, Arabic and Swahili. In Sudan, of the three languages, the main language spoken within the family and local community was Arabic. In addition, English, being a language of prestige, was used at school and sometimes in communications with other Sudanese. The Arabic they speak is Sudanese Arabic, a local variety of Arabic, just as other countries and communities have their own local variety of this language: Palestinian Arabic, Egyptian Arabic, etc. At the time Arabic was and still is an official language of Sudan; English, however, has been recognised as such, too, in 2005. In the refugee camps in Uganda they used mostly Swahili but also Arabic and to some extent English. Upon arrival in the Netherlands they started learning Dutch. The older three children lived for some time in Kenya where they used mainly Swahili in addition to some native African languages such as Gikuyu. As mentioned above, the older three arrived in the Netherlands later. As part of the integration program in the Netherlands they have all been enrolled in Dutch

language classes except for the deaf girl (Gloria). Currently, the youngest two girls (Lea and Gladies) and the boy (Alex) attend regular secondary school; Gloria is in a school that specialises in deaf and hearing-impaired children. Of the oldest two girls Harriet is currently in a special program because she has some loss of sight, and Helen attends professional education.

### **3.2 Language Measure**

As a language proficiency measure I used a questionnaire by which participants self-report their language proficiency for each language they speak. The questions were based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages CEFR (Council of Europe). The CEFR gives very detailed descriptions of what a person should be able to comprehend or produce in relation to a certain level of language proficiency. These descriptions are very useful for self-reports since they are formulated in the first person. In addition they are language neutral and therefore able to describe language proficiency in any language. Moreover they make it possible to compare language proficiency between languages and to compare language skills (e.g. reading, speaking, writing, listening, interaction) within a language. In addition, there were self-reported questions to assess which languages they presently use to what extent and with whom.

Language tests do, by my knowledge, not exist for some of the languages they speak and I cannot properly assess their language proficiency myself since I do not speak all the languages (only Dutch and English). Using language tests for only the languages for which they do exist would not have been very useful since the results of such tests are not comparable to the self-reports on the other languages. Devising my own language tests was not possible since I had no access to people with enough expertise on the languages that I do not speak myself and not enough time to arrange the necessary help and expertise and eventually test the tests. I therefore had to rely on self-reports.

The questionnaires were formulated in Dutch. However, where needed I was available to explain or translate the questions in English for those of the participants who have low proficiency in Dutch. In addition, I decided to present the questionnaires orally to the participants by reading them out loud since some of the participants appeared to be lacking sufficient reading skills. The focus of the questionnaires was on communication and comprehension skills as opposed to literacy skills. Questions were therefore related to production, listening, and interaction as opposed to reading and writing. There were open-ended questions and statements that had to be answered 'yes' or 'no'. Below are some example statements and questions. The complete questionnaire can be found in appendix A.

**Example questions from the Language Proficiency and Language Use questionnaire:**

1. Comprehension skill:

Ik kan moeiteloos gesproken Nederlands/Engels/etc. begrijpen, in welke vorm dan ook, hetzij in direct contact, hetzij via radio of tv, zelfs wanneer in een snel tempo gesproken wordt. Antwoord: ja/nee

(E: I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken Dutch/English/etc., whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed. Answer: yes/no)

2. Production skill:

Ik kan eenvoudige uitdrukkingen en zinnen gebruiken om mijn woonomgeving en de mensen die ik ken, te beschrijven. Antwoord: ja/nee

(E: I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know. Answer: yes/no)

3. Language use

Welke taal gebruik je het meest in het dagelijks leven? Antwoord: \_\_\_\_\_

(E: which language do you use most in everyday life? Answer: \_\_\_\_\_)

4. Language use

Welke taal spreek je meestal met je moeder? Antwoord: \_\_\_\_\_

(E: Which language do you usually speak with your mother? Answer: \_\_\_\_\_)

### **3.3 Ethnic Identity Measure & Other-Group Orientation**

For a measure of identity I used as a basis the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) originally proposed by Phinney (1992). This is a questionnaire especially designed for measuring the ethnic identity of adolescents and young adults and thus very suitable for my purposes. There have since been minor modifications by Phinney (2004). I translated and adapted the MEIM (2004) questionnaire to fit the present situation. Below are some example questions. The complete translated and adapted questionnaire can be found in appendix B. The original MEIM (2004) can be found in appendix C. According to Phinney (2004) "the measure can best be thought of as comprising two factors, ethnic identity search (a developmental and cognitive component) and affirmation, belonging, and commitment (an affective component)." With regard to ethnic identity search questions 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10 are relevant, and for affirmation, belonging, and commitment, questions 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11 and 12 (see appendix B). Each question was answered using a 5-point scale (5- Strongly agree 4- Agree 3-Neutral 2- Disagree 1- Strongly disagree).

**Example questions from the Ethnic Identity questionnaire:**

1. Ik heb er tijd aan besteed om meer over mijn etnische groep te weten te komen, zoals de geschiedenis, tradities en gewoonten.

(E: I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.)

2. Ik ben actief in organisaties of sociale groepen waar voornamelijk leden van mijn etnische groep deel van uitmaken.

(E: I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.)

3. Ik heb een duidelijk idee van mijn etnische achtergrond en wat het voor me betekent.

(E: I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.)

In addition to the MEIM, Phinney (1992) also constructed a measure of Other-Group Orientation (OGO). This measure is also relevant in relation to this case-study since I wanted to measure their ethnic African identity as well as their possible shift towards a Dutch identity. The original OGO questionnaire can be found in appendix C. For my purposes I have translated and adapted the OGO measure to fit the situation under investigation. The entire translated and adapted questionnaire can also be found in appendix B. For ease of reference and interpretation the two parts of the questionnaire (MEIM & OGO) are presented separately here and in appendix B. However, when the questionnaire is used the questions of the two parts are mixed together. Again example questions can be found below.

**Example questions from the Other-Group Orientation questionnaire:**

1. Ik vind het leuk om Nederlandse mensen te ontmoeten en te leren kennen.

(E: I like meeting and getting to know Dutch people.)

2. Ik breng veel tijd door met mensen buiten mijn etnische groep.

(E: I spend much time with people outside my ethnic group.)

3. Ik probeer vrienden te worden met Nederlandse mensen.

(E: I try to become friends with Dutch people.)

### **3.4 Scoring & Interpretation**

With regard to the Language Proficiency Measure, more questions answered yes constitute a higher score on language proficiency. Each language is scored separately. The open-ended questions provide additional information for discussion but are not used for scoring.

Scores are obtained for the Identity Measure by adding up the numbers participants used in answering each question; the higher the number the stronger the ethnic identity. Scores are obtained in the same way for the measure of Other-Group Orientation. The scores for these two measures are related to four types of identities: a 'mixed' identity, a 'crisis' identity, a 'preservation' identity or an 'assimilation' identity.



- High scores on both measures relate to a 'mixed' identity which means that the participant identifies strongly with both groups.
- Low scores on both measures relate to a 'crisis' identity which means that the participant does not know to which group s/he belongs and feels different from both groups.
- A high score on the Identity Measure in combination with a low score on the Other-Group Orientation Measure relates to a 'preservation' identity which means that the participant identifies strongly with the culture of origin and has not adapted or does not want to adapt to the host culture.
- Finally, a low score on the Identity Measure in combination with a high score on the Other-Group Orientation Measure relates to an 'assimilation' identity which means that the participant identifies strongly with the host culture and has left the original culture behind.

To interpret the results the Language Proficiency scores are related to the identity types that resulted from the Identity Measure and the Other-Group Orientation Measure.

## **4. Results**

In this chapter I will present the results of both questionnaires in words and in tables. In §4.1 the results of the Language Proficiency measure will be presented, and in §4.2 the results of the Identity and Other Group Orientation measures. It is important to note that since some of the participants lack sufficient literacy skills in Dutch the questionnaires were not filled in by the participants themselves but were filled in by the experimenter as the result of individual interviews with the participants. In these interviews the questions were read to the participants and sometimes explained or clarified. This was done to make sure that the questionnaires were measuring respectively language proficiency and identity and not literacy.

### **4.1 Language Proficiency**

The overall results of the Language Proficiency (LP) Measure are presented in table 1. To this table is added a column for Dutch Sign Language (Nederlandse Gebarentaal, NGT). This language was not part of the original questionnaire; however, these results were obtained through follow-up questions regarding the LP questionnaire. I added NGT because it is an important part of the discussion of Gloria's unique language situation within the family which I will come to later.

Table 1: Self reported language proficiency: overall results.

	Bari	Arabic	Swahili	English	Dutch	NGT*
Joyce (36)	C: 4 P: 4 I: 4	C: 4 P: 4 I: 4	C: 4 P: 4 I: 4	C: 3 P: 2 I: 2	C: 3 P: 2 I: 2	Few words
Harriet (21)	C: 1 P: 0 I: 0	C: 2 P: 1 I: 1	C: 3 P: 1 I: 1	C: 1 P: 1 I: 1	C: 3 P: 3 I: 3	Few words
Helen (18)	C: 2 P: 1 I: 0	C: 3 P: 3 I: 3	C: 3 P: 3 I: 3	C: 2 P: 2 I: 2	C: 3 P: 3 I: 3	Few words
Alex (17)	C: 3 P: 1 I: 1	C: 3 P: 3 I: 3	C: 3 P: 3 I: 3	C: 3 P: 1 I: 1	C: 4 P: 3 I: 3	Few words
Gloria (15)	C: 0 P: 0 I: 0	C: 0 P: 0 I: 0	C: little P: 0 I: 0	C: little P: 0 I: 0	C: 1 P: little I: little	Near native = her L1
Gladies (14)	C: 1 P: 1 I: 0	C: 1 P: 1 I: 0	C: 3 P: 3 I: 3	C: 2 P: 1 I: 1	C: 4 P: 4 I: 4	Few words
Lea (13)	C: 1 P: 0 I: 0	C: 2 P: 1 I: 0	C: 3 P: 3 I: 3	C: 3 P: 2 I: 2	C: 4 P: 4 I: 4	Few words

C = Comprehension, P = Production, I = Interaction

0 = no language skill, 1 = basic language skill (A1), 2 or 3 = low or high intermediate language skill (B1 & B2), 4 = native or near native language skill (C2)

\*Nederlandse Gebarentaal (Dutch Sign Language)

Table 1 shows for each participant the self-reported level of language proficiency for three categories: comprehension, production and interaction. I will briefly go through the results per participant and then make some general remarks about their language use.

Joyce reports native or near-native proficiency for all her African languages, Bari, Arabic and Swahili, in all categories; and intermediate proficiency for English and Dutch. Harriet on the other hand reports a low proficiency in production for all African languages and English and scores highest of all her languages on Dutch. For comprehension she reports intermediate proficiency in Arabic and Swahili but not Bari. Helen and Alex are somewhat similar in that they both report to be high intermediate or near-native in both Arabic and Swahili, and Dutch, whereas they report lower proficiency for Bari and English. Gladies and Lea are similar in that they both report native or near-native proficiency in Dutch for all categories and lower proficiency for all African languages with an exception for Swahili which they score relatively high.

Gloria is a different story. She has always been deaf without access to a sign language and therefore has never learned a language before coming to the Netherlands. In the Netherlands she received hearing aids and appeared to be able to hear at least a little. Upon arrival in the Netherlands she started to learn NGT which is consequently her first language (L1). Because she is now able to hear a little, she has learned to

understand a little Swahili and English but most of all communicates with her family in spoken Dutch which she is able to understand at a basic level and produce a little. The other members of the family speak and understand only a few words in Dutch sign language (NGT), therefore the common means of communication for them with Gloria is spoken Dutch.

All members of the family report that Dutch is their main language of communication in and outside the home. Other languages that are frequently spoken in the home are Arabic and Swahili. The mother also speaks some Bari to the children but they generally answer in Dutch, Arabic or Swahili. As their best language all children report Dutch except for Gloria who reports NGT. Joyce reports Bari as her best language. It must be said that at least for Helen and Alex, and perhaps also for Harriet, their Dutch language proficiency is still growing as they are still being educated in that language.

They speak Dutch or Arabic with other members of the Sudanese community and sometimes a little Swahili. Mostly the three languages are mixed. They mix words from all three languages together in their communications with other bi- and trilingual speakers. Bari is not used since there are many tribes and many languages in Sudan and most Sudanese in the Netherlands do not speak each other's native tribal language. They speak Dutch with friends of other ethnic groups.

During follow-up interviews it proved that the children do not regard Bari as their native language. They separately and consequently report Arabic and/or Swahili as their first languages. Bari they consider the native language of their mother but not their own. Joyce however does report Bari as her first language. Therefore in my interpretation and discussion of the results I will take Arabic and Swahili into account as the children's first language and Bari as the mother's first language.

#### **4.2 Ethnic Identity & Other-Group Orientation**

The overall results of the measures of Ethnic Identity (EI) and Other-Group Orientation (OGO) are presented in table 2. These results are extracted from the Identity Questionnaire in which they were presented to the participants in a mixed form. The results are incomplete for Gloria since I only had the chance to speak with her in Dutch and her Dutch is very limited both in comprehension and production. I tried to arrange for a sign language interpreter however that did not work out. With the help of her sister Harriet I was able, however, to obtain answers to some of the questions.

Table 2 shows the participants' self-reported ethnic identity as well as the results of the EI and OGO measures. I will briefly go through the results for each participant and then make some general remarks.

Table 2: Ethnic Identity & Other-Group Orientation: overall results.

	Joyce	Harriet	Helen	Alex	Gloria	Gladies	Lea
Self reported Identity	Sudanese	Dutch / Sudanese	Sudanese / Dutch	Sudanese	Dutch	Sudanese	Sudanese
Ethnic Identity	M: 4.1 R: 2-5 T: 49/60	M: 2.8 R: 1-5 T: 34/60	M: 3.9 R: 1-5 T: 47/60	M: 3.8 R: 1-5 T: 46/60	Incomplete	M: 4.2 R: 1-5 T: 50/60	M: 4.3 R: 1-5 T: 52/60
Other Group Orientation	M: 4.1 R: 1-5 T: 33/40	M: 4.9 R: 4-5 T: 39/40	M: 4 R: 1-5 T: 32/40	M: 4.3 R: 2-5 T: 34/40	Incomplete	M: 4.3 R: 1-5 T: 34/40	M: 4.9 R: 4-5 T: 39/40

M = mean score, R = range of answers, T = total score out of total possible score

Joyce reports a Sudanese identity. Her EI and OGO scores are equally high with a mean of 4.1 for both measures. She scores high on Sudanese ethnic identity but also on orientation towards other ethnic groups. Harriet reports a mixed Dutch / Sudanese identity leaning towards Dutch. Her EI and OGO scores are farthest apart of all participants, respectively: 2.8 and 4.9. Her score for Sudanese ethnic identity is much lower than that of all other participants. Her score for orientation to other ethnic groups is as high as it can be. Helen also reports a mixed Sudanese / Dutch identity, however, she is leaning more towards Sudanese than Dutch. Her scores for EI and OGO are equal (3.9 and 4) as those of her mother and just as high. Alex reports a Sudanese identity. His OGO score (4.3) is slightly higher than his EI score (3.8). As already mentioned, the results for Gloria are incomplete. She reports a Dutch identity. During the interview with her it became clear that she often feels more Dutch than Sudanese, however, she also has feelings of connection with her Sudanese ethnic group. Gladies reports a Sudanese identity. She scores a 4.2 on ethnic identity and a similar 4.3 on orientation towards other groups. Her range of answers is from 1 to 5 in both measures like those of Helen. Lea reports a Sudanese identity and scores very high on both measures (EI: 4.3 and OGO: 4.9).

From the table it is clear that the range of answers is very high. Participants often used the most extreme answers 1 and 5. They simply fully agreed or disagreed with a statement. This however makes it less reliable to use the mean scores for the analysis since the answers were more all or nothing than somewhere in the middle as the mean scores might suggest. In addition, scores were generally quite high for all participants for both measures. This makes it difficult to differentiate between the participants. In the discussion of the results I will therefore also discuss individual statements or groups of related statements in interpreting the identities of the participants.

## **5. Interpretation & Discussion**

Having presented the results I will in this chapter analyse the outcomes of the two measures in relation to each other in order to answer my research question as presented in §2.7. First, in §5.1 I will discuss some general identity patterns. Second, in §5.2 I will present an individual analysis of identity in relation to language proficiency for each participant. Finally, in §5.3 points for discussion, improvement and further research will be provided.

### **5.1 General Identity Patterns**

With regard to identity, it is clear by looking at table 2 that all participants score high on both measures, EI and OGO. The scores of the two measures are noticeably different only in the case of Harriet. In all other cases the two measures have similarly high scores. According to the model of interpretation presented in §3.4 these high scores would indicate that all these participants have a 'mixed' identity. However, they themselves do not all feel that they do. Follow-up interviews and an analysis of individual statements of the EI and OGO measures clarify some of the results.

Interviews with the participants, and especially those with the children, reveal that they have a strong general orientation towards Dutch people and Dutch society. They want to integrate. It is very important for them, for their future, to find their place in Dutch society, to be educated and successful. They do not separate themselves from Dutch society by forming a strong link with other Sudanese or operating only in a Sudanese community. However, that does not mean that they would feel Dutch; or on the other hand, that they do not feel Sudanese or that they do not interact with Sudanese people! Five of them report Sudanese as their main or only identity. Analysis of individual statements from the EI and OGO measures illustrate this. All participants agreed with statements 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 from the OGO measure which indicate if the participants interact actively with people from other ethnicities. These questions they easily agreed with producing a high score on the OGO measure. They even found the questions funny since they obviously interact on a daily basis with people from other ethnic backgrounds in school and at work. They are part of a very small minority group so they have no choice but to interact with other ethnic groups. However, none of them gave any indication that they failed to see any purpose in being in contact with individuals from other ethnic backgrounds. They were not always positive, on the other hand, about statements 1, 2, 8, and 10 from the EI measure which indicate if the participants are spending time to find out things about their ethnic background and customs. However, at every point where they did not agree with the statements, they

indicated that they could not always find the time to be active in their community but that it is actually very important to them to know something about their ethnic background and to have contact with other Sudanese people.

Another interesting phenomenon relating to the EI and OGO measures is that some of the participants, specifically Harriet, Helen and Alex, found it difficult to say what their identity is and how they feel about being Sudanese. They found it difficult to decide about statements 3, 4, and 7 from the EI measure which are about feelings about their ethnic background. It could be that they are experiencing what I called in §3.4 identity 'crisis' meaning that they do not know where they belong to anymore. They do not feel Sudanese but they do not feel Dutch either. However, during the interviews it became clear that their difficulty with the statements was more related to problems with understanding the words than actual difficulty with deciding about their feelings. On the other hand, it remains true that they could not easily find the proper way of stating their identity. Relating to this is statement 7 from the OGO measure: 'sometimes I feel more Dutch than Sudanese'. This statement in relation to their reported identity illustrates their difficulty in identifying themselves. Alex, for example, reports a Sudanese identity but also agrees with this statement whereas Helen reports a Sudanese/Dutch identity but does not agree with the statement. These seemingly contradicting reports are an indication of their struggle with identification. Perhaps this struggle does designate a 'crisis' identity or perhaps a 'mixed' identity. Both are equally well possible. These adolescents or young adults are in the process of negotiating their identities between Sudanese and Dutch.

Remarkable are also the reported identities of Gladies and Lea. They are the youngest two of the participants and neither of them has any recollection of their lives in Africa. They are very integrated into Dutch society. Still they both report a definite Sudanese identity. They have no doubts about it and no hesitation in saying it. Perhaps their already stable place in the Dutch community around them makes it unnecessary for them to promote and sustain a Dutch identity. Instead they use their Sudanese identity to set themselves apart from others. In the individual analyses I will come back to this pattern.

As this analysis of general identity patterns reveals it is difficult to take in the participants as a single group or simply report the results of the EI and OGO measures. In addition, there is much individual variation. Therefore, the analysis of identity patterns in relation to language proficiency patterns will be done on an individual basis taking into account specific statements from the EI and OGO measures and information obtained through additional interviews.

## 5.2 Individual Analyses

*Joyce:*

As for most participants Joyce's EI and OGO scores are both high, indicating a 'mixed' identity. However, from interviews with her I would rather say she has a 'preservation' identity. Much of her high OGO score can be explained as the result of individual statements (i.e. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) as already discussed in the previous section. In addition her EI score would have been even higher if some questions (i.e. 1, 2, 8, and 10) had more regarded the importance of knowledge about ethnic background and less the practical execution of that knowledge. In interviews she stresses the importance for herself but also her children to know about their ethnic background and to retain their Sudanese identity. She adamantly states that she is Sudanese and nothing else. Any suggestions that she might perhaps also consider that she may feel Dutch at some point are waved away. Linking this to the results of the LP measure it can be seen from table 1 that she reports a native or near-native level of proficiency for all three African languages (Bari, Arabic, and Swahili) and an intermediate level of proficiency for English and Dutch. Her self-reported proficiency of English and Dutch may perhaps be a little higher than it actually is. Her motivation to learn Dutch is that Dutch is the main means of communication in the society that she lives in. However, she does not feel that by learning Dutch she becomes more Dutch. It is important to note that although she does not link speaking Dutch directly to a Dutch identity, she strongly links her native language Bari to her identity. In interviews she repeatedly stated that she could never forget her native language since it is a vital part of her as a Sudanese.

*Harriet:*

As an exception to the other participants Harriet's EI and OGO scores are clearly distinct from each other. Her EI score is relatively low and her OGO score is as high as it can be. Although her score on the EI measure is not really low I would argue that she has an 'assimilation' identity or at least one that is shifting towards it. Interviews with her confirm this view. She is strongly Dutch oriented and finds it important to be Dutch oriented. Integrating in the Dutch society is vital to her present life and future. In combination with that she has a relatively low Sudanese identity. She finds it more important to assimilate than to preserve. Relating this 'assimilation' identity to the results of the LP measure it shows that she scores Dutch as the most proficient of all her languages. She reports only a basic level of production in any other language than Dutch. Compared to the other participants she may slightly overestimate her Dutch and underestimate her African languages. Perhaps the LP measure does not fully represent actual language proficiency but more likely self-perceived language proficiency.

Consequently it may be that in this case not actual language proficiency can be related to identity but perceived language proficiency. I will come back to this and further discuss it in the next section. However, the pattern in the case of Harriet is clear. She is assimilating to a Dutch identity thereby finding her Sudanese identity, including the African languages linked to it, less important; finding her place in the Dutch community around her means for her, first of all, speaking Dutch.

*Helen:*

Helen's case seems to be clear-cut. Her EI and OGO measures are equal and both high relating to a 'mixed' identity. Her LP reports show an equal level of proficiency for both African languages and Dutch which corresponds with my expectations in relation to a 'mixed' identity. However, as discussed in the previous section it may equally well be the case that in a case such as this one we are not dealing with a 'mixed' identity but a 'crisis' identity. At some points during the interview and when filling in the EI and OGO measures she does seem to have problems with identifying herself as either Sudanese or Dutch indicating a 'crisis' identity. She for example disagrees with the statement that she sometimes feels more Dutch than Sudanese. In addition, as also discussed previously, the high scores for both measures may not be entirely reliable because of the influence of individual statements. Nevertheless, she does report a mixed Sudanese / Dutch identity. The implication of these considerations seems to be to assume a 'mixed' identity in this case. With regard to language proficiency in the African languages Arabic and Swahili I would have expected the sisters Helen and Harriet to take in a more or less similar position. Interestingly, however, Helen reports much higher language proficiency for these languages than Harriet. Although it may actually be true that she is more proficient in these languages than Harriet it raises the same issue I have mentioned before: perhaps the LP measure represents not actual language proficiency but perceived language proficiency. In §5.3 this issue will be further discussed. For the present case it remains that Helen's reported language proficiency corresponds as expected to the 'mixed' identity that follows from the EI and OGO measures.

*Alex:*

Alex's EI and OGO measures are similar to those of Helen. However, whereas Helen reports a mixed identity he reports a Sudanese identity. Still, he also seems to be strongly Dutch oriented. He even agrees with the statement that he sometimes feels more Dutch than Sudanese whereas Helen does not. From the interview with him became clear that he feels the need to assimilate towards and integrate into the Dutch society, however, that he does want to preserve his Sudanese identity in that process. Thus, Helen and Alex are similar in that they value both their Dutch and their Sudanese



identity. They even have the same focus in that they want to preserve their Sudanese identity in the integration process. Alex's self-reported language proficiency is also similar to that of Helen thereby showing the same link between relatively high language proficiency for both African languages and Dutch and a 'mixed' identity.

*Gloria:*

As is already clear from chapter 4 Gloria is a unique case within this research and has a unique position within the family. I do not have complete EI and OGO measures from her; however, with the help of her sister Harriet I was able to interview her about her identity. She reports a Dutch identity. She is the only one of the participants who does. It seems at first surprising; would she have assimilated totally to a Dutch identity? However, when taking into account her social and linguistic situation having an 'assimilation' identity becomes more logical. She was only four years old when she came to the Netherlands, therefore she will remember little about her life in Africa. In addition she never learned a language while in Africa. The first language she learned was NGT (Dutch Sign Language) which she started learning upon arrival in the Netherlands. Since her only language is NGT she has no linguistic link to Africa. Most of her social interaction takes place at the specialised school for deaf and hearing impaired children that she goes to since at home no one speaks sign language. The interaction with her family takes place through very basic communication in spoken Dutch. I would say that in her case the link between her language abilities and her identity is obvious. Otherwise, why would she be any different from the other children? Even Lea and Gladies who were younger than Gloria when they came to the Netherlands do not report a Dutch identity. Gloria's linguistic situation makes the difference.

*Gladies:*

Gladies scores high and similar on both measures (respectively EI: 4.2 and OGO: 4.3) which would indicate a 'mixed' identity. However, she does not report a mixed identity. She reports a definite Sudanese identity without any hesitation. In addition she disagrees with the statement that she sometimes feels more Dutch than Sudanese. These two factors would perhaps indicate that she has a 'preservation' identity like her mother. Yet, she disagrees with statements 3, 4, and 7 from the EI measure which indicate if the participant has an idea of what it means to have a certain identity. This suggests that she has little idea of what it means to her to be Sudanese and how her life is influenced by her Sudanese ethnic identity. In addition, from the interview with her, as from her OGO score, it became clear that she is very active in and integrated into Dutch society. As already mentioned in §5.1 perhaps these seemingly conflicting results can be explained by the suggestion that Gladies is already so far integrated into Dutch society

that it has become unnecessary for her to strongly promote a Dutch identity. Her Dutch identity is naturally present but her Sudanese identity needs to be actively sustained, thus leading towards a 'mixed' identity with a focus on the Sudanese part of it. This relates also to her Language Proficiency scores. She has a native or near-native proficiency in Dutch which is the language she is most proficient in and most comfortable with. In addition, she reports a relatively high proficiency for Swahili in both comprehension and production. Perhaps she overestimates herself a little here, since according to her mother she understands Swahili quite well but is able to speak it only a little. However this self-reported language proficiency in relation to actual language proficiency corresponds well with her self-reported identity in relation to the EI and OGO results. As she overestimates her African language proficiency she may overestimate or 'overpromote' her ethnic identity; and as she has little actual production in Swahili she has little knowledge of what her ethnic identity means to her and how it influences her life.

*Lea:*

Lea scores very high on both the EI measure and the OGO measure, higher than any other participant. Still she does not report a mixed identity; she reports a Sudanese identity. Nevertheless she does agree to the statement that she sometimes feels more Dutch than Sudanese. She seems to be very integrated and active in the Dutch community. Lea and Gladies are also the only ones who are fully proficient in Dutch and sound like native speakers. Perhaps, similar to Gladies, she already has found her place in Dutch society and does not have to work for that place anymore as her older brother and sisters might. She arrived in the Netherlands at the age of two, so her only experience is with living in the Netherlands. Perhaps she differentiates herself from others by promoting her Sudanese identity since her Dutch one is a given? The fact that she reports a relatively high proficiency for Swahili, which she uses very little and according to her mother has limited proficiency in, may be related to her reported Sudanese identity. However, the results of the EI and OGO measures still point in the direction of a 'mixed' identity which also corresponds to her LP scores that are high for both Swahili and Dutch.

### **5.3 Discussion, Improvements & Further Research**

In section 2.7 I presented the main question of this research and asked what the relation would be between language proficiency and ethnic identity. In this particular case-study I investigated the influence of the proficiency in the various languages of multilingual individuals on their ethnic identities. As the individual analyses show, there is

a link between the reported language proficiency and the ethnic identity of the participants. The participants language proficiency in their various languages corresponds as predicted to the identity patterns they display. Joyce has a high proficiency in her native language as well as other African languages in relation to a 'preservation' identity. Harriet has a relatively high proficiency in Dutch in combination with a low proficiency in all three African languages in relation to an 'assimilation' identity. Gloria has the unique situation of NGT (Dutch Sign Language) as her first language in relation to an 'assimilation' identity. Helen and Alex have a 'mixed' identity in relation to relatively high proficiency in both their main African languages (Arabic & Swahili) in combination with a relatively high and still growing proficiency in Dutch. Gladies and Lea have 'mixed' identities in relation to a native or near-native proficiency in Dutch in combination with a relatively high proficiency in Swahili. They themselves in interviews also reported sometimes that especially their African languages are linked to their Sudanese identities. Joyce feels particularly strong about her proficiency in Bari in relation to her ethnic identity. To some extent they also report that speaking Dutch well is linked to their Dutch identity. Especially Harriet was adamant on this point. Taking these results into account this research has been successful in relating language proficiency to ethnic identity. However, having established this relation, the question remains what exactly this relation entails and what influences what. From the present results it can not be assumed that it is the language proficiency that influences the ethnic identity, it might as well be the other way around.

Thus, we can conclude that this study has been successful up to a point. Obviously, to be able to make stronger claims on the relation between language proficiency and ethnic identity, more research of other, similar and different cases, is needed. Moreover, some theoretical and methodological issues will have to be resolved. In the remainder of this section I will discuss some questions that this research raises, and provide ideas for methodological improvements and possible further research.

First of all, as already mentioned, there were some problems related to the Ethnic Identity and Other Group Orientation measures. All participants scored high on both measures due to the effects of individual statements, as discussed in §5.1. With information acquired through additional individual interviews with the participants and by analysing responses to individual statements I was able to differentiate between participants and obtain more meaningful results. Consequently, it would be valuable for ensuing research to improve specifically the EI measure so that it more consistently measures ethnic identity. Perhaps the present questionnaire works perfectly for groups of individuals that Phinney (1992 & 2004) worked with; however, it worked only partially for this family.

Another general problem that I encountered was a language barrier that I experienced with some of the participants. Communication was particularly difficult with Gloria, but also with some of the others it was sometimes difficult to get all the nuances of a particular question across. Especially with regard to the EI and OGO measures this language barrier resulted in difficulty in getting the subtle meaning of some statements across to some participants which may of course influence the results. Some of these problems might have been resolved in the process of this research if it was not for lack of time. For example, a sign language interpreter could have resolved the language barrier with Gloria. However, I do not feel that these problems have influenced the results. Only in the case of Gloria it resulted in incomplete EI and OGO measures. Moreover, in the end these language difficulties only resulted in more elaborate interviews with the participants than initially intended. These interviews provided masses of interesting and more nuanced information about the participants' linguistic and social situations as well as their feelings about their ethnicity.

These language difficulties may raise the question if perhaps the self-reports for Dutch language proficiency were excessively positive. However, with the participants who reported a native or near native proficiency in Dutch I did not experience these language problems. Moreover, the problems I encountered involved only some words with meanings that relate to nuanced feelings. Thus, the language problems occurred only in relation to the intermediate or low proficiency in Dutch of some participants of whom it is understandable that they do not know the precise meaning of some words. Therefore, I do not believe the self-reports excessively positive in this respect.

Another linguistic issue is that I wanted to measure language proficiency and not literacy. Therefore, as mentioned before, the LP questionnaire concerned only the following three skills: comprehension, production and interaction and not writing or reading. In addition, the LP questionnaire, as well as the EI and OGO questionnaires, was administered to the participants orally by the researcher so as to avoid comprehension problems because of some of the participants' lack of reading skills. By presenting the questionnaires in this way there is always a risk that the participants will be biased to answer in a way that they think the researcher wants to hear. However, since the participants were familiar with the researcher they probably felt no apprehension in giving their own answers. Indeed the results of the LP, EI and OGO measures, as well as additional interviews, show that the participants gave individually varied and sometimes surprising answers, making it unlikely that they were biased.

A third linguistic issue, that I earlier touched on briefly, concerns the self-reported language proficiency. How reliable are these self-reports? As I mentioned at different points in this thesis, I have reasons to believe that the self-reported language proficiency of the participants is not always an accurate reflection of reality. Information from other

family members and from my own observations sometimes points in this direction. Still, although without language tests we can never be entirely sure, differences in self-reported and actual language proficiency appear to be very small. However, even if this self-reported language proficiency maybe more perceived than actual language proficiency, I still believe that these self-reports are valuable to the discussion, perhaps even more so than the participants' actual language proficiency. Since, as language proficiency is an important part of the participants' ethnic identifications this is reflected in their own view of their language proficiency. It may be very interesting for subsequent research to measure both participants' actual language proficiency by means of standardised language tests as well as their perceived language proficiency by means of self-reports. Comparing these and relating them to measures of ethnic identity may provide valuable additional results. For the present research this was impossible since comparable standardised language tests do, by my knowledge, not exist for Bari, Sudanese Arabic and Swahili.

Another proficiency related issue is the observation that the oldest three of the children (Harriet, Helen and Alex) neither have native or near-native proficiency in any language! Their lack of proficiency in Bari can probably be explained by incomplete acquisition since they were separated from their mother from a relatively young age. In addition they report that they were not raised in early childhood as monolingual speakers of Bari, but more or less as trilingual speakers of Bari, Arabic and Swahili. During their childhood they have mostly spoken a mix of the three languages, with Arabic as the principal language during their stay in the Sudan, and mostly Swahili while staying elsewhere in Africa. This description of their linguistic development goes a long way towards explaining their lack of proficiency in Bari. Their lack of native proficiency in Arabic and Swahili is more remarkable since they report them as their native languages and continued speaking them regularly until their arrival in the Netherlands. These adolescents and their languages may prove interesting cases for the study of language attrition.

The lack of language proficiency in African languages in the younger children (Gladies and Lea) is easily explained by a lack of acquisition since they were very young upon arrival in the Netherlands. In addition they have acquired Dutch at a native or near-native level of proficiency. Joyce retains her native language Bari at a native or near-native level. Her low level of proficiency in Dutch is not surprising since language learning difficulties for adults are widely reported.

In addition to these language-related issues some identity related issues remain. In the individual analysis of the results I have discussed some identity 'types'. I have presented these types and the results in general in quite a black and white approach only allowing room for a little nuance. This was necessary to be able to differentiate between

the participants, tease apart the various factors that play a role and present the most interesting and meaningful results in a coherent and insightful way. However, to do justice to the complexity of a concept such as identity, it must be said that there are many more factors besides a linguistic one that have played and are still playing a role in the processes of identity formation of these participants. Their direct social environment, for example, may play a role in their identifications; and for the adolescents in particular there may be a strong influence of their peers. In addition, it would not do justice to the complexity of processes of identification to state that these participants only have the single identity or type of identity that they labelled themselves with or that I labelled them with in the analysis. The present analysis of these participants' identities is only a snapshot, an interesting snapshot nonetheless. I forced the participants in this research to focus only on their ethnic identities of that moment, thereby disregarding other times and other identifications they might have such as, student, adolescent, mother, friend or outsider, and many more. However, identities may change over time and individuals may have different identifications in different situations. Therefore, it would be interesting to interview the same participants again in a few years to see the possible changes in their identifications or set up an investigation similar to the present one but with a longitudinal design.

## **6. Conclusion**

Taking into account the interpretation, analysis and discussion of the results of this case-study as presented in chapter 5 it may be concluded that this research establishes that there is indeed a relation between language proficiency and ethnic identity with regard to these participants. The established identity patterns of the participants corresponded almost perfectly to the self-reports of their proficiency in the various languages they speak. Thus, predictions and expectations resulting from the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2 were born out. The participants' self-reported level of proficiency in native African languages, Bari in case of the mother and Sudanese Arabic and Swahili for the children, appeared to be linked to the strength of their Sudanese identity. A higher level of proficiency corresponded to a stronger Sudanese identity; and a lower level of proficiency to a lower Sudanese identity. In addition, for most participants, their level of proficiency in Dutch could be related to their amount of orientation towards Dutch society in a similar way.

However, although the results from this study are very interesting they also pose new questions that need to be answered and raise issues that need to be addressed. Thus, to be able to make strong conclusions about the nature of the relation between language proficiency and identity and to be able to generalise these results to other

languages and other ethnicities further research is needed. Still, the unique linguistic situation of this family has provided a valuable and unique snapshot of the phenomenon of ethnic identity in relation to language abilities.

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## Appendix A: Language Proficiency & Language Use: Questionnaire

### Deel 1: Taalbeheersing

Ja of nee? Omcirkel het goede antwoord voor elke taal.

Begrip:

	Bari	Arabisch	Swahili	Engels	Nederlands
1. Ik kan vertrouwde woorden en basiszinnen begrijpen die mezelf, mijn familie en directe concrete omgeving betreffen, wanneer de mensen langzaam en duidelijk spreken. (A1)	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee
2. Ik kan de hoofdpunten begrijpen wanneer in duidelijk uitgesproken (Nederlands/Engels/etc.) wordt gesproken over vertrouwde zaken die ik regelmatig tegenkom op mijn werk, school, vrije tijd enz. (B1)	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee
3. Ik kan de meeste nieuws- en actualiteitenprogramma's op de tv begrijpen. Ik kan het grootste deel van films in het (Nederland/Engels/etc.) begrijpen. (B2)	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee
4. Ik kan moeiteloos gesproken (Nederlands/Engels/etc.) begrijpen, in welke vorm dan ook, hetzij in direct contact, hetzij via radio of tv, zelfs wanneer in een snel tempo gesproken wordt. (C2)	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee

Productie:

	Bari	Arabisch	Swahili	Engels	Nederlands
5. Ik kan eenvoudige uitdrukkingen en zinnen gebruiken om mijn woonomgeving en de mensen die ik ken, te beschrijven. (A1)	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee
6. Ik kan uitingen op een simpele manier aan elkaar verbinden, zodat ik ervaringen en gebeurtenissen kan beschrijven. Ik kan een verhaal vertellen, of de belangrijkste punten van een boek of film weergeven en mijn reacties beschrijven. (B1)	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee
7. Ik kan duidelijke, gedetailleerde beschrijvingen presenteren over een breed scala van onderwerpen die betrekking hebben op mijn interessegebied. Ik kan een standpunt over een actueel	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee

onderwerp verklaren en de voordelen en nadelen van diverse mogelijkheden uiteenzetten. (B2)					
8. Ik kan een duidelijke, goedlopende beschrijving presenteren in een logische structuur, zodat de toehoorder in staat is de belangrijke punten op te merken en te onthouden. (C2)	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee

Interactie:

	Bari	Arabisch	Swahili	Engels	Nederlands
9. Ik kan deelnemen aan een eenvoudig gesprek. Ik kan eenvoudige vragen stellen en beantwoorden die een directe behoefte of zeer vertrouwde onderwerpen betreffen. (A1)	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee
10. Ik kan onvoorbereid deelnemen aan een gesprek over onderwerpen die vertrouwd zijn, of mijn persoonlijke belangstelling hebben of die betrekking hebben op het dagelijks leven (bijvoorbeeld familie, hobby's, werk, reizen en actuele gebeurtenissen). (B1)	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee
11. Ik kan zodanig deelnemen aan een vloeiend en spontaan gesprek, dat normale uitwisseling met sprekers van de taal redelijk mogelijk is. Ik kan binnen een vertrouwde context actief deelnemen aan een discussie en hierin mijn standpunten uitleggen en ondersteunen. (B2)	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee
12. Ik kan zonder moeite deelnemen aan welk gesprek of discussie dan ook en ben zeer vertrouwd met uitdrukkingen en spreektaal. Ik kan mezelf vloeiend uitdrukken en precies aangeven hoe ik me voel. (C2)	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee	Ja / Nee

## Deel 2: Taalgebruik

Algemene vragen:

1. Hoe oud ben je?

2. Waar ben je geboren?

3. Welke talen spreek je?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Welke talen versta je?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Welke taal heb je als kind het eerst geleerd?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Welke taal gebruik je het meest in het dagelijks leven?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Welke taal wordt er thuis het meest gesproken?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Zijn er situaties waarin er thuis een andere taal gesproken wordt dan dat er normaal gesproken wordt?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Wat is je beste taal?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Vragen voor de kinderen:

10. Welke taal spreek je meestal met je moeder?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Zijn er situaties waarin je een andere taal spreekt met je moeder dan dat je normaal doet?  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Welke taal spreek je meestal met je oudere broer en zussen?  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Welke taal spreek je met je jongere broer en zussen?  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. Hoe communiceer je met Gloria?  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. Gebruik je wel eens Nederlandse Gebarentaal in de communicatie met Gloria?  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. Welke taal spreek je meestal met je Nederlandse vrienden?  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. Welke taal spreek je meestal met je Afrikaanse (Sudanese) vrienden?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Vragen voor de moeder:

18. Welke taal spreek je meestal met je kinderen?  
\_\_\_\_\_
19. Spreek je met de oudste drie kinderen een andere taal dan met de jongste drie kinderen?  
\_\_\_\_\_
20. Hoe communiceer je met Gloria?  
\_\_\_\_\_
21. Gebruik je wel eens Nederlandse Gebarentaal in de communicatie met Gloria?  
\_\_\_\_\_
22. Welke taal spreek je meestal als je met je familie in Sudan praat?  
\_\_\_\_\_
23. Welke taal spreek je meestal als je met Sudanese in Nederland praat?  
\_\_\_\_\_
24. Welke taal spreek je meestal met Nederlandse vrienden en kennissen?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B: Ethnic Identity & Other-Group Orientation:**

### Questionnaire

#### Deel 1: Etnische Identiteit

In dit land wonen mensen uit veel verschillende landen en culturen en er zijn veel verschillende woorden om die verschillende achtergronden of etnische groepen waar mensen vandaan komen te beschrijven. Een paar voorbeelden van namen van etnische groepen zijn Turk, Marokkaan, Nederlander, Soedanees, Surinamer, Pool, Antiliaan, en nog vele andere. Deze vragen gaan over jouw etniciteit of je etnische groep en hoe je daarover denkt of op reageert.

Vul in: Wat betreft etnische groep beschouw ik mijzelf \_\_\_\_\_  
(meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)

Gebruik onderstaande nummers om aan te geven in hoeverre je het eens bent met elke stelling.

(5) helemaal mee eens (4) mee eens (3) neutraal (2) niet mee eens (1) helemaal niet mee eens

1. Ik heb er tijd aan besteed om meer over mijn etnische groep te weten te komen, zoals de geschiedenis, tradities en gewoonten. \_\_\_\_
2. Ik ben actief in organisaties of sociale groepen waar voornamelijk leden van mijn etnische groep deel van uitmaken. \_\_\_\_
3. Ik heb een duidelijk idee van mijn etnische achtergrond en wat het voor me betekent. \_\_\_\_
4. Ik denk er vaak aan hoe mijn leven wordt beïnvloed doordat ik deel uitmaak van mijn etnische groep. \_\_\_\_
5. Ik ben blij dat ik hoor bij de etnische groep waar ik deel van uitmaak. \_\_\_\_
6. Ik voel me erg thuis bij mijn etnische groep. \_\_\_\_
7. Ik begrijp heel goed wat het voor mij betekent om deel uit te maken van mijn etnische groep. \_\_\_\_
8. Om meer over mijn etnische groep te weten te komen heb ik vaak over mijn etnische groep gesproken met anderen uit mijn etnische groep. \_\_\_\_
9. Ik ben erg trots op mijn etnische groep. \_\_\_\_
10. Ik neem deel aan culturele activiteiten van mijn groep, zoals speciaal eten, muziek en gewoonten. \_\_\_\_
11. Ik voel mij sterk verbonden met mijn etnische groep. \_\_\_\_
12. Ik heb een goed gevoel over mijn culturele of etnische achtergrond. \_\_\_\_

## Deel 2: Gerichtheid op Andere Groep

1. Ik vind het leuk om Nederlandse mensen te ontmoeten en te leren kennen. \_\_\_\_
2. Ik breng veel tijd door met mensen buiten mijn etnische groep. \_\_\_\_
3. Ik probeer vrienden te worden met Nederlandse mensen. \_\_\_\_
4. Ik neem deel aan activiteiten van andere etnische groepen. \_\_\_\_
5. Ik ga graag om met mensen van andere etnische groepen. \_\_\_\_
6. Ik voel mij verbonden met mensen buiten mijn etnische groep. \_\_\_\_
7. Soms voel ik mij meer Nederlander dan Soedanees. \_\_\_\_
8. Ik voel me thuis bij Nederlandse mensen. \_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C:**

### **The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 2004)**

In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, American Indian, Mexican American, Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be \_\_\_\_\_

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

**(4) Strongly agree    (3) Agree    (2) Disagree    (1) Strongly disagree**

- 1- I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.
- 2- I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.
- 3- I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
- 4- I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.
- 5- I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.
- 6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
- 7- I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
- 8- In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.
- 9- I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.
- 10- I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.
- 11- I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
- 12- I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.
- 13- My ethnicity is
  - (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
  - (2) Black or African American
  - (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
  - (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic

- (5) American Indian/Native American
- (6) Mixed; Parents are from two different groups
- (7) Other (write in): \_\_\_\_\_

14- My father's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

15- My mother's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

### **The Other-Group Orientation Measure (Phinney, 1992)**

Originally, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure and the Other-Group Orientation Measure were presented together in one questionnaire in which the questions were mixed. Presented here are only those questions from the original questionnaire which constitute the original Other-Group Orientation Measure. Scoring is the same as for the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure.

- 1- I like meeting and getting to know people from ethnic groups other than my own.
- 2- I sometimes feel it would be better if different ethnic groups didn't try to mix together.
- 3- I often spend time with people from ethnic groups other than my own.
- 4- I don't try to become friends with people from other ethnic groups.
- 5- I am involved in activities with people from other ethnic groups.
- 6- I enjoy being around people from ethnic groups other than my own.