The relationship between L2 accent and identity

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Abstract

This study is a comprehensive analysis to conceptualize the transparent borders between second language L2 learners and the imaginary image of the novel mentally interactive settings they emerged in. As this novel experience of L2 learners entails a sort of sociocultural shift through shifting language, it requires learners to shift identity as well. This study sheds the light on the linguistic situational contexts that motivate L2 learner's identity to be both unconsciously and consciously shifted. This study argues that the L2 learner's identity is unable to receive a full macro shift, rather it experiences a micro one, hypothetically proposed as "identity-version shift". This study concludes with a systematic list, each of which guides the learner's identity version shift: 1) the identity-version shift is mandatory, 2) the identity-version shift is basically motivated by a situated linguistic context, 3) The new version should carry better image than the old one or more socially appropriate, 4) Implicit developing language can offer more authentic stable identity "i.e. children language", 5) Reconstructing fully new identity is impossible, 6) Shifting between two identities is irrational unless with whom suffer from Schizophrenia.

Keywords: EFL Identity; Accented Speech; Identity Shift: Hybrid Identity; Impeded Language Indicators.

1. Introduction

This study investigates second language accents and identity. It is a crucial issue in the field of second language acquisition to discuss such correlation. No doubt that there are many of second language learners kept their native accent and lack the ability to achieve native-like pronunciation. To look at this from a phonological perspective, this accented speech is merely misperception which eventually caused second language learners incorrect language production. Though production is a reflected mirror of perception. Trying to answer a question about what reasons caused this misperception or accented speech, surely there is multiple factors can cause this such as exposing L2 learners to one-way English classes through the traditional teacher-centered approach and using L1 in L2 instructions that end up with demotivating L2 learners (e.g., Alshammari, 2021, Alshammari, 2011; Fareh, 2010). From a linguist perspective, the phonological system of first language has been chronologically fully developed at the time of exposing to second language. Even it has been noted that L2 learning in Arab World, for instance, receives sufficient fund and logistic support, the overall outcomes are still less than expected and learners usually experience an increased number of challenges, some of those challenges are related to their L1 interference (Al-Khairy, 2013a; Elyas &

Picard, 2010). That is, the L1 sound channel controls and judges any kind of language input. Simply, any new sounds can be reconstructed via the dominant sound system in a way that match existed sound quality. As a result, most of second language learners hear, for example, English vowels as identical to their native language, where those vowels have a different quality. And then, they treat these new vowels as their prior vowels. The importance of native-like pronunciation is more likely to grape most of L2 learners. It is a fact though that individuals are judged through the way of pronouncing words, or simply as said "You are the way you speak." So, then this is not a matter of merely linguistically related rather it is more related to the individuals' identity.

1.1. Language & Identity

Language is a tool of constructing identity as soviet sociocultural psychologists proposed. Through language most of the linguistics input can reformulate current experience and add more knowledge. This can expand or expedite the development process of individuals. How language then conveys experiences from outside into inside someone's' mind. And then how the mind regenerates this linguistic input into thoughts. It is kind of continuous mental construction that ceaselessly provides mind with more supply of knowledge and experience.

1.2. Identity vs. Language

At the very beginning of this section, there is some broad introduction about language acquisition and how second language can be learned from a theoretical background. I thought it is a good idea to include some background about different school of thoughts that had various perspectives about SLA. In other words, language is the tool of constructing identity, and it should receive some attention in this current study to draw broad understanding. Then, identity that constructed through language will be thoroughly discussed. So, in this section language will be treated separately from identity for the purpose of understanding.

In language acquisition domain, for example, most of the researchers were investigating the current phenomenon of acquiring linguistic input with more likely considering this acquiring process independent event such as some schools of thought in second language acquisition i.e. structural linguistics/ behavioral psychology. Structural psychologists virtually had a typical theme of describing or observing performances, simply this school focus of produced linguistic behavior and they focused on only legitimate responses that can be easily recorded and observed as Skinner along with Osgood proposed. For example, Skinner 1953, defined learning as "a process of operant conditioning through a carefully paced program of reinforcement". Doing so, means excluding mental processes and strikingly discarding other inner cognitive unobservable guesses and intuition about language, as Twaddell 1935 already criticized (cited in Brwon 2014). Also, Ausubel 1965 as a cognitive psychologist criticized the observable method of behaviorists as a kind of oversimplifying highly complex phenomena. Even the behavioral approach embodied language learning as a process that can be chronologically constructed through receiving frequent positive reinforcements, inspired from Labove's dog salvation experiment. Skinner called this process Operant Conditioning. Chomsky 1959, and others insured that Operant Conditioning theme should be rejected, one of the most critic points was the lack of justification for advance on abstract level of language where rewards or reinforcements occupy less important role or in learners' creativity.

However, there various school of thoughts explored different aspects of learning not only focusing on observable linguistic behaviors through, such as generative linguistics/ cognitive psychology. These schools had a different typical themes about language acquisition, for example, they included that the language is innate, systematic, and they studied the language actual competence i.e. Ausubel 1965, De

Saussure 1961, Chomsky 1960 and others. De Saussure highlighted the different between parole and langue. Parole is simply what behaviorists observed, that is, recoded or measured linguistic behaviors with including any inner cognitive mental processes. Alternatively, parole can be considered what Chomsky pointed out as language performance, yet either way can define parole as De Saussure indicated. The other side is langue; that refers to the unobservable language abilities, or what Chomsky and others called competence.

Third school of thought is constructivism, that monitor other linguistic aspect and explored language learning from a different perspective. Scholars of this school mainly focused on development of individuals and thoughts as well as experimenting sociocultural factors, interactive discourse, construction of learners' identity, creativity of language, such as Piaget 1969, Vygotsky 1930s, Slavin 2003, Bakhtin 1986, Kaufman 2004, and others. This school of thought looked at the learning, acquiring process as dependent on other factors. Neither it can be independent or separated from other aspects nor it can be explored in presence without tracing the effect of the past. For example, Piaget 1969 defined learning "is a developmental process that involves change, self-generation, and construction, each building on prior learning experiences" (cited in Kaufman, 2004). So, this building on prior experiences can provide some valid justifications of current processes which unable to work independently. Also, Sociocultural Theory, the origin of Vygotsky theory; Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), considered language as merely a tool of development, a tool that helps individuals' mind to internalize cognitive experiences and turn them consequently into thoughts. In other words, language is only a bridge between the individual's outside and inside.

1.3. Research questions

1) Is there any relationship between accent and ESL identity?
2) How& Why does identity shift? "from an empirical perspective"

2. Literature Review

There are some existed body of research targeted the topic of second language accents and its' relationship with learners' identity. However, the first part of this sector will include some previous studies that explored the effect of first language on second language. Then, the second part will shed more light on the accented speech and learners' identity.

2.1. Phonology & Identity

Baker & Halter (2008) in their article, *Child-adult differences in second-language phonological learning: The role of cross-language similarity;* investigated the role of age in cross-language phonological transfer. Basically, it investigated whether the age factor effects L2 speech learning. This study included some hypotheses that can embody some implications about the correlation between age and phonological system cross-linguistically, i.e interaction hypothesis (IH). This interaction hypothesis proposed that the older L2 learner the more difficult he/she and being unable to correctly perceive the new phonological system of L2, specifically vowels. "L1 vowel categories become more likely to perceptually encompass neighboring L2 vowels". The roadmap of this study retrieved from the IH. age-phonological correlation. The instrument this study used was two experiments involved sixty-four native Korean and English speaking children and adults. Experiment 1: concluded that Korean children were better than Korean adults in perceiving L2 vowels, and experiment 2; concluded that Korean children again had better performance in producing L2 vowels. Strikingly, this study advocated the suggestions of interactive hypotheses.

This study investigated the effect of age on phonological system in L1 Korean and L2 English. The conclusions it came up with through its two experiments identified that age plays a major role in determining proper L2 age for better perception and production. That is, Korean children were better than Korean adults in correctly perceiving and producing English vowels. It can be justified because children phonological system of Korean was not fully developed which allowed them to perceive English vowels more accurately. This uncompleted L1 phonological system provided Korean children with more flexibility to both correctly perceive and produce L2 sounds. Whereas, adults L1 phonological system "Korean" is fully developed which prevented them from accurately perceiving and producing L2 vowels.

Wang & Lee (2006) in their article; *Korean-English biliteracy acquisition: Cross-language phonological and orthographic transfer,* investigated the relationship cross-language between phonology and orthography. Specifically, subjects recruited for this study were forty-five Korean English children. The instrument used was reading skills tests in first language L1 Korean & second language L2 English where the focus on three main processes; reading, phonological & orthographic. The conclusion showed positive and strong correlation between L1 and L2 phonological processes. However, transfer of orthographic skills between L1 and L2 revealed limited relationship between the two systems.

Phonological system of L1 is already fully developed, while the L2 is remain developing in a chronological period. As a justified result, learners in a second language environment, when face language input that appear irrelevant to their independent linguistic identity then they subconsciously consult their fully developed phonological system. It is more likely to be a process of displacement the unknown; L2 phonological system, with the known; L1 phonological system. It is a process where second language learners mentally substitute their new linguistic identity that appeared less confident with their L1 identity where they confidently able to process different levels of linguistic input. This process of cross-language negative transfer of phonological processes can be discussed in negotiating learners' identity or resisting the new identity.

2.2. Second Language Accent & Identity

What is the relationship between second language and identity, is one of the main questions this current paper intended to answer? Although answering such complex thorny question is never being simple nor difficult rather rational or irrational. Although, most of the research still debating and never reached a consensus about a fixed, agreed definition of identity, this paper includes some of these definitions. Djité (2006) proposed "identity is the everyday word for people's sense of who they are" (Djité 2006). Following this definition may arise another question regarding identity; what about learners' sense about who are they in case they exposed to second language community. What if they become bilingual, is there any kind of updating their sense of looking at their selves? In case of initial emergence to second language community, what become activated within individual mind toward their identity or their sense of seeing their selves. Kanno (2003) declared that second language learners in second language society might encounter some difficulty at the beginning, especially with looking at their selves in a marginalized position. Then they try to immerse in the society through showing their multilingual identity (p.13). Consequently, during fighting in target community, they accept their bilingual "hybrid" identities (p. 134). It is kind of a process of initial resisting the new identity, although individual have inner intrinsic motivation to be part of the community and not marginalized is either way. This hybrid identity though can be pointed out as a final stage of merging first knowledge[2]

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[2] Including first language, first culture, prior educational and social experiences.

Mc Crocklin, & Link (2016) in their article *Accent, identity, and a fear of loss? ESL students' perspectives* explored the relationship between identity and native accent. Its motivation to establish this study was the increased number in the field of second language that proposed some interconnection between native-like accent and second learners' identity. This study claimed that most of ESLs' desire to achieve native accents as well as there are limited number of studies who investigated the role of accent on L2 identity from the learners' perspectives. The main question of this study was whether L2 learner fear of losing their accents and is there any links between this and losing identity. This study is mixed method, the participants recruited were ESL university students =78, the instrument used was a survey and semi structured interview. Results showed that participants had positive attitude toward native accent as well as not fearing losing their identity.

Sung (2016) in the article *Does accent matter? Investigating the relationship between accent and identity in English as a lingua franca communication* This study explores the relationship between accent and identity in English from the perspective of ESL learners. The instrument this study used was "via in-depth" interviews taken from second language learners of English in Hong Kong university. This study found out that the relationship is more complex, and it suggested a range of reasons that can be identity-related as well as practical driven reasons. For identity-related reasons, it is revealed that participants seek to speak in a native-like accent to see their identities more English competent. However, the rest of the participants who prefer to speak in local accent, they seek to maintain local culture identity and not prefer to be associated with Native-English identity. Some participants were focusing on neither local or native accents rather on intelligibility in L2 communication. This study concluded with the L2 accent preferences can have some implications about the learners' identity "recalling: you are the way you speak".

3. Results

This section presents the results in a way it scrutinizes possible themes retrieved form a longitudinal analysis trying to validly respond to the following questions: 1) Is there any relationship between accent and ESL identity? 2) How & Why does identity shift? "from an empirical perspective". In responding to the first question, it is clearly stated that there is a strong relationship between accent and L2 identity hypothetically highlighting the statement of "you are, the way you speak". This indicates that second language learners receive some sort of judgement based on the way they speak. For instance, through looking at French speakers of English as a second language in one eye, and looking at Arabic or Indian speakers of English as a second language, it can be easily noticed that French speakers of English treated with better image than the two others. Therefore, L2 accent can indicate something about the speakers either consciously or unconsciously. Interestingly, in responding to the second question that asked about how L2 learners identity can shift and why, the retrieved analysis can be trimmed into some broader themes as follows:

Proposed L2 Identity Versions	Main Themes		Core Selection	
Measurable Scale	Limited	Unlimited	Primary	Additional
a. Independent L2 Identity	X	√	√	X
b. Dependent L2 Identity	√	X	X	√
c. Authentic L2 Identity	X	√	√	X
d. Unauthentic L2 Identity	√	X	X	√
e. Factual L2 Identity	X	√	√	X
f. Fictional L2 Identity	√	X	X	√
g. Plain L2 Identity	X	√	√	X
h. Flavor Added L2 Identity	√	X	X	√

i.	True L2 Identity	X	√	√	X
j.	Partially True L2 Identity	√	X	X	√

The following section provides more detailed discussion related to the above proposed themes, as well as identifying each proposed version.

4. Discussion & Conclusion

This section consists of several discussions that are related to the topic of second language accent and identity. However, most of the discussions included here are personal driven thoughts that were retrieved from individual experiences rather than theoretical base, without discarding theoretical framework rather focusing on practical perceptions. This discussion will treat language following soviet dualism of merging language and society and considering language as mediator of development. In more clear words, the main aim is not the language itself rather the what role language plays in constructing individuals'' identity. And how this learners' identity interacts in respect with second language accent. What second language accent indicates for identity from individuals' perspectives. Also, this section will include some paragraphs to discuss the broad definition whether or not there a concept called identity shift. And how identity cannot be shifted from its base core to alternative one rather stretches from its main core to alternative versions.

4.1. Language + Identity "language as a tool of constructing identity"

Language is merely a tool of constructing individuals' identity. Following the soviet psychologies perspective who established their approach on using language in a way it helps and improves individuals' development. They never studied the language for the sake of language learning rather they studied language as mediator for individual development. In other words, they focused on genetic processes in a way of mind internalizes input experience to improve its conceptualization. Simply, this school of language concerned about dualism and emergence relationship where mind + society interact. Mind generates thoughts, and through this inner processes individual identity can be constructed. during the process of learning second language the individual prior identity can receive some changes. Since there is no merely language identity, but there is a language that used as a tool to construct thoughts in individuals' minds, there is a challenge of accepting or resisting new experiences L2 language can offer. However, this kind of what some authors called identity shift. What the term identity means through? There is no clear distinction to authentically describe this slippery term. However, what I revealed from previous research (next section will be discussed thoroughly) is more likely that identity is a set of cultural values, personal thoughts, religious believes, and simply the way individual see their selves. Even some research thought about identity that it is socially constructed, I to some extent, ensure that it is not totally socially constructed rather partially. In my personal perspective that identity is sort of innate endowment but socially developed. Clearly, what I meant is that identity is not socially constructed rather socially developed. The difference among these two claims demands further consideration. I meant by claiming identity is innate and partially constructed is that there is impossibility for any kind of entire identity shift. Next couple paragraphs will shed some light on what I intended to mean by this claim.

The matter of identity shift requires further deep investigation. I believe each individual has only one identity "innate" and there is incorrect implication that the identity can be shifted. However, contemporary research findings and most of the studies in the field of discourse analysis that are monitoring the phenomenon of identity shift merely justifies their findings following structural and behavior definition of language i.e. Skinner, Labov. This school identifies and studies language behavior through the observable linguistic acts and pay less attention or even discard the cognitive and

deep processes that can determine and effect the linguistic product "internalization & cognitive process". I assume that each adult person has a primary identity that includes all aspects of cognitions, feelings, believes, way of thinking. This primary identity is simply can be identified by the person himself, his family, his close friends who "really know him". Sure, there are some exceptions; some individuals cannot be authentically identified only by themselves.

Then the other versions of this identity where the identity shift occurs, is not identity shift rather acting identity. The reality we live, from passed days along to this current moment, someone possibly fell in a critical situation because of his believing in identity shift. Most of the faces we see are simply covered with decorated masks. The real identity cannot be seen but through eyes. I propose calling this process "what called identity shift" conditioned identity or constrained identity. Thus, the primary identity cannot be shifted rather modified to meet the assigned context. Shifting refers to leaving the primary identity and offer substituted identity, which is logically untrue. No one can totally depart his primary identity but modifies it as the new context requires.

Also, I propose another explanation of what contemporary research in discourse analysis called identity shift. I assume that the individual has two versions of identity; independent and dependent. The independent identity contains the real construct of the individual including believes, feelings and son on. This independent identity, can refer to the primary identity previously mentioned. The other version of identity is dependent; where the individual is contextually limited to certain forms of expected linguistic and social behavior. Also, here is another explanation that can help understand the incorrect term of identity shift; authentic vs. unauthentic identity. The shift of identity is not shifting among two identities rather shifting between two versions of one identity. Again, authentic identity refers to primary identity, and independent identity. Unauthentic identity refers to modified, constrained, and dependent identity. To clarify, the identity shift is not merely shifting single identity between two intra-identities versions where one version is true and the other is false. The shifting, I assume, is between two versions; the one is true and the other is partially true. Also, there is a distinction between factual identity and fictional. Factual identity can be internally shifted into fictional due to conceptualize a particular situation. Again, the reasons cause this shift are more likely to meet the requirements of the target linguistic context.

Plain identity vs. flavor added identity. Back to the previously mentioned types of versions these new two types can manifest that the shift occurred in an inner interaction between the two versions of identity. Developing languages give some indication to more independent, primary versions of identity. For example, children language can include high amount of authentic language and even when they try to lie parents can easily figure that out. Their linguistic behavior reflects their independent, primary, pure identity. The similarities that all different versions of identity share through their inner shift are the following:

a. The identity-version shift is mandatory

b. The identity-version shift is basically motivated by a situated linguistic context

c. The new version should carry better image than the old one or more socially appropriate

d. Implicit developing language can offer more authentic stable identity "i.e. children language"

e. Reconstructing fully new identity is impossible

f. Shifting between two identities is irrational unless with whom suffer from Schizophrenia

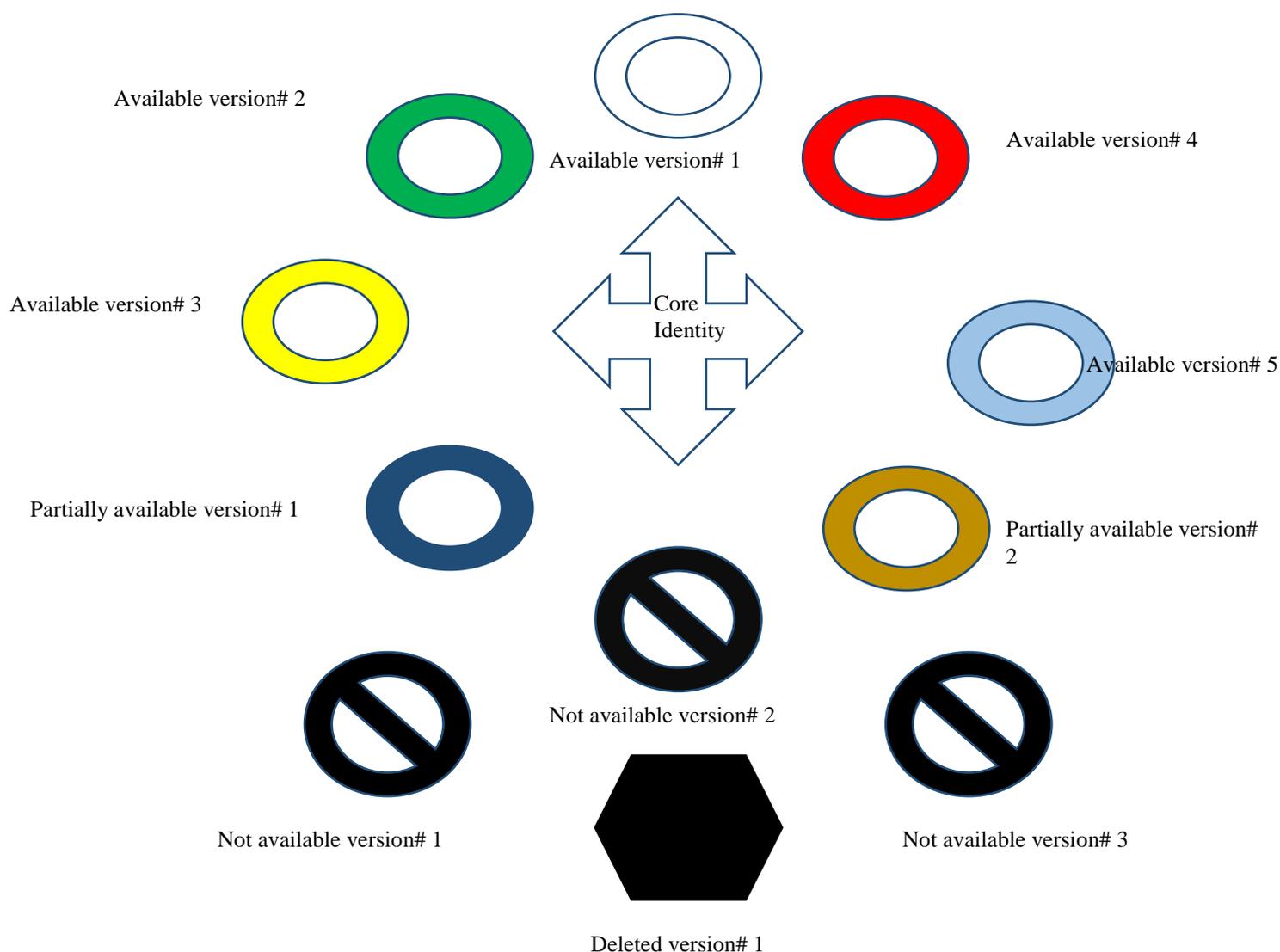### 4.2. Why Identity-Version Shift Is Mandatory

Though assuring Vygotsky's interactional constructionism, where the language acquired and developed through social interaction, we recognize that there is inexistence of linguistic borders. The

language is required for a purpose or communication and interaction among individual in different societies. However, speakers most of the time are judged and evaluated upon their utterances, so, it is more likely to be reached a consensus that "who you are" is tightly connected with "your utterances". Not only the utterances that send some messages about who you are but every linguistic features that can be carried on your language. For example, written discourse shows implications and hints about the writer's voice and whether or not this voice is authentic or not. Bakhtin assumed that the writer can offer multiple voices as well. I might claim that these multiple voices are simply shifting voice-version as similar as I wrote in this paper. I assume it is not multiple voices rather one authentic voice shifting between different versions to match suitable linguistic context. To proof that the process of identity shift is illogical and irrational and the correct form should be identity-version shift. Each ordinary individual has only one identity with different flexible versions to occupy different linguistic contexts.

1. The new version of identity is part of the main identity: no one can shift from intimate group discussion into more academic discussion unless both versions existed in his identity. The second and the first versions are not different identities rather different versions that construct the main identity. This means, if the person is illiterate and after years he become literate, this new experience can construct a minor version of identity that can consequently affect the main identity. Here is another example shows the negative effect of the versions on the main identity, when a person fails in school, or has a bad car accident, or lost his parents… all these bad memories can construct a minor version of identity, and if so, it consequently has negative influence on the main identity but cannot form a new identity.

2. There is no existence of two independent identities in one mind unless there two minds in one body. Similar to two individuals sharing one independent identity, which is realistically impossible. Otherwise you have two social security numbers. But it is not. I assume that there is a main independent identity and different possible versions of it, which can be called dependent identities.

3. New neighbor has Mercedes module 2017 can cause the naked eyes guess how rich he is "successful person", or negatively "drug dealer". In both cases the Mercedes communicates as well as the language. So, most of the people try to make themselves appear better than real through language, through shifting versions of identity.

Available version# 2

Available version# 1

Available version# 4

Available version# 3

Core Identity

Available version# 5

Partially available version# 1

Partially available version# 2

Not available version# 2

Not available version# 1

Not available version# 3

Deleted version# 1

Graph 1. Explanations of core identity and how it stretches to alternative possible versions

This image represents identity for the purpose of clarification. Where the core four arrows in the center indicates one-way direction from within the self toward outside. This shift can embody moving from being fully pure white innocent identity into more adjacent versions of identity, however and more importantly this moving doesn't indicate entirely leaving the pure core center rather stretching out where the end point touched the new identity version. These four arrows can indicate individual knowledge, culture, religious and nonreligious believes, life experience, prior education, feelings, thoughts and so on. So, shifting from the core identity to any available version would be merely to meet requirements of contexts. Changing the way someone may ordinarily speak to meet the expectations of the audience is also a kind of shifting identity to alternative available, appropriate version. Although, I assume that doing so, cannot be identified whether conscious or subconscious process since I believe both levels are virtually included. I claim though that some versions of identity are not available, because individual experiences new knowledge and chronologically gotten rid of such versions. I assume that it is not necessary though that these versions were reluctant or inappropriate rather time processed, experiences as well as circumstances may cause this block. For

example, if someone was very kind person, helpful but later on travelled to a society where offering help can mean something else in a bad sign. More illustration, in a case someone came from a Middle Eastern country where are collective cultures and extended families, and people offering help for neighbors all the time, to the US society; in case he followed his prior knowledge, that is offering help, to neighbors, absolutely it can have different interpretation. What if this Middle Eastern person offers help in a "strong" request like most of people do for their close neighbors? Then, when this individual receives this experience s/he is more likely to temporary blocks this version, and may cause ultimate block.

Acknowledgment

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