Forming Identity through Foreign Language Learning

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Forming Identity through Foreign Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research paper was to get an insight into the phenomenon of forming identity through foreign language learning by exploring the attitudes and feelings English and Swedish language students of the last year of the graduate program have towards English and Swedish and finding out whether they have been able to identify with the language, culture and/or the communities of the languages they have been studying for the last five years. In the research, five students of English and Swedish were interviewed and through reflection and retrospection they provided data for this qualitative research study.

The research showed that the participants' change of identity was manifested through code-switching and speech as well as the creation of new character traits while using a foreign language. The research results also suggested that the participants, even though they felt different while speaking different languages, did not affiliate with the nations or the communities of the languages. Furthermore, the analysis of the participants' answers showed that the participants believed that through foreign language learning one acquires a new layer of identity. The participants also felt they have identified more with English as they had been learning it longer than Swedish and since they have had more opportunities to use it.

Since a small number of participants was included in this research, the results cannot be used as generalization, but can be used as orientation for further research and can be valuable to teachers and other education experts.

Key words: identity, culture, bilingualism, foreign language learning, English, Swedish

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is a Czech proverb which says "Learn a new language and get a new soul" (Grosjean 1982, 252). Language is a living organism and is one of the principles of culture, but a correlation between language and identity has also been proven, with language being used as a way to form identity (Cumming 2012, 43).

According to Teng (2018), identity has been become a significant driver for foreign language learning and identity formation has become an important concern. The nature of identity is multifaceted, contradictory, fragmented, elusive and changing; it can be constructed, reconstructed, maintained and negotiated to a certain extent (Teng 2018, 41). This phenomenon of the relationship between language and identity has become a matter of interest and debate for researchers as they have been trying to explore the influence of language on identity change or identity formation for decades. Granger (2004, as cited in Medved Krajnović and Juraga 2008, 350) asked whether acquiring a new language included constructing a new "second-language self" that alters, replaces or coexists with the primary self.

Do bilinguals feel different and behave in a different way when speaking different languages? Are they perceived as different people by their interlocutors? According to Pavlenko (2006, 1) these questions often arise in conversations about bilinguals, but are not explored enough in the literature. Even though these issues can sometimes be considered naive and simplistic, there has been a growing awareness on this complex phenomenon which is a matter of research and discussion and is, therefore, also the motivation for this paper.

The main focus of this research paper is to investigate the relationship between the language and identity among the Croatian students of language. The paper will try to get a deeper understanding of their attitudes, reflections and feelings about languages and the possible influence languages have on their identity.

2. KEY TERMS

2.1 Culture

In order to understand the relationship between language and identity, it is important to take culture into account as an essential factor in the relationship between the two. According to Grosjean (1982), anthropologists commonly agree that culture consists of several components, such as the human's way of maintaining life and preserving the species, habits, customs, social arrangements, object, sentiments, etc. He defines culture as "the way of life of a people or society, including its rules of behavior; its economic, social and political systems; its language; its religious beliefs; its laws; and so on. It is acquired, socially transmitted and communicated in large part by language." (Grosjean 1982, 157)

So as to comprehend the notion of culture, a distinction between three fundamental levels at which culture is manifested should be made. They are a) observable artifacts (visible and audible behavior, patterns, technology and art), b) values, and c) basic underlying assumptions (relationship to environment, nature of human nature, nature of human activity, nature of human relationships, etc.). Artifacts are often visible but often not decipherable; values carry a greater level of awareness while basic assumptions are usually taken for granted, invisible and pre-conscious (Schein 1990, as cited in Spencer-Oatey 2012, 3).

Although there are many characteristics of culture, for the purpose of this paper, only relevant ones will be mentioned.
Culture affects behavior and interpretations of behavior (Saville-Troike 1997, as cited in Spencer-Oatey 2012, 138) and it can also be differentiated from universal human nature and distinctive individual personality. It means that culture is learned, not inherited and that it does not derive from one's genes, but from one's social environment and personal experiences (Hofstede 1994, as cited in Spencer-Oatey 2012, 7-8). Culture is also associated with social groups and in order for a belief, thing, or behavior to be considered cultural, it should be shared by some kind of community or social group (Ferraro 1998, as cited in Spencer-Oatey 2012, 7-8). Culture is learned from people one interacts with, primarily from parents. This notion that culture is learned implies important suggestions for international purposes. It can lead to greater tolerance for cultural differences and it can serve as a reminder that since people have acquired their own culture through the process of learning, it is also feasible to learn to function in another culture (Ferraro 1998, as cited in Spencer-Oatey 2012, 12). People carry several layers of mental programming within themselves which corresponds to different levels of culture, e.g. a national level (one's country/ies), a regional

and/or ethnic and/or religious and/or linguistic affiliation (most nations are usually composed of culturally different regions, ethnicities, religions and language groups), a gender level (depends on whether a person was born as a girl or a boy), a generation level, a role category (parent, son/daughter, teacher, student, etc.), a social class level (educational opportunities, one's occupation or profession), and an organizational or corporate level (Hofstede 1991, as cited in Spencer-Oatey 2012, 8). Culture is also subject to gradual change. Cultures do not remain the same year after year, and change is considered as a constant feature of all cultures (Ferraro 1998, as cited in Spencer-Oatey 2012, 13).

2.2 Biculturalism and bilingualism

Bicultural individuals are those who have adopted two cultures, both of which lead biculturals' thoughts, feelings and behavior. Bilingualism is defined as "the ability to communicate relatively well—including the ability to speak, understand, read, and write—in two different languages", and it is an essential characteristic of being bicultural (Luna, Ringberg and Peracchio 2008, 280).

Bilingualism includes people's first language and any other language acquired later, whether in a natural or institutionalized setting. Marcos (1976, as cited in Dewaele 2011) made a distinction between the L1 and the L2 in the sense of emotional detachment. According to him, the language bilinguals have acquired second has an intellectual function and does not have an emotional component, while the mother tongue expresses emotions. Depending on the topic, situation, speaker and intent, a bilingual might speak one of the languages, borrow some elements of one language when speaking the other, or code-switch between the two (Grosjean 1982, 289).

The language bilinguals use while talking to themselves depends on the imagined situation or the topic they are thinking about. In other words, the culture and the environment as a whole are the ones that cause the bilingual to change languages, together with attitudes, feeling and behaviors, and not the language itself (Grosjean 1982, 276).

According to Grosjean, there are many advantages to bilingualism – it gives people a double perspective on life, fosters open-mindedness, provides more job opportunities, etc. It also gives people greater clarity in speaking the languages and richer vocabulary and grammar. Some people said that it had helped them learn other languages, improved their mental discipline, made them aware of the relativity of things and made them think more

critically about life. Also, many bilinguals have the awareness that they are bicultural and that biculturalism or the lack of it has had an effect on their lives (Grosjean 1982, 272-273).

2.3 Identity

Identity is one of the central issues in this paper. Identity construction is considered a "dynamic, interactive, discursively constructed and contextually situated process (Block 2007, as cited in Teng 2018, 37). Throughout the history there has been a change in the perspective of how identity is perceived and defined.

As Norton (2016) explains, during the 1970s and 1980s, personalities, learning styles, motivations and other traits of individual learners were researched. Such research was relatable to the humanistic conceptions of the individual which was dominant in Western philosophy, which hypothesizes that every individual, the so-called "real me", had a unique, stable, fixed and coherent core. However, more recent theories and research presuppose the poststructuralist view of an individual in which an individual is depicted as "diverse, contradictory, dynamic, and changing over historical time and social space". The central point of this view is that the individual's "subjectivity," or what could also be considered "identity," is always constituted in terms of relations - the individual is never parted from the social world, but is integral and constitutes the part of it (Norton 2016, 475-476). This theory defines identity as a process that takes place in specific interactions, provides an abundance of identities rather than individual constructs, results from social processes of negotiation and entextualization, and involves "discursive work". Identities are realized through identity claims which are "acts" through which people define themselves in a new way, and are considered fluid and ever-changing (De Finna, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006, 2).

Identity is often intertwined with personality. There is not a single and clear definition of personality. According to Petz, most authors list and describe personal traits, types of personalities, theories, approaches, etc. so eventually the readers have to make a definition for themselves. However, he gives a wide definition of personality as a relatively stable unity of temperament, ability, beliefs, interests, attitudes, values and motives, which can be sometimes reflected in the person's behavior in the environment (Petz 1992, as cited in Medved Krajnović and Juraga 2009, 350).

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE

According to Norton (2013), identity constructs and is constructed by language – many authors believe that language use and notions of ethnicity and social identity are inextricably linked and that language and culture are inseparably intertwined: "Identity is constituted in and through language. By extension, every time language learners speak, read or write the target language, they are not only exchanging information with members of the target language community, they are also organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. As such, they are engaged in identity construction and negotiation" (Weedon 1997, as cited in Norton 2013, 4).

Cumming believes that there is a correlation between language and identity and that language is used to maintain identity. He claims that language allows a person to self-identify themselves and to show affiliation with a particular group, their traditions and culture and that, therefore, language cannot be isolated from culture. (Cumming 2012, 47) In addition, Crystal suggests that "language is the primary index or symbol or register of identity, in that it expresses cultural distinctiveness (2000, as cited in Cumming 2012, 46). However, identity should not be equated with culture. Identities are based on mutual images, stereotypes, emotions, etc., but not on values. Societies that fight each other because of their "different felt" identities might share the same values (Hofstede 2001, as cited in Spencer-Oatey 2012, 20).

As already mentioned, bicultural bilinguals are individuals who have incorporated two cultures within themselves and speak the languages which are associated with each of those cultures. Biculturals often claim they feel "like a different person" when they speak a different language and this might suggest that they have distinct cognitive frameworks which are associated with the cultures and the languages they deal with and that those mental frames might consist of not only different values and behavior, but also separate worldviews and identities. This switch between culture-specific mental frameworks is called "frame switching" and it can result in the change of sense of self (Luna, Ringberg and Peracchio 2008, 279).

According to Pavlenko, there are four main sources of perceptions of different selves: "1) linguistic and cultural differences; 2) distinct learning contexts; 3) different levels of language emotionality; 4) different levels of language proficiency". She believes that the

perception of different selves is not limited to late or immigrant multilinguals, but that it can be caused by multilingual experience and she notices that experiences such as a change in verbal and non-verbal behaviors accompanying the change in language could be interpreted differently by people who have different discourses of bi/multilingualism and self (Pavlenko 2006, as cited in Dewaele 2011, 30).

As Pavlenko explains, in the first half of the 20th century, in traditionally monolingual societies, bilinguals were often seen as people who had two conflicting personalities whose change of language devotion implies the change of political devotion and moral commitments. On the other hand, in the second half of the 20th century, the better understanding of the advantages of bilingualism and the decrease of its concern were brought by the increased transnational migration, the awareness of ethnic consciousness and advanced education system. However, there is still a belief of bilingualism as a problem of two conflicting identities, which some authors from that period claimed could lead to split personality and schizophrenia (Pavlenko 2006, 2-3). Scholars or politicians have not been the only ones who thought of bilingualism in the discourse of schizophrenia – this discourse also appears in bilinguals' and multilinguals' own reflections and writings. They often represent links between languages and selves and are aware of the fact that they might sound different when telling the same stories in different languages (e.g. Julian Green 1941; Tzvetan Todorov 1985, 1994). Todorov's essay, *Bilingualism, Dialogism and Schizophrenia*, and Hoffman's memoir about second language learning, developing a different persona after a couple of months in Canada and distancing herself from her family and Polish identity, *Lost in Translation*, offer a description of the issues of duality, metaphors and tropes that appear in bilinguals' reflection on language (e.g. borrowing, betrayal, split, gap, alienation, double vision, etc.) which invoke the discourse of schizophrenia, emotions which show up, for example, insecurity over the legitimacy of a newly learned language, anxiety about the lack of wholesome oneness, sadness and confusion about seeing oneself as divided, etc. (Pavlenko 2006, 5).

4. RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

There have been a number of research studies which investigated the relationship between languages and emotional attitudes towards them and were used in order to research the relationship between language and the change of identity.

In 2008, Wilson researched the issue of "feeling different in a foreign language" by categorizing and quantifying the feedback of 1,414 respondents. Almost two-thirds of participants responded affirmatively to the question, a quarter of participants responded negatively, while the remaining 10% of participants responded ambiguously or left the question unanswered. Participants also reported a number of changes: a majority of them reported feeling more confident and being more sociable in a foreign language; they did not only notice the changes in body language, traits and voice, but also deeper changes of disguise through references to "putting on a mask or taking on another role" (Dewaele and Nakano 2012); they also pointed out differences of self-expression in different languages and a feeling of having different identities in each language. Statistical analysis showed that female participants and highly-educated participants were more likely to report feeling different while using different languages (Wilson 2008; Dewaele 2011; Dewaele and Nakano 2012).

Wilson also developed a questionnaire on feelings about the foreign language in the second stage of her research. The items focused on different aspects of having a feeling of being different when using a foreign language, e.g. "I sometimes feel as though it's someone else speaking this language and not me" or "I am more confident when I speak a foreign language because I don't mind making mistakes". She correlated the scores of her participants on this questionnaire with the scores of the same participants on the Big Five personality traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism). The research showed that the introverts who rated their proficiency at intermediate level or above reported feeling different when using a different language, while extraversion and feeling different when speaking a foreign language for participants who rated their proficiency at intermediate level or above was negatively correlated. Wilson (2013, 303) explained this relationship saying that individuals who are less outgoing and who tend to be more reserved in their first language might use a foreign language as a mask or disguise, as it allows them to feel more comfortable – foreign language helps them interact in a way they possibly might not in their first language.

Gender and age did not show any effect, while a lower education level was linked to being

more likely to feel different. Participants with higher level of perceived second language proficiency who had started learning their second language at a younger age were more probable to say they felt different (Dewaele 2011; Wilson 2008, Dewaele and Nakano 2012).

Similar to Wilson's research, Ožanska-Ponikwia's study (2010) on 102 Polish-English bilinguals and the connection between psychological variables and multilinguals' self-reported feeling of difference when they operate in different languages showed that both higher-order (Agreeableness, Openness, Conscientiousness) and lower-order personality traits (Expressing Emotions, Emotion Management, Well-being, Sociability, Emotionality and Optimism) were positively linked to the feeling of being different in the second language. She found that 'feeling different' and personality traits such as Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were positively correlated. The same emerged with the notion of feeling different when using the second language and a number of traits dealing with emotional intelligence, namely Emotion Management, Emotion Perception, Emotionality, Social awareness, Empathy and Sociability. Female participants scored higher on feeling different in comparison with male participants. Her hypothesis is that changes which occur in personality and behavior while operating in a foreign language largely depend on personality: people who have a higher self/social awareness and emotional intelligence can notice changes in personality and behavior while using L2 and are also more aware of any changes which occur in their linguistic storage (Dewaele 2011; Dewaele and Nakano 2012).

In her research, Koven found evidence of Cultural Frame Switching in her comparison of stories of the same personal experience which were told by two female Portuguese-French bilinguals. The research showed that they were using different lexical and morphosyntactic resources and registers in two languages; they also had a different perspective of themselves and were described differently by the listeners. They also said they had a different perspective on the world. While speaking Portuguese, they felt less sophisticated than in French. (Dewaele 2011, Koven 2007)

A study carried out on female Chinese students from a Hong Kong university examined their language choices - they had interviewed each other in the first language Cantonese and the second language English on two neutral and two intimate or embarrassing topics. The results showed that they used English when discussing the latter group of topics. The interpretation of these results is that participants use the second language in order to distance themselves more from embarrassing topics, and that code-switching to a second

language allowed them to distance themselves from what they were saying and, therefore, reduced their anxiety (Dewaele 2013; as cited in Trudgill 2000).

5. LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND EDUCATION

5.1 Second-language acquisition and foreign language learning

When it comes to learning a language, a distinction between second-language acquisition and foreign language learning should be made. According to Medved Krajnović and Juraga (2008), foreign language learning is learning in an environment where no communities speak the language as a mother tongue and are not present, e.g. learning English in Croatia, while second-language acquisition can be defined as learning a language which is spoken by the community with which the learners frequently have contacts. It is mostly concerned with a member of minority group who is learning the official language of the majority group, e.g. a Croatian immigrant is learning English in the UK. Foreign language learners are assumed to have little access to the language and to foster instrumental motivations more closely, unlike second-language learners who have both stronger motivations and more access to the language than foreign language learners (Kinginger 2013, 347). This distinction is important since most research about language and personality is concerned with second language acquisition, and not many of them deal with foreign language learning. It is difficult to distinguish between the influence of a foreign language on the personality and the influence of different ethnic or cultural communities on it since it is closely intertwined, e.g. a Spanish-English bilingual will speak Spanish at home with their family, while they will speak English at work or school (Medved Krajnović and Juraga 2008, 351). For the purpose of this paper, only foreign language learning will be analyzed and discussed.

5.2 Foreign language learners, education and identity

Teng believes that human learning is an integral and indistinguishable aspect of social practice and is always linked to the construction of identities. He emphasizes learning a foreign language as it refers to a holistic, socially and culturally situated process entailing construction, creation, development or modification of identity" (Teng 2018, 37).

Although the majority of research studies have been carried out on second language

learners, there is evidence in literature that foreign language learners are also impacted by the process of foreign language learning. Granger (2004) recounts the story of a student who felt "as if a part of his identity had been removed" after he had been pulled out from a French immersion class, and Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) reports that there are shy and introverted students who become more open and communicative in foreign language classes. She assumes that communication in a foreign language provides the speaker with a feeling of being a different person which is more open and spontaneous; the one they would call "the real self" (Granger 2004, Mihaljević Djigunović 2002, as cited in Medved Krajnović and Juraga 2008, 352). Norton claims that identity, practices and resources are mutually constitutive. This means that practices which are common to institutions such as homes, schools and workplaces influence identity: "Thus, while identity is conceptualized as multiple, changing, and a site of struggle, the very multiplicity of identity can be productively harnessed, by both learners and teachers, in the interests of enhanced language learning and human possibility" (Norton 2013, 476).

In the field of language education, the process of identity construction is a continual negotiation between a person and the society – they bring their own lived histories in situated environments and then co-construct their views of themselves and the society through negotiations and interactions with others in these environments (Hawkins 2005, as cited in Teng 2018, 39). Foreign language teaching is essential here, as foreign language teaching and teaching materials can instill transnational susceptibilities and aspiration towards languages, cultures and topics being discussed. Language education contributes to a form of transnationalism and learner identity where people "move" or "travel using instructional materials and other media and try to come close to transnational language exchanges and exploration. Nevertheless, some students and teachers manage to identify themselves with the target language or community and accordingly take on new linguistic or cultural identities (Duff 2015, 74-75).

According to Teng (2018), there are some studies which emphasize the reciprocal relationship between language learning and identity. According to a study by Murray and Kojima (2007, as cited in Teng 2018, 40), learning a foreign language in an out-of-class setting can be important for evolving learners' identity. In its conclusion, learners come to realization of self when they learn a foreign language in their own cultural context. Moreover, a learner's experience as a language learner and speaker contributes to personal fulfillment, pursuit and self-perception.

Another example is Day's (2002) study in which it is documented that learners' identities are shaped when engaged in classroom activities or socially shaped classrooms. Similar to Day's study, Toohey's research (2000) proved that learners' identities are constructed while learning a language. All these studies suggest that "language learning is not purely a cognitive academic activity, but a socialization process in which learner identities are constructed" (Teng 2018, 40).

5.3 Investment and imagined communities

In the past, most theories claimed motivation was the main trait of the individual language learner and those who failed to learn the target language were not committed to the learning process (Norton 2013, 6). According to Norton, 'investing' in learning a language means investing in one's social identity as well (Norton 2000, as cited in Medved Krajnović and Juraga 2008, 356). She has introduced the construct of "investment" which signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their aspiration to acquire a language. She claims that "if learners 'invest' in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic resources (language, education, friendship) and material resources (capital goods, real estate, money), which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power". Investment should be seen within a sociological framework, and it makes a significant connection between a learner's wish and commitment to learn a language and their complex and changing identity. Therefore, there is an integral relationship between investment and identity (Norton 2013, 6).

Contemporary sociocultural theorists believe language learning is a result of social processes – they do not see it as 'language learning' or 'language acquisition', but as 'language socialization', "a process through which learners acquire not only linguistic knowledge and skills, but social ones (values, beliefs, attitudes) as well, with the aim of becoming members of a certain community of speakers" (Day 2002, as cited in Medved Krajnović and Juraga 2008, 356). Moreover, another term Norton introduces is "imagined communities" which is also relevant to the issue of developing identity through language and culture. Imagined communities are groups of people with whom people in general connect through the power of the imagination (Norton 2013, 8). Anderson was the first person who coined the term "imagined communities" founding it on imagined political communities, both limited and sovereign. He claims that an example of it is when people think of nations - they have the

image of a community in their minds, although they will never know most of their members, meet them or hear them. Therefore, while people imagine being bonded with their fellow citizens across time and space, they also feel a sense of communion with people they have not yet met, but hope to meet eventually (Anderson 1991, 6). Multilingualism and transnationalism also contribute to the sense of identity, that is, "how people see or imagine themselves, how they relate to the social world, and how they are seen or positioned by others in their various social, cultural, and linguistic settings, and thus their sense of belonging to and legitimacy within particular social groups." Speaking a language which is used in many parts of the world can connect a person with those wider linguistic communities and this shared linguistic basis and history may give them a feeling of connection or affiliation with those communities as well (Duff 2015, 61). According to Norton, "a focus on imagined communities in language learning enables us to explore how learners' affiliation with such communities might affect their learning trajectories". Imagined communities can involve future relationships which exist in the learner's imagination and aspirations that increase beyond local sets of relationship, such as nationhood or transnational communities, and they might have a stronger impact on their current actions and investment. (Norton 2013, 8)

According to Teng (2018), the development and construction of learner identity are congruent with the imagined communities and identities, and in that way influence foreign language learning. Hence, the construction of imagined identities can lead to learners' engagement with language learning (Teng 2018, 44).

6. CODE-SWITCHING AND LANGUAGE CHOICE

Code-switching, or shifting from one language to another in a single word or full sentences, can be seen as a function of changes in setting or topic, or as chosen by the speaker according to the discourse meaning. The latter view is different in the way that speakers choose the perspective and social framework they want their discourse to be situated in and the language choice is not affected by factors such as setting or topic (Romaine 2000, 62). Bilinguals usually explain that they use code-switching when they cannot express themselves in an appropriate way, when they are lacking an adequate word or expressions in one language or when the vocabulary from the language they are using cannot be appropriately translated. They also believe that some notions are just better expressed in one language than

another (Grosjean 1982, 149-150). Trudgill (2000, 106) believes that code-switching also has the effect of making a conversation more intimate and confidential and it enables a speaker to signal two identities at once. Li and Zhu (2013, as cited in Duff 2015, 64) claim that "code-switching also develops and transforms the speakers' skills, knowledge, experience, attitudes, and beliefs, thus creating a new identity for the multilingual speaker".

However, language is not the main factor which causes the change in identity. Bilinguals will choose a language depending on the situation, the speaker, the subject and the intent of the conversation. These circumstances will trigger different attitudes, behaviors and impressions and according to them a bilingual may speak one language or the other, borrow elements of one language while speaking the other or switch from one to the other. When a bilingual is asked in which language they talk to themselves, 70% of them will reply "both" (Grosjean 1982, 157). The question is whether the language only signals different social identity, e.g. a family member, friend, employee, etc., or if it can also cause a change in personality, e.g. cause the speaker to feel like they are a different person (Medved Krajnović and Juraga 2008, 352).

7. RESEARCH

7.1 Methods and instruments

In this research, a qualitative approach was used. More specifically, five students of English and Swedish were interviewed in order for the author of this paper to obtain a deeper understanding of the topic.

The purpose of this interview was to get an insight into the participants' feelings and attitudes towards the languages in focus, i.e. English and Swedish, and a retrospective perspective on the five years of studying these languages.

The questionnaire for the interview consisted of 22 questions (see Appendix) divided into three parts:

The first two questions asked about the participants' knowledge of foreign languages and their evaluation of their language proficiency. The purpose of these two questions was to get an insight into students' affiliation towards languages. The presumption was that the more languages they spoke, the more culturally and linguistically aware they were and could, therefore, be aware of the possible differences when using different languages.

Questions 3 -12 thematized English and Swedish learning in particular – the beginning of the participants´ English and Swedish learning, code-switching and its

frequency, feeling different when speaking these languages, affiliation to English-speaking or Swedish-speaking countries, etc. The purpose of these questions was to learn about the participants´ awareness of the cultures and speaking habits of these particular languages. Through these questions, the author wanted to see whether there could be a link between the beginning of language learning and the identification with the language and its culture; with feeling different when speaking different languages; and with code-switching as a tool to express oneself differently in different languages.

In the fifth question (*Have you ever lived in those countries for more than 2 months? If yes, did that have an impact on you and what kind of impact?),* the period of two months was chosen arbitrarily as it was thought that living in a certain place for a longer period of time would lead to adjustment to and/or internalization of the habits and customs of the target languages´ cultures.

The third part, questions from 13 to 22, were focused on the studies and the participants' reflection of how much they linguistically and culturally advanced during the five years of studies, whether the studies have changed them, and, if yes, in which way. The last two questions were crucial as they asked whether the participants believed that through learning a new language people acquire a new layer of identity and if they felt they had acquired a new layer of identity during the five years of studying these languages at university, which was the main issue of this research.

7.2 Participants

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb. The participants were five females, students of the last year of the graduate program in English and Swedish. Their L1 was Croatian and they have acquired English and Swedish as an L2 and L3. Considering the fact that this research did not examine gender differences and that no male participants came forward for the interview, only female participants were interviewed for the research. Their mother-tongue was Croatian and their age range was from 23 to 25.

7.3 Aims

The aim of the research was to see whether, and if so, to what extent, English and Swedish students of the last year of the graduate program have identified with the languages and their cultures and have been able to identify with the language, culture and/or the communities of the languages they have been studying for the last five years.

This study addresses four research questions which the research tried to give answers to:

1) *Do the participants identify with the English language and culture more than with the Swedish language and culture?*
As the participants have been studying English longer than Swedish, it is believed that the duration of studying a language will have an impact on the identification with the language and the culture.

2) *After five years of studying, do the participants identify with the Swedish language and culture?*
The assumption is that five years of studying a language and being fully invested into learning about the language and its culture will be enough for the participants to feel identified with the language and its culture, although they only started learning it at university.

3) *Do the participants feel different when speaking a different language?*
 Based on their personal attitude, the participants will express feeling different when using different languages.

4) *Do the participants believe that learning a foreign language has an influence on forming an additional layer of identity?*
As students of languages, the participants will be of the opinion that learning a foreign language leads to an acquisition of new layers of identity.

The presumption is that the participants are representative of the whole population of the students of English and Swedish at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and the statements related to them could also be valid for the rest of the population. However, this is just a presumption considering the fact that this research was conducted on a very small sample.

7.4 Procedure

All the participants were interviewed individually at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. They had no prior knowledge of either the questions or the topic of the interview so that the procedure could not be affected by the author's ideas about the results she would like to get in the end. The aim of the research was briefly explained to the participants: they were introduced to the interview with an explanation that the interview would be about their studies and a reflection and perception of their studies. The length of the interviews varied from 15 to 35 minutes, depending how talkative and reflective the

participant was. The interviews were recorded on the author's phone and later transcribed. The interviews were held in the Croatian language, but the transcripts were translated into English by the author of this paper.

8. RESULTS

8.1 Knowledge of other languages

Besides English and Swedish, all the participants were to some extent familiar with at least two more foreign languages at the point of the interview, and the largest number of languages a participant spoke was four. Among the most often mentioned languages, there were Norwegian, German, Italian and Spanish, and some of the participants used Japanese, Icelandic, Dutch and French as well.

"Besides the mother tongue, I speak English, Swedish, a bit of German; I can recognize Norwegian, Icelandic, and I learned Dutch."

The participants rated their knowledge of other languages significantly poorer than the knowledge of English and Swedish. Among other languages, they evaluated their own knowledge of Norwegian best because they learned it in their studies, alongside with Swedish, while they did not use other languages so much.

"I rate my knowledge of languages approximately – English C1, Swedish B2, Norwegian between B1 and B2, French B1, Icelandic A1."

8.2 English and Swedish language learning

All the participants claimed they had started learning the English language at a young age – at the preschool age or in lower grades of primary school. On the other hand, they started learning Swedish in the first year of studies or shortly before the beginning of their studies.

"I started learning English in the fourth grade of primary school, I was around 9 then. But I had come into contact with English before that and I was interested in it. And Swedish, I started learning it in 2013, at university."

"I started learning English in kindergarten, when I was around 3-4, and I started learning Swedish at uni, i.e. 3 months before uni."

"I was learning English with my mom even before school. We would be, like, slowly walking, let's say, in a park and then she would be saying "This is a tree", "This is a dog" and so on, and then I really started learning it in primary school. I started learning Swedish in my first year of university."

When it comes to learning methods, all the participants stated they had learnt both languages formally, i.e. at school or university. After the formal part, they added the informal sources of learning to the formal one, such as friends, books, movies, music and other media. All the participants claimed they had much more sources available for informal learning in English than in Swedish, taking into account that they were more surrounded with English.

"Both formally and informally actually, for both languages. I mean, English is all around us, of course you will pick it up from TV series, music and everything, directly and indirectly. And for Swedish it's the similar story. We do a lot of everything in the Swedish studies, especially in grammar exercises classes, which were great; we have great professors at the Swedish department. They tell us about STV, which is a Swedish television, then let's say Swedish radio, we have a lot of great books in the library."

"I would say that for English [learning] came from both spheres. I can't say it was fully informal since I was going to school where I was learning grammar, but I was also learning a lot while talking online with people. In the seventh grade, I had a huge vocabulary leap when I started reading books in English. So yeah, a part of it definitely came from school, this formal part of grammar, where they told me to sit and study, and the other came from this reading and online communication with people."

8.3 Differences in expressing themselves

8.3.1 Code-switching

When it comes to code-switching, there was just one participant who said she did not code-switch. Other participants said they code-switched sometimes, and most of them even on daily basis.
The participants reported code-switching only in English. As it was mentioned earlier, all the participants started learning English at a young age so the communication in English came naturally to them. Also, as they noticed, reading books in English and communicating with university colleagues and friends from foreign countries, which was in English, also made a contribution to this feeling of natural language learning.

Code-switching usually occurred in informal situations, especially in conversations with friends who had a similar level of knowledge of English. Moreover, they pointed out that code-switching was an automatic process to them and that it would take a lot of effort to avoid it.

"I code-switch in all situations, except really formal ones in which I have really big pauses until I remember a word in the language needed at that moment."

"I code-switch a lot more from English and it is mostly with friends from the uni, sometimes with others as well, although not so much anymore. With my parents not so much, or with my family, because they mostly wouldn't understand me so there would be an obstacle in the communication channel."

"I speak English every day because my girlfriend is from the Netherlands so we communicate in English. So it often happens to me that I simply cannot remember how to make a sentence in Croatian. In English it comes to me much more naturally because I've been reading only English books since I was in the seventh grade. So it can often happen in any kind of conversations, especially informal ones, with my friends etc."

The participants said they did not code-switch in the Swedish language at all, which was, in their opinion, related to the level of their knowledge of Swedish and the level of the language identification.

"I don't code-switch in Swedish so much, because I believe that we still have to internalize that language to the level where we can just say a swearword in Swedish all of a sudden or something like that."

"I can't say I ever had a need to code-switch in Swedish, but it is because I haven't been studying that language so long that it has become a part of me to some point as much as English."

8.4 Affiliation to the nation and the community

None of the participants had lived in the English or Swedish speaking countries for more than two months in the period before the interview took place. Also, none of the participants felt as if they belonged to either of the mentioned nations although they all agreed

that, due to the studying of the language, literature and culture, they acquired a better understanding of these nations.

Moreover, some of them felt they had a better understanding of the Anglo-Saxon culture rather than the Swedish culture and they claimed it was because of the longer period of time they had been studying English.

"I mean, it's not a community [of the speakers of the target languages] where I grew up or have ever lived, so by that criterion no. But that some things would be familiar, more familiar to me than to someone else who isn't so much into that, yes."

"Swedish no, because it hasn't been with me for such a long period, it's not like I have been speaking it for so long and it's not like I have ever given myself into that culture, while on the other hand, for English I wouldn't say it's about the culture or how simple it is but rather the fact that it's easier for me to speak English. In that sense I would say, yeah, okay, I kind of feel a greater connection to the English-speaking areas, but then again I wouldn't say it's also belonging to a society."

However, when asked about their affiliation to the Swedish or Anglo-Saxon culture now after five years of studying, most of the participants had affirmative answers. They believed their studies had deepened their understanding of the society and the culture and was clearer to them why some things in those cultures are the way they are.

"I think I understand the society and the culture and how much we learnt in some courses. I think I understand why some things are today the way they are and maybe if they can change. So yeah, yes, I feel their community is somehow closer to me. When you deepen your understanding of something, a whole new world simply opens up."

All the participants believed a stronger connection with the culture and the community would be developed after a longer stay in a certain country.

"I believe that the Swedish [department] introduced me nicely to the community, I think I have learned all and everything about it and there are definitely some aspects which I really like and I love listening to Swedish music and reading and e.g. watching memes in Swedish and things like that, it's all cool, but that I feel like I belong to this community... I think it's something that develops after someone is in constant contact with the culture, meaning e.g. that if I moved there for two months, did my studies abroad, this level of belonging would

definitely be greater than when I'm here in Croatia where Sweden is just a shape on the map about which I hear or which I see here and there. I think all of it just has a bigger influence. If I had more contact with it or e.g. if I had parents who were from there or some family who was there, the feeling of affiliation would definitely be greater."

The participants who did not answer affirmatively on the question of belonging to the community also believed that during their studies they had developed a better understanding of the culture and the knowledge of the language, but that it had not attracted them to feel as part of the community. Moreover, they thought the curriculum of their study programs did not focus on the internalization of the target languages´ cultures.

"We didn't do things in a cultural way where we would be adjusting. I have a feeling that, at this university, we look at things from the outside. There is no tendency to form us in a way... to culturally connect us to the community. There are no intentions like that from the uni."

8.5 Layers of identity

During the interview, some (similar) answers and motifs occurred more often and were expressed by all the participants, which could represent the way in which identity change occurs. Layers through which identity could be expressed were divided into two categories: the way the participants expressed themselves (code-switching and speech) and accepted different character traits (accepting the target language´s culture and greater self-confidence):

Category 1: CODE-SWITCHING AND SPEECH

Code 1.1. Code-switching

"But I code-switch a lot with my colleagues from the English department."
"A lot. I code-switch in all situations, except really formal ones in which I have really big pauses until I remember a word in the language needed at that moment."

Code 1.2. Speech

"A lot of these things which characterize those different nations I am already doing by myself, for example, the Swedes can be really quiet and polite a lot and so on."

"...but I think I definitely have a different way of speaking, intonation; somehow, in Croatian I will always sound aggressive and fast, and in English I will sound, depends on the situation,

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but I have a feeling that in Swedish I sound more like an introvert because of this lack of knowledge and practice."

Category 2: ACCEPTING DIFFERENT CHARACTER TRAITS

Code 2.1. Accepting the culture

"I have a feeling that, depending on the language you speak, you actually adjust to some level to their culture."

"But then again, you can understand yourself better through some new culture, see how you correspond with this culture."

Code 2.2. Greater self-confidence

"When I think of myself better, when I'm in class at the English department I definitely have more self-confidence; I have a feeling that I have a better knowledge of the whole material, that I have actually learned something in the last five years."

"In English I am more confident in myself and I have self-confidence and I will say whatever and somehow won't hide some of those things."

9. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the research was to see whether the participants felt different while speaking another language and acquired an extra layer of identity through their studies, or whether they used the languages only as a source of communication. Since English is obligatory in the Croatian education system and is usually taught from the first or fourth grade of primary school, the author believed that this duration of learning English would be crucial for the participants – it would make them feel more connected with English and, therefore, they would feel like English is already a part of them. To contrast that, she decided to choose another language which students had not learned until university, meaning they got in contact with it in the first year of university, and see whether and how they managed to identify with this language and its culture during five years of intensively studying the language and its culture at university.

Considering the fact that the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences offers a number of languages which can be taught from the beginner level, the search for the second

language was narrowed down to Swedish and Russian, as two of the most popular languages among students to study alongside English. Eventually, Swedish was chosen as it was believed that Russian, as a Slavic language, is potentially culturally similar to Croatian so the participants could naturally feel closer to it. The interviews were held in Croatian so as to be as objective as possible and to avoid leading the participants to the deduction of their potential additional identities which could influence the results of this research.

According to the participants, the motivation for choosing their majors was similar. They always knew they wanted to study English and it was their first option when choosing a major at university. They learnt English both formally and informally and were good at it in primary and high school. Since English can only be studied as a double major at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, they had to choose another major to study it together with English. All of them had some interest in the Swedish culture and found this as one of the main reasons for enrolling Swedish at the Faculty. Their interests were music, movies and the culture or the fact that they loved languages and wanted to learn a language from the beginner level. They saw Swedish as a challenge and as something new and different.

All the participants felt closer to English rather than Swedish as they thought they were surrounded by English in their everyday life so it became more natural to them to use English. They believed that not only the longevity of learning English, but also the informal part of studying English (reading books in English, listening to music in English, watching movies in English, etc.) was integral for their identification with English and them feeling more comfortable with it. On the other hand, they felt their knowledge of Swedish was not on the advanced level so they did not use it as often as English. It did not come as naturally to them as English did, so code-switching was also primarily noticed only in English and not in Swedish. Another reason for code-switching they have mentioned was the lack of topics translated into the Croatian language, whether it was the university material or some modern slang they have heard on the Internet.

The way bilinguals choose the language they are using says a lot about how they perceive the world and how they feel about the language. As Romaine (2000, 35) puts it, language choice is not arbitrary. It is through choosing one language over another that speakers indicate 'acts of identity' and deciding the group that they want to be identified with. Kramsch (2001, as cited in Medved Krajnović and Juraga 2008, 355) believes that foreign language learners at first use the new semiotic system to complete tasks or communicate meaning, but after a

particular time, the new system will probably start influencing their view of the reality they are writing in or talking about.

The participants noted that they felt different when speaking foreign languages and mostly they claimed they felt "more self-confident" when speaking English than their mother tongue or Swedish. One participant claimed she had adjusted to the "personality" of a certain language and gave an example of Spanish as a romantic and soft language, which made her behave in that way, while, on the other hand, speaking Swedish made her quiet and introverted. She also noted that, while speaking foreign languages, she tended to behave as much a native speaker of a specific language as possible.

Most of the participants reported a number of changes when speaking a foreign language, especially English, which was mostly feeling more confident, open and sociable; they felt like they had another role and behaved like they usually did not. The changes were especially noticeable among the participants who described themselves as introverted or shy. These findings correlate with the already mentioned Wilson's findings in which a majority of her participants reported feeling more confident and sociable while speaking foreign languages and also felt like they were taking on another role. Wilson explained the relationship between introversion and language learning, saying that introverts might use a foreign language as a mask which could help them interact in a way in which they could not in their mother tongue (Dewaele and Nakano 2012; Wilson 2013). According to Evans (1988, as cited in Wilson 2013, 300-301), students who chose to study languages at university have experienced discovering new aspects of themselves through the experience of spending a period in the target country, feeling freer while operating in foreign language and more aware of being more confident and sociable. The explanation was also found in Mihaljević Djigunović's (2002, as cited in Medved Krajnović and Juraga 2008, 364) research and her reasoning was that speaking in a foreign language allows speakers to feel like a different person and talk about things they would usually find difficult because it allows them to distance themselves from what is being said.

Feeling different when speaking a different language leads to the question whether the participants feel self-confident because they feel better when speaking it or only because they are more secure of that specific language's grammar and structure. Most of them said they felt more comfortable speaking English than Croatian as they knew the English grammar better than the Croatian one and they did not feel as confident in Swedish as they were not on such a high level proficiency. As already mentioned, Pavlenko (2006, cited in Dewaele 2011, 30)

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distinguishes four main sources of perceptions of different selves: "1) linguistic and cultural differences; 2) distinct learning contexts; 3) different levels of language emotionality; 4) different levels of language proficiency". In this case, different levels of language proficiency could be influencing the participants' feelings of being more open and confident when speaking English and shy and introverted when speaking Swedish, based on their level of knowledge of these languages.

The participants noted that studying about the language and the culture of the English- and Swedish-speaking countries had led them to a better understanding of the community of the target languages and that they had felt more connected to them in comparison with a regular person who does not have much knowledge of them, but however, they did not feel affiliated to these nations as they were aware of the differences in the mentality and the culture, which they believed they would not be able accept, and they believed that only living there could make them feel like they belong there. When asked about possible characteristics they acquired, especially about the ones connected to the Swedish culture, some participants said they had started appreciating being alone more often, peace, nature, etc., which would be typical stereotypes about Swedes. In this case, the question arises as to whether the participants' reflection was realistic, whether it was mistaken by stereotypical characteristics of the Swedish culture or whether it was not influenced by the Swedish culture, but their introversion just became more obvious and visible. This problem could be a possible question for discussion and future research.

The issue some of the participants also mentioned was distinguishing the language from the culture. Even though some of them felt almost "native-like" in English, they did not feel affiliated to its culture or the nations – they were distinctly specifying they belonged to the "Balkan" mentality, identified themselves as Croats and felt like the differences between the mentalities and cultures were too drastic to possibly be or want to be affiliated with. According to Matsumoto (1996), to speak a language and acquire its culture together with it are separate issues and it does not mean that if people speak a certain language that they automatically fully invest themselves into it. They can separate those two and purposefully reject the culture. Culture is not only an individual construct, but also a social construct. It exists in all of us individually, but it also exists as a global, social construct. Individual differences in culture are observed among people in the way they adopt and engage in the attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors which are associated with a certain culture. If a person acts in accordance with those values or that behavior, then the culture is inherent within them,

and if they do not share those values or behaviors, then they do not share the culture (Matsumoto 1996, as cited in Spencer-Oatey 2012, 8).

In Norton's book, a bilingual expressed his view on the two languages he speaks:

> "I have a Mexican accent. English is mine from the very moment I put it into practice and I am able to establish communication. But when I say that the English language is mine, I do not mean to say that I want to take the culture that comes with it (Norton 2013, 18).

When it comes to the research questions aimed at answering before carrying out the research, the following could be concluded:

1) *Do the participants identify with the English language and culture more than with the Swedish language and culture?* –All the participants felt more connected to the English language and the culture than with the Swedish ones due to the longer exposure to the language through formal and informal, intentional and unintentional ways of learning.

2) *After five years of study, do the participants identify with the Swedish language and culture?* - None of the participants have identified with the language and its culture as they all claimed they did not feel they had identified with the language and its culture; they felt five years of studying was not enough to identify with the language and its culture and hence they did not manage to do it.

3) *Do the participants feel different when speaking a different language?* – All the participants were affirmative about this issue and had personal experience with feeling and expressing themselves differently when speaking a foreign language.

4) *Do the participants believe that learning a foreign language has an influence on forming an additional layer of identity?* - All the students unanimously believed that through learning a language a person can acquire additional characteristics and points of view which could lead to forming one's additional identity.

At the beginning of this research it was expected that the participants would be largely self-reflective and would describe their feelings and perceptions towards the issue of language and identity shift. The assumption was that the participants would be more reflective on the issue of identity construction through language learning and would fully understand the

questions asked during the interview. However, the expectations were not met, as the author noticed that some participants had not thought about this topic before and were not as reflective as were expected. They were mostly focused on the educational aspect of their studies and talked about different emotional attitudes towards the two departments. A possible explanation for this misinterpretation of the questions would be that the questions had not been structured clearly enough. It is plausible that if the research had been carried out in more stages, the participants would have had more time to think about the topic and be more self-reflective. Another possible explanation would be that since the participants were in the last year of their studies, still dealing with their exams, seminar paper, and other university material, they were still too immersed into the educational aspect of it that they had not thought about this phenomenon yet and did not have time to think thoroughly about it during the interview. This lack of reflection and misunderstanding of the questions could have affected the results and were, therefore, the limitations of this paper. One of the possible extensions of this research would be to perform a follow up with the participants a few years from now.

10. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the participants' statements and the categories through which identity is manifested, it could be concluded that additional layers of identity could be manifested primarily through code-switching and speech and possibly the creation of new character traits or the change of one´s characteristics during speaking a foreign language.

The research also showed that, even though the participants noted they felt different when speaking languages, especially English, they did not feel affiliation towards the nations or the communities of the languages they had been studying for the last five years. A possible reason for not managing to identify with the cultures or communities of the target languages, as the participants also mentioned, could be the fact that they did not have a chance to live in English- or Swedish-speaking countries, but only learned about them at university or watched videos about them. However, they do feel they have acquired some characteristics believed to be associated with the nations or communities.

The participants believed that through learning a foreign language a person acquires a new layer of identity and four out of five of them expressed they believed they had acquired an additional layer of identity during their studies. All participants claimed they had noticed changes in their behavior when speaking a foreign language – most of them reported feeling

more open, self-confident and sociable, which was most interesting with participants who did not behave like that when speaking their mother tongue. Concerning the languages, the participants identified more with English as they loved it more as a language, had been learning it for a longer period of time and since it was generally easier for them to get to people with whom they could use it.

Since there is a very small number of participants included in this research, thus limiting the interpretation of the data obtained, the results cannot be used as a generalization for all Croatian students of languages, but can be only used as orientation for further, more comprehensive research.

As far as the author of this paper is aware, there has not been a similar study on this topic in Croatia, which contributes to the understanding of the Croatian students of languages and the link between languages and identity in general. The findings from this research could also be valuable to teachers and other education experts, especially foreign language teachers. These findings could make an impact on their knowledge and understanding of emotions, cultural awareness, national affiliation and other identity issues involved in foreign language learning. The issue of learning foreign languages as a way of forming new layers of identity is sociolinguistically very significant and should be carefully researched in order to gain a better understanding of the various factors involved.

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12. APPENDIX

Questions used in the interviews

1) Which languages do you speak except your mother-tongue?

2) How would you rate the proficiency of those languages?

3) When did you start learning English, and when did you start learning Swedish?

4) Was the English and Swedish learning formal (in schools, language schools or similar) or informal (through your parents, friends, Internet, movies, music, etc.) or both?

5) Have you ever lived in those countries for more than 2 months? If yes, did that have an impact on your and what kind of impact?

6) Do you feel like you belong to this nation/community where English/Swedish is spoken? Why?

7) Are there any elements of mentality of English/Swedish-speaking countries which you would like to internalize or have already internalized, and if yes, which ones are those?

8) Do you code-switch? If yes, how often do you use it and in which situations?

9) Do you express yourself differently in Croatian and in English? If yes, can you think of an example?

10) Do you express yourself differently in Croatian and Swedish? If yes, can you think of an example?

11) Why do you think you code-switch and/or express yourself differently in Croatian and English and Croatian and Swedish?

12) Do you sometimes feel like a different person when using different languages? If yes, in what way?

13) How would you describe your interest for the English language before your studies?

14) How would you describe your interest for the Swedish language before your studies?

15) How would you describe your interest for English and Swedish now after five years of studying them?

16) Have you acquired any new characteristics that could be linked to the culture of the English language?

17) Have you acquired any new characteristics that could be linked to the culture of the Swedish language?

18) Are there any differences in the context of your way of thinking and/or behaving between you as a student of English and you as a student of Swedish? If yes, what are they?

19) Has studying English made you feel more like a member of that community? Because of what?

20) Has studying Swedish made you feel more like a member of that community? Because of what?

21) Do you think that a person acquires a new layer of identity by learning a new language? If yes, in what way?

22) Do you believe you have acquired to some extent, and to what extent, an additional layer of identity and why?