Language Policies and the Construction of Identities
08-09 March 2023

The language of an individual or even a speech community and the identity of the speaker(s) of that language are inextricable. That is why, it is often said that "language acts are acts of identity" (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985). For many sociolinguists, anthropologists, and philosophers, this is an assumed piece of knowledge which is undoubtedly as old as human speech itself. By contrast, linguistic differences are also viewed as representation of identity differences. Linguistic differences very commonly create divisiveness among very proximate people or even among the same groups of the same nation. This explains how language can be a crucial marking feature of identity.

Nonetheless, the relationship between languages and identity is still murky. This is presumably due to the complexity of definitions and functions inherent to both of them and which range from simplistic ones till rather complex demarcations. The definition of language, for instance, may be as simple as "… a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communications", Wardaugh (1972). This simplified definition puts excessive weight on the vocal property of language and its communicative function. However, for Heidegger, to be is to be in the logos viz. language. Perhaps, this is why human beings are philosophically characterized as "speaking creatures". It is also in this respect that the famous existential cogito "I speak, therefore I exist" can be understood. In other words, language is not just a neutral means of communication, but a social system which reflects existence and expresses identity. No doubt, any researcher who intends to investigate into language and the related issues would find himself confronted with this great diversity of conceptual delimitations. Yet, the issue becomes more complicated when one attempts to deal with language in relation to identity.

The definition of identity, in turn, commences from the simple personal pieces of information encoded in the official card issued for every citizen and often reduced to a neutral numerical code. In other contexts, an individual's identity extends to encompass all aspects of human collective belonging. Norton (2013) defines identity as "how people understand their relationship to the outside world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future". Thus, components of identity would comprise other ingredients such as the ethnic race, the geographical environment, the cultural features, the historical traits, and even the future prospects; all of which contribute to shaping an individual's/community personality. Hence, the relationship between language and identity cannot be handled straightforwardly; the link between these two concepts is rather complex and manifests at various levels.

At the international level, the threads of the issue are intertwined with the advent of cultural and civilizational globalization, where powerful civilizations seek to dominate the cultures and languages of vulnerable communities. The relationship has become even more complex after the technological explosion. In fact, the development of the means of communication has made the world a small village in which the East is connected to the West and the North to the South, in a continuous cross-fertilization which transcends the traditional determinants of identity such as geographical boundaries, ethnic diversity, and racial differences. Even linguistic differences are threatened by the repercussions of what is known as "linguistic imperialism." In many parts of the world, a group of powerful foreign languages are steadily permeating the labor market, stock exchanges, and all stages of manufacturing and marketing. Accordingly, many indigenous languages are at risk in their territory. Here, a pertinent stressful question arises: which is the first to be given priority: economic and developmental interests or identity and cultural foundations.

In the Arab and Islamic countries, the language and identity relationship is no better for various reasons. First, a variety of multilingual situations tends to complicate the question of identity in these countries. Second, the non-homogeneous language policies adopted by the governments do not reflect any political plan to unify the local linguistic choices. Third, the calls to promote the status of regional dialects are constantly increasing. Forth, educational systems in these countries are also multilingual where the student is subjected to a variety of linguistic input from very early ages. Fifth, the languages/dialects of the media are extremely diversified; they differ not only from one country to another but from one city to another within one and the same country.

All these factors augment the tension between language and identity to levels never ever witnessed before. They also reveal that language/identity relationship in the Arab world is dynamic and is subjected to ongoing processes. Whenever interlocutors interact in the second language, they are somehow involved in identity shaping and negotiation. Therefore, it is quite legitimate to believe that the existence of language policy automatically subsumes the existence of some kind of identity policy.

In order to discuss these and other related issues, the research group of Language Policy and Language Contact, within the Laboratory of Values, Society and Development, organizes its third international conference on Language and Current Issues on the theme of "Language Policies and the Construction of Identities" on 08-09 March 2023 at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Ibn Zohr University, Agadir - Morocco.

We are pleased to invite you to participate in this international conference. The topics of interest include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Language policy and identity construction: theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches.
- Foreign language learning/teaching and the identity construction.
- The multi-dimensional relationship between language and identity in multilingual contexts.
- Language policy and identity construction in media, culture, and art.
- Language policy and identity construction in educational curricula and textbooks.
- Language policy and identity construction in economics and technology.
- Language policy and identity preservation/construction in diaspora.
- Language and gender identities.
- Language Policy, the "self", and the "other".

Important dates

- Abstract submission deadline: **October 15th, 2022.**
- Notification of abstract acceptance: Done on a regular basis starting **from July 30th 2022 until October 20th, 2022.**
- Full papers submission deadline: **January 15th, 2023.**
- Notification of final acceptance: **January 30th, 2023.**
- Conference: **8-9 March 2023**

Publication

The selected articles will subsequently be published in a refereed conference proceedings volume (cf. instructional guidelines on the conference website).

Languages

English / Arabic / French.

Organizing Committee

- **Abdelaziz Ait Taleb**
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- **Abderrahim Mimouni**
- **Aziz Driouch**
- **Belkacem Laghfiri**
- **Brahim Machaal**

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Conference Coordinator

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Conference Fees

- Practitioners from inside Morocco 600 MAD / Practitioners from other countries 100 USD
- Students from inside Morocco 300 MAD / Students from other countries 50 USD

NB.

- *The registration fees cover the conference documents, two coffee breaks, and two lunch. meals*
- *Participants from Ibn Zohr University are exempted from fees*

Contacts

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