

TOWARD AN IDENTITY STRESS

*Language and religious affiliations of an immigrant adolescent in Norway¹***Abstract**

This paper explores the usefulness of different languages in determining and shaping the notions of identity of a second-generation immigrant adolescent in Norway. This research is part of a doctoral study based on the sociolinguistic ethnographic method of inquiry on an Indian immigrant family. The verbal repertoire of the Norwegian informant includes many languages and each of the languages contributes to different meanings in the construction of the informant's identity. The informant's language practices are influenced by the language ideologies of his parents, who endeavor to maintain the culture and languages of their country of origin. One of the core issues for the family members is the perseverance of their religion and hence a religious identity is manifested in the narratives of the informant. Besides, a lack of adequate language competencies in parental languages and a desire to maintain the culture of origin in the family premises, the young adolescent shows signs of identity stress.

Keywords

Identity stress • Family language policy • Islamic identity • Indian immigrant family in Norway • Language practices

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1 Introduction

Languages have been instrumental in shaping the ideological framework of people, and consequently languages have ramifications for identity. Furthermore, the constant hybridization in a globalized world through the mobility of humans and resources has added new factors that regulate identities. Before exploring how languages exert an influence on one's identity, it would be appropriate to provide a working definition of the term "identity" for the current study. Several authors have recognized the intricacies of this term that fails to generate a single definition to which all could ascribe (ed. Herrberg 1998: 10; Riley 2007: 70). I will attempt to formulate this concept as a parameter to portray the image of oneself with some potential of a generic kind, and further, this aspect is explored on the basis of several backgrounds and affiliations such as ethnic, regional, linguistic, religious, caste, tribal and gender. The identity factor is pervasive and hence no one is deprived of it. Taking into consideration social factors, Riley (2007: 87) argues that the definition of identity is applicable "with reference to others, since others are its principal source". What this implies, therefore, is that it is the others

who define and attribute a set of identities to us or to a particular ethnic group. From this perspective, we witness the national debates on identity (in France² or in Germany³), with nationalistic movements raising the issues of languages and identity in the Western regimes (Schmid 2001: 9) or in the Asian countries (Simpson 2007), and these all affect the discourse of the local communities. As a result, the examples of portraying images of selfhood by the marginalized groups occur in order to oppose the hegemonic beliefs by inventing a new parlance (*verlan* in France; *kanakspråk* in Germany), by music (hip-hop culture) or by variations (Ferguson 1996: 190). In all these instances, we see the defining process of identity by others and the manifestation of selfhood identity. These two concepts of identities are succinctly captured by Dong and Blommaert (2009: 16) who refer to Blommaert and others (Blommaert 2005, 2007; Hinnenkamp 1991; Butler 1990; Goffman 1981), "one's self-constructed and claimed identities (...) have to be recognized by others – ascribed or attributed identities – so as to be established in social reality (...)".

Language and identity have been found intertwined by many social scientists and scholars (Gumperz 1982; Tabouret-Keller 1997;

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ed. Fishman 1999; Joseph 2004; Edwards 2009). It implies in a manner that language is an integral component of the identity. Attributing a particular identity on the basis of language spoken is a general perception that we find in many literatures, but researches in post-structural and hybridized society based on mobility have shown that there might be no relevance between language spoken and identity attributed. Blommaert (2009) has warned against the etiquette of attributing a certain identity based on “monoglot ideology”⁴ of an individual, which might prove to be erroneous, as he has shown in a case study of an asylum seeker in London. Language is undoubtedly the principal exemplar of identity but identity does not need necessarily the languages to draft its characteristics. Edwards (2009: 19) reminds the basic notion of identity as follows, “it signifies the sameness of an individual at all times or in all circumstances”. The main point is therefore, irrespective of the language(s) and the cultural practices we pursue, we all manifest an identity unique to ourselves. Following this argument, the designation of *identity crisis* might not hold true and it will be more viable to employ the term *identity stress* which I find reverent and less stigmatic for the immigrant groups in particular. The identity stress can be defined primarily as the state where one is unable to affiliate to a particular group or a particular mode of culture. Such a condition stems from reproach by the dominant groups or by political discourses toward the less privileged community.

In this study, my objective is to draw attention to the linguistic aspects of the identity stress of a second-generation Indian immigrant adolescent (RAF⁵) in Norway. The emphasis here is to raise those issues which mark the identity of a person from the viewpoint of a number of languages present in his or her verbal repertoire. Each language ascribes to a specific identity. Apart from disposing some competencies in the parental languages, it is in particular, the notions in religious language – Qur’anic Arabic which has been influential in shaping the identity of RAF. Religion seems to be a traditional linchpin in this informant’s life. Edwards (2009: 100) points out citing Safran (2008) that “religion was historically more often the bedrock of identity, and that its replacement by language is a more contemporary phenomenon”. Showing traits of a different religious affiliation from the one which is prevalent in the host country and a multilingual repertoire comprising mostly linguistic codes of the country of origin, the current paper examines the degree of identity stress manifested by the informant. The paper will seek to address the following question: In what manner does the multilingual repertoire supplemented with religious beliefs affect the identity of the informant in a migratory context?

2 Methodology and sociolinguistic profile of the family members

This paper is part of an ongoing doctoral study⁶ on the language practices and policies of four immigrant families of Indian origin in four European countries – France, Sweden, Norway and Finland.

The qualitative approach constitutes the primary mode of investigation and analysis in this doctoral study. The three tools that were employed to gather the data were: (i) questionnaires, (ii) interviews (open-ended) and (iii) conversation recordings of family members inside their homes. Some ethnographic methods carried out during the fieldwork consisted of (i) participant observation, (ii) member-checking, (iii) triangulation and (iv) *linguistic homescapes*. The latter, inspired by an ethnographic tool, *outcroppings* that according to Fetterman (1998: 57–58), comprises the study of outer surfaces, particularly in an urban setting, such as skyscrapers, graffiti, urine on the wall, etc. I applied this approach in the home setting by studying the presence of various languages visible in the home environment on books, calendars, newspapers, cassettes, kitchen products, religious items, etc.

Sharing the same linguistic and religious background as of the family members residing in Norway, my role in the fieldwork can be compared to that of *insider*. In fact, I speak the same first and second languages as the parents, Urdu and Hindi, and therefore, my presence did not alter the mechanism of language practices inside the house of the participants. Moreover, I come from the same region of India as the parents, which has facilitated my quick immersion in the field.

In my first contact with the family members residing in Norway, questionnaires were sent to them by e-mail, which were then filled out and returned. The fieldwork conducted on this family occurred in September 2007 when interviews were carried out with family members in addition to the recording of their conversations. After this period of fieldwork, some members (the father and his two sons) were followed, for two years (2007–2009), on *Facebook*⁷ in order to observe their language practices and attitudes with friends, relatives, and other contacts. Previous academic studies related to identity, for example, by Hargittai (2008) and Bumgarner (2007) have been conducted using this social network platform. Concerning the ethical issues which might arise in the case of such ethnographic research in which regular contact with humans is maintained, the parental consent was obtained after the family had been apprised about the purpose and tools of research. This includes my *online* research relationship with informants, in which case they knew that it was a part of my empirical study.

The family resides in Norway and consists of two parents and five children. The father (45 years old⁸) arrived in 1996 as a doctoral student in petroleum engineering. After a gap of six months, his wife and two sons joined him in Norway. Upon completion of his doctoral studies, the father joined a company run by his American supervisor (from the United States). The mother (35 years old) was a stay-at-home mother who took care of the household. When the children arrived in Norway, the eldest son (RAF, 16 years old) was 5 years old and the second son (14 years) was about one and a half years old. Three children were subsequently born in the host country, among them were two girls aged 7 and 5 years, respectively, whereas the third child was a boy born in January 2011.

The parents report their first language to be Urdu, which is also the second official language of their home state in Bihar, India. Other languages which the father speaks are English, Hindi, and Norwegian. The mother learnt Hindi and English during her school days and her Norwegian classes are twice a week. All the children⁹ have reported Urdu as their first language. In addition, they also have a working knowledge of English which they are learning at school as one of their subjects. The three children are enrolled in Norwegian medium schools, while the fourth one goes to an English-speaking daycare. The eldest son, RAF, reports some truncated competency in the Hindi language, as he was enrolled in a daycare in a Hindi-speaking region prior to his immigration to Norway.

3 Language practices

Society in India is composed of a complex social structure which, for example, encompasses ethnic, linguistic and religious diversities. According to Pandit (1977), if we formulate the sociolinguistic scenario of India, “language maintenance is a norm and shift is an exception”. The first generation of this Indian family has maintained the same linguistic behavior of their country of origin in the host country. The Norwegian language policies, on their part, also encourage maintaining the diversity of codes among its citizens. Husby (2007) points out that “dialects are utilized extensively in all the public fields such as at schools, on the radio, on the television and even in the parliament”. At the national level, the Norwegian language is recognized in two distinct varieties, Bokmål and Nynorsk, the former comprising the written Danish, a standard form, while the latter represents more dialectal borrowings. The societal bilingualism manifested through the practices of various codes by the people in Norway allows a favorable environment for a migrant family to maintain its own languages and cultures. In my doctoral study conducted on other immigrant Indian family members in France and Sweden, where the host languages dominate in all domains as the only official languages, *de jure* in France and *de facto* in Sweden, showed that the second-generation children speak only French and Swedish.

The language practices of the Indian informants in Norway emanate from the family language policy in which the parents have specified certain roles for languages in the socialization of their children. Previous studies have reported that in a migratory context, the parents set certain guidelines for the maintenance of their first language(s) in the household which differ from the language practices of the resident country (Billiez 1985; Haque 2010; Matthey 2010). These *guidelines* reflect the ideological aspect of the first generation, which are imposed on the children as a kind of policy, and in fact, this deals with the decisions made on the usage and learning for each and every language spoken in the household as well as outside the home, something that has been documented in several published articles as a “family language policy” (Curdt-Christiansen 2009; King *et al.* 2008; Haque 2011). In the case of this family, the

parents have maintained the usage of the Urdu language at home. As a consequence, all the children are addressed in this language and they reply in the same language to their parents.

However, the parents of this family have not carried out the home language instruction in their Urdu language. Furthermore, no such instruction in this language is implemented in the local municipal schools, as reported by the parents. The educational language policy in Norway promotes and paves the way for teaching of all languages of its different ethnic groups in the schools. As far as instruction of immigrant languages is concerned, Wiggen (1995: 71) points out that over 100 languages are taught in school premises. However, it has been found that in primary schools, such instructions are reserved for students with low or no competence in the Norwegian language whereas in the secondary schools provisions are made for the teaching of immigrants’ languages if certain requirements are met: minimum number of pupils should be between 4 and 5 and the availability of a qualified instructor of the target language. In a study on the situation of migrant education in Norway, Taguma *et al.* (2009) noted that several pedagogical activities are carried out in primary schools related to the *mother tongue* of the immigrant population in order to develop competency in Norwegian and as well as in their own heritage language. RAF’s mother stated during the interview that some video programs related to Hindi films are shown to their children in their Norwegian daycare. Furthermore, to orient their children toward the culture and languages of the country of origin, the parents visit India often. The mother expressed that her youngest child was slow in speaking the Urdu language:

In my family, the children did not have difficulty in speaking Urdu. It was only ZAR (the fourth child) who was very late in speaking Urdu. But I was not worried. Last time, we planned to visit India so that ZAR can learn and speak quickly. When we came back from India, she started speaking Urdu. (Translated from Urdu, Personal Interview, September the 11th, 2007).

The above extract indicates that the parents relied on their trips to India as a part of their effort to transmit a first language to their children. Moreover, the parents often invited their relatives from India to stay in their home, and in particular, the grandmother of RAF, who lives in London and who speaks only Urdu. RAF’s grandmother stayed for a prolonged period at the house of this family. These types of encounters with Urdu-speakers at home provides an opportunity for interaction with different speakers using Urdu, and hence enhances the children’ interest in speaking and learning their parents’ language.

By engaging in multiple interactions with the speakers of the same region, the second generation has developed the same regional register of Urdu that their parents use in their verbal communication. For example, the choice of *ham* (the first-person plural pronoun in Hindi/Urdu, we) over *mein* (the first-person singular pronoun in Hindi/Urdu, I) is used commonly by the speakers of the eastern Hindi region in Bihar and in East Uttar Pradesh (Davison 1999: 398),

and this signifies an important criterion for identity. Hence, RAF indicates his regional identity of eastern India by employing uniquely the first-person plural pronoun in his speech during the interview and conversations.

According to RAF's father, all his children were first enrolled in an English daycare and later they were sent to a Norwegian medium-school¹⁰. In this way, according to him, the children acquire a good knowledge of the English language, which they can continue to develop later in their schooling while learning Norwegian at the same time. As the Norwegian language is predominately spoken in most of the school subjects and also in various activities in addition to the environment, RAF finds himself more competent in Norwegian than in any of the other languages he reports to have in his verbal repertoire.

4 Roles and functions of languages employed by RAF

The several languages which are spoken by RAF have specific purposes and functions. From childhood until his adolescence, RAF has noticed the function of these languages which were characterized by his parents' language practices and language behavior. In other words, each of these languages marks the identity of a person which we will analyze in the next section.

By communicating in the Urdu language in their household and by its overarching presence over the other languages, the parents of RAF have established the status of this language as being the most important. In a migratory movement, though the first languages of the parents are eroded away by the dominance of the host languages (Schmid 2001: 68; Saville-Troike 2003: 198), this family has enforced strict discipline in the maintenance of the Urdu language. As a result, RAF reports Urdu to be his favorite and he feels more comfortable in expressing his views or his anger in this language than he does in any other.

Another language which RAF speaks is Hindi. The similarity between Hindi and Urdu is so close on the phonological and grammatical levels that they are thought to be one language (Narang 1999: xiv). However, there is a marked difference in lexical items for several terms in both languages (Urdu has borrowed from Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Sanskrit whereas Hindi has borrowed exclusively from Sanskrit) but at the same time, many identical words are found in both languages. Another difference is noted in the written script, as Hindi uses Devanagari, whereas Urdu is written in the Perso-Arabic script. RAF uses Hindi for communication with his parents but mostly relies upon the Urdu lexical items. During the interview, RAF uttered some words of Hindi and verified to me whether he was using Hindi or Urdu. The use of Hindi is reported in watching Indian movies where the actors speak Hindustani, an idiom mixed of Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and English.

The Norwegian language is primarily reserved for interaction with peers on the school premises. RAF mentions the use of Norwegian

on the Internet, sending e-mail messages and SMS¹¹, speaking on the telephone, reading newspapers, watching television, listening to the radio and playing video-games with his younger brother. He invites his school friends to his home and he communicates with them in Norwegian only, one of the rare moments when he speaks Norwegian at home.

From the viewpoint of an impact and the importance in RAF's daily life, English is his third language. During his early daycare period, he already became acquainted with English, and continued to learn it as a subject in his Norwegian school. RAF noticed the importance of English in two ways: first, from his father, the breadwinner in the family, who uses English in his workplace and second, this language was useful in maintaining contacts with his cousins in England and with people from the parents' native India. Another point of interest for RAF in this language was the fact that the American foreman of his father gave him some video games in English as a gift. He also reports the use of English in making small documentary movies related to India, in writing on his Internet blogs and in reading books and journals.

The last language which was not reported by any of the family members, including RAF, but whose practice was observed during the fieldwork is Qur'anic Arabic. RAF acknowledged that he has the reading knowledge of the classical Arabic in which Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, is written. He also said that he has learnt some verses to recite them during prayers but he regrets that his reading skill is poor in this language. All the family members are found to have some reading skill in Qur'anic Arabic in order to perform the ritual or religious ceremonies.

Thus far, we have noticed how each language is allotted different functions to perform different activities in RAF's daily life. In some cases, RAF utilizes two or more languages to perform the same function. Likewise, speaking on the telephone can be in Urdu, Norwegian or English, depending upon RAF's interlocutor. Furthermore, in the same way, all the activities which he reported doing in the Norwegian language can also be undertaken in English, except talking with his school friends, teachers, administrative personnel and local inhabitants, as he communicates with them solely in Norwegian.

5 Plurality of identity

In a society such as found in India, where several religions and several languages are found to share the same space, the pluralism of languages in use and the knowledge of various cultures are inherited naturally by the inhabitants, leading to a plurality of identity dynamics. These different identities are manifested through different languages. Annamalai (2001: 36) observes on the functional distribution of languages as, "one language is for ethnic identity, another for business transactions, another for official dealings, another for entertainment, another for rituals and so on". In the case of RAF, Urdu portrays his ethnic identity and his relationship to India, whereas Norwegian is for

local communication, and it is also used for various other activities in daily life with the English language. On the other hand, Qur'anic Arabic illustrates religious identity, whereas knowledge of Hindi lexical items represents RAF's migrant identity. However, the functional distribution of languages does not lead to an "identity crisis", as is noted by Annamalai (p.36).

RAF associates himself to his parents' identities through the Urdu language. During the interview, he reported that he prefers Urdu to other languages to communicate with his siblings. He recounts an incident of playing football with his brother and with his school friends: he addressed his younger brother in Urdu while playing, which was not appreciated by his Norwegian classmates. RAF remarks that if he talks in another language to his younger brother, he would feel as if he is speaking a foreign language with him. RAF says further that the practice of the host language will lead not only to the loss of Urdu, but also constitutes an invasion of another culture at home.

The Urdu language is also the identity-marker for the Muslim population in India. During the colonial period under the British Empire, there were a large number of scholars from Hinduism or from other religious backgrounds, whose work was largely in Urdu literature; it was shortly after the independence (in 1947) that a shift occurred in the language choice and language policy of the Indian government. Schiffman (1996: 208) takes note of the "raging desire to squelch Urdu" by Indian policy makers and observes that the eradication of Urdu along with other regional languages in the "Hindi-speaking areas" has been successful. Since the creation of Pakistan as a country for Muslim populations and with the rise in status of the Hindi language as the national language of India, Urdu was subsequently marginalized in India.

As for the family in this study, the maintenance of the Urdu language, to preserve its ethnic identity, has also come with a price. RAF elaborates:

For me, I have two countries, but here my parents have given us the education that we cannot integrate a lot with the local people. For example, here, the boys and girls, they meet everyday, they invite each other to their homes, it happens all like this (...). (Translated from Urdu, Personal Interview, September the 11th, 2007)

The children are not advised to associate with their classmates. Although RAF invites his school friends to his home, he explains that the custom in Norway is that boys and girls freely interact and groups are mixed in terms of gender, and the society foregrounds different cultural practices which might contradict his own religious doctrine. For example, the mother of the Indian family in Sweden vehemently stated the same viewpoint about the mixing of immigrant children with their local inhabitants. The mother, who has a strong Sikh heritage, remarks that the children of immigrant origin are no longer allowed to mix in with those of Swedish origin when they go to sixth grade. Most of the immigrant parents in Sweden who are from different religious backgrounds, in particular the Muslims from

Somalia, Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq, do not allow their children to mix with the children of Swedes, as the latter start drinking alcohol and sleeping together at a very young age in comparison to their own cultures. In other words, according to the mother, due to the differences in religion and cultural practices, the immigrant family tends to protect their children, and hence the socializing of both the parents and children is restricted. Such separation of children, as claimed by the mother, might result in a kind of polarization or marked identity of each group.

Similar trends have been found in the study of Indian immigrant adolescents in Geneva by Sapru (2006). The author points out that parents (of a Hindu religious background) emphasized a greater importance in transmitting the traditional Indian values to their children in order to counter the influence of the host culture, such as premarital sex, late-night activities, dating and school parties. In a similar way, Lakha and Stevenson (2001: 260) speak about the first-generation Indian immigrants in Melbourne who share a common anxiety of "losing (...) their children to the egocentric ways of mainstream Australian culture". Portes and Rumbaut (2006: 255) present a grim situation of second-generation immigrant adolescents of different ethnic groups in United States. Based on large samples and a longitudinal study conducted by CLIS¹², the authors identify three challenges faced by the second-generation which are as follows: (i) racial discrimination, (ii) labor market inequality and (iii) consolidation of drug use and street gangs as alternative lifestyles in American inner cities. Around 80 percent of the parents interviewed showed concerns of "negative influence their children receive in school and the gap between their own goals and values and those of their children's friends" (p. 262).

Despite RAF's strong affiliation with one of the religions of India and with the practice of the Urdu language, he thinks that he cannot imagine himself as being truly Indian. The reason he cites is that he has a poor knowledge of India and that he never stayed long enough in India to learn about its culture. With Norway, lack of proper socialization is mentioned due to religious restrictions and to the different parental cultural backgrounds. RAF considers that his identity might qualify as being Islamic:

And as you are interviewing me, I think that my identity has not been constructed in India and I do not consider myself as Norwegian but perhaps I have an Islamic identity. (Translated from Urdu, Personal Interview, September the 11th, 2007).

Another reason mentioned by RAF is that he has a strong Islamic heritage and he has an adequate knowledge of it. In comparison, he has a very limited cultural and linguistic knowledge of India or Norway. This maintenance of religious identity by an immigrant population has been noted in several publications. Lanza and Svendsen (2007: 294) note the importance of religious identity in the case of the Filipino immigrants in Oslo where "the feast of Saint *San Lorenzo Ruiz de Manila* has been celebrated with a Mass in Tagalog (...)". Kaya (2006) warns not to associate the "Islamic identity" claimed by the young Muslim populations living in Europe as being either

essentialist or radical. The author further remarks that such diasporic religious identities “emerge within the process of dialectical and dialogic relationships between majority and minority”.

The maintenance of the religious identity through the teaching of the Christian faith in Norwegian schools might be another factor which compelled RAF to shift toward his religion. Biseth (2009: 249) states, “Christian values are regarded as the spine of the Norwegian education system, (...) the purpose of the education is to give the child a Christian and moral upbringing”. This particular religious pedagogy in Norwegian schools might have emerged as a pressing concern for RAF’s parents to assume a certain role and to reinvigorate the tenets of Islam in the household. In the case of Finland where religious instruction is as pervasive in public schools as in Norway, the Indian immigrant family upholds the transmission of religious and heritage values to their children in order to maintain the religious identity. Both parents in the family are devout Muslims. During my fieldwork tenure, once I accompanied the mother and her two sons to a mosque in their city of residence as the mother was planning to enroll them for Qur’anic Arabic classes. Upon return, the father rejected the idea that his children frequent a mosque run by Somalians, and instead he preferred to send his children to a mosque run by Pakistanis. The children were however not enrolled in any of the mosques but the religious transmission was successfully implemented through home teaching carried out in particular by the mother during weekends.

Returning to the observations of Annamalai (2001), where he argued that a person’s multiple identities avoid an “identity crisis” as he or she can switch easily from one to another, we have observed that RAF was unable to associate himself with any country, neither with his country of origin nor with his host country:

We can become neither Indians nor Norwegians. We are half and half. When I go to India, it is like a house for me, but when I come back to Norway, it is a relief for me. Each time I visit India, I have an impression that the country is degrading. On the contrary, in Norway I appreciate that we are encouraged to participate in sports. (Translated from Urdu, Personal Interview, September the 11th, 2007).

From this extract we infer that RAF prefers the living conditions in Norway to those he encountered in India. Though he appreciates visiting his country of origin, he finds the daily life of the people there to be difficult when compared to his life in Norway. RAF regrets that he does not have his own network in India and he will never have unless he moves to live there. For all these reasons, he depicts his Indian identity as being *half*.

The multilingual repertoire of RAF displays a tendency to the dynamics of pluralistic identity. His strong religious affiliation might be another factor that prevented him from mingling freely in Norwegian society and from becoming acculturated, but in other studies, even the linguistic and social assimilation with primitive people, do not avoid the stigmatization of the immigrant population. We can refer to the case of French youths of North African origins who are born

and raised in France, but who are subjected to discrimination with the denomination of *arabes* (Hargreaves 1995), even when most of them are monolingual in the French language, and paradoxically they are not welcomed in their parents’ country of origin as they are too French. Either it is through the practice of one language (French by the youths of immigrant background) or multiple languages (RAF in Norway), the subaltern immigrant community in Europe might face an identity stress.

According to RAF, his identity as perceived by others in Norway is as a foreigner due to his *wheatish*¹³ skin color. Such perception of labeling identity on the basis of skin color is solely based on outer appearance. This can be quite misleading as the second- or third-generation child born or raised in the host countries might represent another ethnicity than from that suggested by their skin color but their education and upbringing in the host environment construct the same pattern of identity found in the local inhabitants.

Finally, RAF is ambiguous as to how his identity will shape in the future, in which language he will continue to speak, and which other languages he will abandon. Such uncertainty reveals perhaps his one-sided identity, which he inherited from parental values. Later as he grows, he anticipates the plausibility of forging other identities through his own network and his new ideologies, irrespective of his parents’ influence.

6 Conclusion

The interplay of language and identity, which emerges in this paper as a crucial factor in the trajectory of this Indian adolescent, entails numerous linguistic and religious ideologies to which he adheres. The case of RAF, however, is specific, owing to his parental roots in India, where identity is enmeshed, and instantiated by several languages. His socialization is marked by a selection of a certain mode and principles of life – religion, country of origin, and languages of India and Norway. Overtly, it may seem there would be a rejection of Norwegian identity, which RAF maintains in many ways with his family members in his daily life. His inability to associate with his country of origin due to the lack of adequate sociocultural facts and languages may make him doubly conscious of a kind of social control by Norwegian culture, and thus, he may develop a fear of losing his parental identity.

Languages have been found to be instrumental in the construction of identity, as they serve functions to carry out specific activities. With each function, RAF portrays a specific identity of himself. The multiplicity of identities, which is exhibited by the usage of different languages, attributes to an ambiguity in his personal identity which we find in his talks. But as Tanner (1967) argues that multilingual people do not need to commit to any particular social identity, in a similar way, this is also true for RAF, as he changes his attachment with the host country and the country of origin, following his niche either for a particular event or a specific function. Nevertheless, the

simulacrum of multiple sets of identities should not be viewed as a stress of identity, but rather as a product of the complex and disarrayed society in which we reside.

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Notes

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2. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1963945,00.html> [Last accessed 01.12.10]
3. See Pautz (2005).
4. "[It] makes time and space static, suggests a transcendent phenomenology for things that define the nation-state, and presents them as natural, neutral, a contextual, and nondynamics: as facts of nature" (Blommaert 2009: 421).
5. RAF is the name of the informant.
6. Dissertation title: A sociolinguistic and ethnographic case study of Indian families in Europe: Language practices and policies of the families and the nations.
7. An online social networking website.
8. The age of all the family members corresponds to their age in 2007.
9. Only the four children present during our fieldwork in 2007 are included in this study.
10. As noted earlier, the fourth child was still in an English daycare and most probably he will follow the same path as his siblings by getting enrolled later in a Norwegian-medium school.
11. Short Message Service.
12. Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study.
13. According to Jha and Adelman (2009: 73), the term wheatish is defined by Indians for the skin color which represents the color of wheat.

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