

Multilingualism And Identity Negotiation Among Third-Culture Individuals: Narratives And Perspectives

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Abstract

Within the context of third-culture individuals residing in Saudi Arabia, the current study analyzes the intricate interplay between multilingualism, sociocultural integration, and identity negotiation. The current research investigates the effect that linguistic proficiency, namely in Arabic and English, has on the process of identity negotiation within the context of a multicultural setting. The data for this investigation come from a diverse group of participants, and the study makes use of the information it provides. In addition to this, we investigate the effects that the integration of sociocultural factors has on the process of identity construction and development. The results of the study show that there are significant links between language competency and the process of negotiating one's identity. This highlights the malleable and ever-changing nature of identity within an environment that features many languages. In addition, the shaky link between sociocultural integration and identity negotiation sheds insight into the complex dynamics that exist between integration and identification within the framework of Saudi culture. The current research deepens our understanding of the processes of identity formation that take place within multicultural settings. These insights can be helpful to educators, policymakers, and individuals who are engaged in the complex procedures of identity creation.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Identity Negotiation, Sociocultural Integration, Third-Culture Individuals, Saudi Arabia.

Introduction

The importance of studying cultural identities and multilingualism has grown with the growth of globalization in today's society. Canagarajah (2013) are just two of many researchers who have recognized the importance of these factors in filling out our understanding of people's daily lives across a wide range of sociocultural settings. Because it is a country that bridges tradition and modernity, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia occupies a special place amid a dynamic and changing environment. This status distinguishes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from other countries. There is a growing population of people who identify as "third culture," or as having been exposed to many cultures and languages (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). The inclusion of these persons' narratives and viewpoints within the larger discourse of multilingualism and the process of negotiating one's identity (Kanno, 2003; Norton, 2013) is crucial but is frequently overlooked. Despite the importance of their existence, this is the case. This research aims to shed light on a hitherto unexplored area in the hopes of illuminating the complexities associated with the development of identity and the influence of language on third-culture persons now residing in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia, a country renowned for its cultural legacy and robust economy, has seen extraordinary transformations in recent decades, leading to a society that is increasingly varied and multicultural (Al-Masaeid, 2009). There is no denying Saudi Arabia's cultural significance and economic might. Pollock and Van Reken (2009) The emergence of a separate group of people known as third-culture folks is largely attributable to the presence of expatriates, international migrants, and foreign educational institutions. They are easily able to switch between cultural norms because of their extensive knowledge of more than one. These individuals, who are frequently born to parents of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds and who are

typically raised in a setting that is different from their parent's country of origin, inhabit a realm that is marked by a diverse fusion of cultures, languages, and identities.

Although there has been a lot of acknowledgement and examination of the experiences of third-culture persons in countries like Saudi Arabia (Picton & Urquhart, 2020), there hasn't been much investigation into the intricate connection between multilingualism and the process of identity negotiation among this group. The paucity of investigation may be traced back to the fact that not enough studies have been conducted on the subject so far. In Saudi Arabia, a country where Arabic is the official language but English is widely used in educational and professional contexts, there is a significant opportunity to study how people from a third cultural background strategically employ their linguistic abilities to negotiate their sense of self and belonging.

There is a blend of modern ideals and ancient traditions in the social climate of the Kingdom. Arab-Islamic customs, as described by Alnaim et al. (2023), run deep through Saudi society. Family relationships and social engagement are only two examples of how Saudis' daily lives are profoundly influenced by their traditions. While this is happening, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is undergoing a period of rapid transformation, as seen by the program known as Vision 2030. Saudi Arabia (Kingdom of), 2016 The goals of the initiative are to increase international cultural interchange, diversify the economy, and improve the quality of education. People, especially those who see themselves as third-culture people, engage in the complex task of negotiating their identities in a world that is complicated due to the intersection of tradition and modernity (Alnaim et al. (2023); Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016). The combination of timeless elements with contemporary touches produces this atmosphere.

There has been a lot of recent scholarly focus on the thorny issue of cultural identity negotiation, especially as it pertains to foreign nationals living in Saudi Arabia. As people travel through life and experience new languages and cultures, their identities undergo a constant process of creation, negotiation, and reinvention (Norton, 2019). Despite this,

not enough study has been done to completely understand the complex relationship between language choice, cultural consideration, and the development of an individual's identity within this specific group. At the heart of this research is the question of how people from different cultural origins who have settled in Saudi Arabia use their knowledge of many languages to negotiate and form their sense of self in this new environment. The research also seeks to understand the stories and viewpoints that develop as a result of their encounters.

Objective of the Study

The fundamental goal of this research is to examine how being multilingual influences the identity negotiations of Saudis with non-Arabic cultural backgrounds. The effort also aims to analyze the stories and views that come from these people's experiences.

Literature Review and Previous Studies

English has become the de facto working language in several fields, including economics, technology, and academia (Alsulaiman et al. 2023), even though Arabic is the official language of the country. The fact that both Arabic and English are widely recognized as working languages has helped to make Saudi Arabia famous across the world for its rich cultural variety. People in this setting can freely travel across linguistic and cultural boundaries, creating the ideal conditions for complex processes of identity negotiation.

Using a theoretical framework is crucial for understanding how people find their way and shape their identities within contexts defined by more than one language. Only by making use of a theoretical framework will this be possible. In their 1986 theory of social identity, Tajfel and Turner delved deeply into the mental mechanisms by which people place themselves and others into different social categories. This theory sheds light on these inquiries, making it more fruitful. It also sheds light on how joining such communities might change one's outlook on themselves and their subsequent behaviour. This idea is crucial because it affects how people negotiate their identities when they come from a third cultural background and must learn to move between different cultural and linguistic communities.

The formation of new hybrid identities is central to de Pinho Correia Ibrahim, (2020) theory of hybridity, which places heavy emphasis on the mixing and matching of many various cultures and languages. Because of their exposure to so many distinct cultures, people who have lived in what are called "third cultures" (whether as children or adults) typically display hybrid identities (Norton, 2019). This theoretical framework facilitates an understanding of the nebulous and ever-evolving characteristics of identity that are typical of this population.

Norton's (2019) theory of language and identity focuses heavy stress on the crucial role that language plays in the formation and development of personal identities. A person's native tongue does more than allow them to communicate with others; it also helps shape their sense of who they are culturally and individually. People who grow up in communities where more than one language is spoken often choose to express different aspects of who they are via the medium of a language other than their mother tongue, adding another layer of complexity to the process of negotiating who they are.

There is a distinct subset of the population known as "third-culture folks" who were raised in a nation that was not their parent's country of origin. Multiple elements, such as one's upbringing in a particular culture and language and one's life experiences, contribute to the development of a person's sense of self, as shown by the work of Pollock and Van Reken (2009). Current research on "third-culture kids" has looked at issues like cultural disorientation, questions of identity, and family ties to the host country at length (Al-Qahtani, 2021); Useem & Cottrell, 1996). These difficulties are merely the tip of the iceberg for those living in a third culture.

Multilingualism has great value in and of itself, but it also greatly facilitates the identity-negotiation process. According to the research (Norton, 2013; Blackledge & Creese, 2010), Studies have revealed that a person's self-perception and others' perceptions may be influenced by their linguistic preferences, proficiency, and the social environment in which they use language. This may be true of the person themselves or how they are seen by others.

Members of third-culture communities, as described by Grosjean (2010), engage in intricate processes of identity negotiation. Individuals' proficiency in more than one language directly contributes to these processes. The use of a certain language in a range of settings has a symbolic purpose in the context of identity negotiation.

Methods

Third-culture individuals in Saudi Arabia were the focus of a cross-sectional survey for this study's quantitative data collection. The actualized layout allowed for the recording of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the participants at a given time concerning the use of many languages and the process of establishing a sense of self during identity negotiations.

Convenience sampling was used to recruit the study participants. To reach the right expat and third-culture people in Saudi Arabia, recruiters relied heavily on social media and email lists. The following conditions were met by study participants to be considered for participation: First, those who were raised in a country other than their parents are considered "third culture." As of right present, the person is in Saudi Arabia. There is a minimum age requirement of 18 years old to participate in the research. Also important is the participant's eagerness to take an active role in the study.

A brief explanation of the study's purpose, a consent form, and a link to the online survey were all included in the recruiting materials. The participants' responses would remain anonymous and private, as was promised.

Online surveys built on a dedicated survey platform were used to collect the necessary information. The online survey was pilot-tested with a small group of people who consider themselves to be members of a third culture to evaluate the questions' clarity and comprehension. Once the survey had been edited to include the feedback and was complete, it was sent out to the intended respondents.

Participants were asked to provide basic personal information such as age, gender, country, and language spoken at home. Self-evaluations of language proficiency

were solicited from participants in many languages (including Arabic and English). Language usage in a variety of settings, including the home, the office, and social gatherings, was also surveyed. Preexisting measures (Norton, 2000; Phinney, 1992) served as the major source for developing an instrument to evaluate identity negotiation. The participants answered questions on how they've dealt with issues of identity in the past. To gauge the level of agreement or disagreement with each statement, participants used a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being a strong disapproval and 5 a strong endorsement. The participants answered a set of questions meant to gauge their level of self-reported intercultural competence in the context of Saudi Arabian society.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic information, linguistic proficiency, and identity negotiation instruments, with means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages being calculated. The relationships between our two dependent variables, language ability and identity negotiation, were analyzed using a bivariate correlation test (Pearson's correlation). To determine how much linguistic ability and other relevant characteristics may influence identity negotiation scores, the research used multiple regression analysis. To identify recurring themes and patterns in the responses to the open-ended questions, the researchers used thematic analysis on the collected qualitative data.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Age	28.6	5.2	20	42
Years in Saudi Arabia	8.4	3.1	3	15
Arabic Proficiency	4.2	0.9	2	5
English Proficiency	3.8	1.0	2	5
Identity Negotiation	3.6	0.7	2.2	4.8

Sociocultural Integration	3.9	0.8	2.5	5
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Participants' ages ranged from around 18 to 102 years old, with a mean of 28.6 and a standard deviation of 5.2. What this means is that the sample was skewed toward young adults. Participants' average time spent living in Saudi Arabia was 8.4 years, with a standard variation of 3.1 years. This finding hints at a constant and lasting presence throughout the country. On a scale from 1 to 5, the participants reported an average of 4.2 and a standard deviation of 0.9 for their level of Arabic language ability. This result suggests that the participants, on average, have a high level of proficiency in Arabic.

On a scale from 1 to 5, the average score for English proficiency was 3.8, with a standard deviation of 1.0. Based on these results, it seems that the participants' command of the English language is below average, yet respectable. There was a mean identity negotiation score of 3.6 and a standard deviation of 0.7. Based on their survey responses, this study suggests that individuals engaged in identity negotiation to a moderate extent, on average. The average score for participants' intercultural competence was 3.9, with a standard deviation of 0.8. This finding provides evidence that integration is widely accepted as a part of Saudi culture.

Table 2: Correlational Analysis - Language Proficiency and Identity Negotiation

Variable	Arabic Proficiency	English Proficiency
Identity Negotiation	0.426**	0.312*

Participants' identity negotiation scores were positively correlated with their level of Arabic proficiency ($r = 0.426$, $p = 0.01$). This research suggests that individuals with higher levels of Arabic language proficiency are more likely to engage in central identity negotiation processes within the context of Saudi Arabian culture. The importance of their identification negotiations increases as their Arabic language skills grow. Proficient command of English has been shown to correlate positively with identity negotiation

scores ($r = 0.312$, $p = 0.05$). In contrast to Arabic, the correlation between participants' levels of English proficiency and identity negotiation is less, but it does seem to imply that a higher level of English proficiency is associated with a larger degree of identity negotiation. This may imply that those who speak English well are more likely to engage in self-discovery and identity-formation activities.

Table 3: Regression Analysis - Predictors of Identity Negotiation

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	p-value
Arabic Proficiency	0.536	0.123	0.436*	<0.01
English Proficiency	0.292	0.135	0.276*	<0.05
Age	0.012	0.028	0.056	0.643
Years in Saudi Arabia	-0.041	0.064	-0.096	0.513
Sociocultural Integration	0.317	0.174	0.207	0.078
Constant	2.823	0.418		<0.001

Those who scored higher on measures of identity negotiation also tended to have a high level of Arabic proficiency, according to the research. The significance level for this correlation is quite high (Beta = 0.436, $p = 0.01$). These results imply that there is a positive correlation between Arabic fluency and identity negotiation scores after controlling for other components in the model, with a projected increase of 0.436 units for each one-unit increase in Arabic fluency. Together, these results from two studies corroborate the hypothesis that people who are more fluent in Arabic also negotiate their identities more actively. The research found that proficiency in English was an important predictor of identity negotiation scores (Beta = 0.276, $p = 0.05$). After controlling for other factors, a positive correlation between English proficiency and identity negotiation scores is expected, with a predicted gain of 0.276 units in the latter for every one-unit rise in the former. Correlational research supports this anecdotal evidence, showing a positive association between English language

skills and active participation in the identity-formation process.

Beta = 0.056, $p = 0.643$ shows that there is no correlation between how well one does in identity negotiation and one's age. This indicates that, for this investigation, disparities in how individuals of different ages negotiate their identities are not significantly attributable to their chronological age. The same holds for the length of time spent in Saudi Arabia; there is no significant link between the two variables ($r = -0.096$, $p = 0.513$). This result suggests that the length of time spent in Saudi Arabia does not greatly contribute to the comprehension of variations in the procedure of identity negotiation.

The findings suggest that social and cultural integration has a small but non-zero effect on identity negotiation scores (Beta = 0.207, $p = 0.078$). Although the results may not be statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), they do suggest that a higher level of perceived sociocultural integration may have little effect on identity negotiation.

Discussion

Role of Language Proficiency in Identity Negotiation

Rather than being only a means of exchange, language, as Norton (2013) argues, is intrinsic to who we are as individuals. Since Arabic is so deeply woven into the fabric of Saudi culture and society, knowing the language well is essential for anyone living in the country as a third-culture member (Al-Rasheed, 2010). It's a crucial channel through which they may express themselves and find their way around the local culture. Learning Arabic fluently opens doors to a richer experience of Saudi society and its own set of values, beliefs, and customs. People's ability to successfully manage roles and relationships within the local culture is a major factor in the prominence of the identity negotiation process.

The findings highlight the fact that when individuals from a third-culture background improve their Arabic language abilities, their identity negotiation processes become more prominent. Using the idea of identity flexibility may shed light on this phenomenon and help us understand it better.

The capacity to express one's unique individuality in a variety of linguistic and cultural settings is one of the hallmarks of a multilingual person, as noted by Grosjean (2010). People who are fluent in Arabic can switch between several personas with ease in the Saudi Arabian culture. They may adjust their actions and words to fit in with the social mores of Saudi society. Having the ability to adapt is crucial in the process of identity negotiation, as it allows people to successfully manage their identities when they move between linguistic and cultural milieus.

By looking at the positive link between English proficiency and identity negotiation scores, Alsulaiman (2019) highlights the value of English proficiency in Saudi Arabia's multicultural society. This discovery highlights the importance of English as a national language for fostering communication and cultural exchange. The universality of the English language makes it possible for people of different linguistic and cultural origins to communicate with one another. People who have experienced life in more than one culture and who are fluent in English are frequently well-suited to take part in such discussions and successfully navigate the complex dynamics that may arise while doing so.

Possessing a high level of competence in this language enables people from a third-culture background to engage effectively in many social and occupational arenas in a sociolinguistically diverse country like Saudi Arabia, where English is used extensively in educational, commercial, and global domains. Cross-cultural encounters might force people to adjust their identities to communicate with and form bonds with others who speak a variety of different languages and cultural norms. Identity is fluid and changing for those who identify with third-culture groups, hence the ability to manage that identity in a multicultural context is highly prized.

Multilingualism and Hybrid Identity

According to Easthope (1998), the term "hybrid identity" describes how an individual's sense of self is formed via exposure to and incorporation of elements from other cultures and languages. It recognizes that people who live in

multicultural environments frequently build identities that contain components from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Third-culture individuals in Saudi Arabia exhibit hybridity as they handle the complex interplay between Arabic, English, and their unique cultural backgrounds.

According to the study's results, bilinguals in Arabic and English are more inclined to engage in a public process of identity negotiation. Therefore, being multilingual is indicative of a hybrid identity, as individuals in Saudi Arabia employ their language skills to navigate the country's numerous cultural and linguistic landscapes. With the capacity to switch between languages and cultures with ease, bilinguals can adapt their sense of self to fit any circumstance (Grosjean, 2010).

People who are bilingual in Arabic and English have an advantage in the Saudi context, as both languages play important roles in the realms of education, business, and daily life. These individuals can more easily blend traditional Saudi values with modern global perspectives. A hybrid identity, drawing from aspects of both local and global cultures, may be formed via the process of integration. Third-culture kids (or adults) are those who, having experienced more than one culture at a young age, have made a conscious decision to incorporate elements of each into their sense of who they are.

The findings corroborate the idea that a person's choice of language may be an important expression of their hybrid identity (Norton, 2013). An individual's linguistic preferences as a third-culture member will vary depending on their goals, the people they interact with, and the predominating cultural norms in any particular situation. Individuals' strategic linguistic choices reveal their hybrid identities as they draw on a range of language abilities to negotiate social situations and represent different aspects of who they are.

Third-culture kids who are bilingual in Arabic and English often choose to speak the latter in a professional business setting. This selection serves to show respect for local customs while still conveying an air of professionalism. In a more casual setting with a diverse group of friends and

acquaintances, some people may find that speaking English helps them feel more at ease and allows them to connect with people from all over the world. These alternatives show how language may be used to negotiate one's identity, highlighting the complexity of hybridity in a multiethnic society like Saudi Arabia.

The study emphasizes a key aspect of hybrid identity: its fluid and situational nature. Identity is not a fixed concept but rather one that is fluid and ever-changing (Norton, 2013). Multilingualism is a social phenomenon that allows individuals to fluidly adapt and realign their identities as they move across linguistic and cultural milieus. Individuals from different cultural backgrounds in Saudi Arabia demonstrate the aforementioned adaptability by deftly negotiating not just language but also cultural and social differences.

When individuals can utilize their command of many languages to negotiate and mold their identities in a variety of settings, the malleability of hybridity is shown. Some people may choose to stress their Saudi Arabian heritage, while others may want to showcase their global experiences. While doing so, they work hard to hold on to a core identity that has been shaped by all of these factors. The hybrid identity that develops in multiethnic settings is characterized by the ability to adapt and negotiate one's identity in response to changing circumstances.

Sociocultural Integration and Identity Negotiation

Several elements, including cultural adaptability, social interactions, and a sense of belonging, play a role in the intricate process of sociocultural integration (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Individuals from a non-Arabic speaking background in Saudi Arabia may experience different levels of integration depending on their history, personal circumstances, and the extent to which they engage with the local society (Al-Maeena, 2014). The study found a weakly significant association, which agrees with other studies finding that integration is a time-consuming and intricate process influenced by several factors (Schönpflug, 2001). Therefore, the impact of integration on the

procedure of identity negotiation may not always be obvious or consistent.

One possible link between the two is the dynamic interplay between cultural assimilation and identity negotiation. As individuals get a deeper understanding of their place in Saudi culture, they may begin to participate in identity negotiation activities. Purposefully changing one's behaviour to fit in with local customs is one strategy for assimilating to a new culture (Douceirain, 2019). The effects of assimilation into the host culture on shifts in identity orientation and identification strategies have recently been the focus of academic inquiry (Ward et al., 2018). Third-culture individuals in Saudi Arabia may actively negotiate their identities to better fit in with the local society, especially as they grow more rooted in the country's culture.

The importance of identity fluidity is shown by research on the effects of multiculturalism on the dynamic of identity negotiation (Guo, 2018). Identity flexibility is the ability to adapt one's sense of self to new and different social and cultural contexts. Hong et al. (2000) argue that people who consider themselves to be part of a "third culture" and who feel more at home in Saudi Arabian society are more likely to be able to shift their identity to fit new environments. As the study demonstrates, one aspect contributing to the marginal importance of the observed correlation is the capacity to adjust and negotiate one's identity following the sociocultural norms of the host society.

On the other hand, it's possible that actively negotiating one's identity might serve as a path to greater social and cultural acceptance. New research emphasizes the two-way relationship between identity renegotiation and social adjustment (Kuo et al., 2014). From this vantage point, one could argue that expats in Saudi Arabia actively engage in a process of identity negotiation, which helps them better understand the local culture, build stronger social networks, and feel more at home there. The aforementioned identity-negotiation processes may, over time, encourage a more nuanced and all-encompassing view of intercultural integration.

Saudi Arabia's social climate adds layers of complexity to the already complex dance of assimilation and identity negotiation. According to Al-Rasheed (2010), Saudi culture is characterized by a unique blend of the old and the new. Especially in urban areas, third-culture people must negotiate not just the traditional cultural norms but also the effects of globalization. Recent studies by Hertog (2019) have highlighted the challenges and opportunities presented by the presence of two cultural contexts. Therefore, the occurrence of a relationship of marginal importance in the study may be explained by the intricate dynamics at play when individuals are called upon to negotiate their identities across different cultural and historical contexts.

Conclusion

The study's results suggest that third-culture individuals' capacity to speak Arabic and English has a significant bearing on their ability to negotiate their identities in Saudi Arabia. Learning Arabic allows one to take part in and appreciate the nuances of one's community while mastering English paves the way for successful cross-cultural conversation and interaction. Being able to fluently move between several linguistic and cultural identities is strong evidence of a hybridized sense of self. This study's findings underscore the importance of language training and cultural integration programs by drawing attention to the malleable and contextual nature of identity negotiation in a multiethnic setting.

Based on the results, it seems that the degree to which a person feels integrated into Saudi Arabian culture may have a modest influence on the dynamics of their identity throughout the process of identity negotiation. There is a tight relationship between the processes of integration and identity negotiation, in which individuals adjust their identities to fit local cultural standards in response to a developing sense of belonging. Actively negotiating one's identity, on the other hand, may pave the way for deeper sociocultural integration as individuals forge meaningful connections and acquire a deeper understanding of the host society. The intricacy of this connection and the difficulty of

the process of negotiating identity are heightened by the fact that the Saudi sociocultural context is characterized by a blend of traditional and modern features.

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