

## **Language against Ethnicity: The Conflicting Linguistic and Ethnic Identities of the Fulani People of Ilorin**

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**Language against ethnicity the conflicting linguistic and ethnic identities of the Fulani people of Ilorin** Ilorin's status as a border community straddling Nigeria's Northern and South-western regions where different languages and ethnicities co-exist makes identity construction complex. Existing literature largely posit an inseparable link between language and ethnic identity implying that language loss constitutes identity loss. This study investigates the relationship between linguistic and ethnic identities among the Fulani people of Ilorin with a view to evaluating the link. Revised Social and Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory was adopted. Structured interviews were conducted with 40 respondents while participant observation was employed. Linguistic identity was established in favour of the Yoruba Language contrariwise for the Yoruba ethnic identity. The majority of respondents (95.0%) identified Yoruba as their first language while respondents' construction of their ethnic identities was largely influenced by their ancestral ethnicity. Seventy-five percent claimed sole Fulani ethnic identity; 5.0% claimed hybrid identity while 20.0% have become ethnic converts who claim either a civic or Yoruba identity.

**Keywords:** Language shift, Allegiance, Ethnic converts, Revised ELIT.

### ***1 Introduction***

This article examines the mosaic patterns of language and identity construction among the Fulani people of Ilorin. It shows how an overwhelming shift from Fulfulde, a minority language of Kwara State, did not translate into an equivalent shift of identity by its native speakers. Language shift can be described as a situation in which speakers of a language (oftentimes, a minority language) abandon their language and adopt another for purposes that their language should serve. Language shift, which often results in language loss, is therefore a phenomenon that often affects languages that are considered to be less prestigious due to various social factors such as politics and economy. Since languages do not exist in isolation, the social factors that encourage groups and individuals to shift from the use of their first languages also often affect the construction of identities by such groups and individuals within such groups. Hence, the manipulation of identity often goes in tandem with language shift. This paper examines the lack of correspondence between language and identity shift among the Fulani people of Ilorin and the mosaic patterns that identity construction take in the Fulani community.

Language loss usually occurs in multilingual contexts in which a majority language comes to replace the range and functions of a minority language with the result that the speakers of the minority language shift over time to speaking the majority language. The fact that in multilingual situations, individuals constantly make choices on the use of language highlights the fact that language loss is not primarily a linguistic issue, but has to do with power, prejudice, (unequal) competition and sometimes overt discrimination and subordination. "Thus, ethnic or linguistic belonging considerably depends on political and social changes" (Ulrike, 2008:11).

Edwards (2009:20) states that "identity at one level or another is central to human and social sciences as it is also in philosophical and religious studies, for all these areas of investigation are primarily concerned with the ways in which human beings understand themselves and others". Edwards further adds that since language is central to human condition, and since many have argued that it is the most salient distinguishing aspect of the human species, it seems likely that any study of identity must surely include some consideration of it. Omoniyi and White (2006) describe identity as a problematic and complex concept in as much as we recognise it as non-fixed, non-rigid and always being co-constructed by individuals of themselves (or ascribed by others) or by people who share certain core values or perceive another group as having such core values.

Having established language as an important tool in the construction and perception of identity, its role in identity formation makes it a critical component of this research.

## **2. The study area: Ilorin**

Ilorin, the capital city of Kwara State comprises three local government areas which are: Ilorin East, Ilorin South and Ilorin West Local Government Areas. Like most capital cities, it is a blend of different ethnic nationalities. In this case, the city is home to the different ethnic groups which are native to the city and these include the Yoruba, the Hausa, the Fulani, the Nupe, the Kannike and the Baruba as well as many different ethnic groups which are not native to the city from within and outside Nigeria e.g Arab, Eggon, Igbo, Itsekiri, Ijaw etc. As the capital city of Kwara State, Ilorin is located on Latitude 8<sup>0</sup>30'N and Longitude 4<sup>0</sup>35' E (Kwara State of Nigeria, 1997). The city is the transitional zone between the deciduous forest (rain forest) of the South and the open savannah to the North (Udo, 1970). This makes it easy for the city to attract settlers from both the southern and northern parts of modern day Nigeria (Danmole, 2012).

## **3 Review of related studies**

Ulrike (2008) explains that most scholars emphasize that although identity is deeply anchored in a society, thus leading to a strong emotional attachment to identity markers like language, language is not the only crucial aspect of minority group identity (Fishman, 1999; Romaine, 2000). For example, Blommert (2006) points out that linguistic behaviour is not necessarily an indicator of ethnicity and that administrative belonging does not always reflect sociolinguistic belonging. Blommert also posits that language constitutes one of the several characteristics that can place an individual in the majority or in the minority. In essence, language is just as much as an identity marker as religion, dress etc because these elements also determine the group (majority or minority) to which one belongs. The point in all of these is that a shared language or a shared territory does not always necessarily translate into a shared ethnicity. What defines a group of people transcends their language and geographical location - other identity markers are equally of importance.

Many writers have posited a strong link between language, ethnicity and identity. For instance, Le-Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) posit that the language spoken by somebody and his or her identity as a speaker of this language are inseparable. Recognising the controversial nature of the relationship between language, ethnicity and identity, Bamgbose (1991) suggests four possible positions as follows: that language is the most powerful factor which determines ethnicity; that language is dispensable in the construction of group identity and that race, political class affiliation are more important factors in the determination of ethnicity; that language is merely one of the cultural elements or symbols which determine ethnicity and not the only one and lastly; that the relationship between language and ethnicity varies depending on the state of the group involved.

In his foreword as an editor to Glaser (2007), Skutnabb-Kangas writes about the two major divisions on the issue of the relationship between language and ethnicity. According to him, some researchers see languages as essential for ethnic identities, as possible and often likely core values of people's ethnic identities. Without them, such researchers claim an ethnic group or a people can in most cases not continue to exist as a group, more than a couple of generations. For others like May (2005:327), languages are seen as at most, "a contingent factor of one's identity. In other words, language does not define us, and may not be an important feature, or indeed even a necessary one, in the construction of our identities, whether at the individual or collective level". The consequence of May's position according to Skutnabb-Kangas is that if language use were merely a surface feature of ethnic identity, adopting another language would only affect the language aspect of our ethnic identity, not the identity itself. Thus, the loss of a particular language is not the end of the world for a particular ethnic identity-the latter simply adapts to the use of the new language. Eastman (1984:275) therefore, posits that "there is no need to worry about preserving ethnic identity, so long as the only change being made is in what language we use".

## **4 Theoretical framework**

For this paper, the Revised Social Identity and Ethno linguistic Identity Theory (Revised SIT/ELIT) has been adopted. Oakes (2001) reviewed the SIT and ELIT and also introduced the additional elements of integration, bilingualism and biculturalism. Minority groups can adopt convergence mechanisms such as assimilation, acculturation/integration and over communication of dominant group's culture (in the case of bicultural individuals).

Divergence mechanisms from dominant out-group include the re-definition of previously negatively-viewed symbols, creation of new, positively-viewed symbols, selection of an alternative, less favourable out-group for comparison and under communication of dominant group's culture.

The scopes of linguistic and non-linguistic boundaries were broadened to encompass hard and soft boundaries and these two in turn, rest upon the concepts of social mobility. The interaction of the notions of hard and soft boundaries creates four types of categories which are: hard linguistic boundary, hard non-linguistic boundary, soft linguistic boundary and soft non-linguistic boundary. Groups with hard linguistic boundaries have distinctive languages, those with hard non-linguistic boundaries have other distinctive identity markers like religion and culture, groups with soft linguistic boundaries adopt others' languages yet, they retain other ethnic features while groups with soft non-linguistic boundaries adopt other ethnic features besides the language of the dominant out-group.

The newly introduced concept of different arenas for the construction of national identity recognises the fact that even when different groups converge and diverge simultaneously on different dimensions, they can also do so within different arenas such as on ethnic, national and global scales. These arenas can be considered as existing independently of one another while they can also overlap. In the case of the former, such independent existence is possible because the status of a group may differ from one arena to the next such that a group may be dominant at the national arena but considered a minority at the continental and global levels.

### ***5. Methodology: Qualitative research method***

The classical methods applied in field research are primarily classified as qualitative research methods (Korth, 2005). Qualitative research method is concerned with structures and patterns and how something is. Qualitative studies are by their very nature inductive; this means that theory is derived from the result of our research (Rasinger, 2010). Qualitative research method is considered more appropriate for this study as a result of the unreliability of the questionnaire as a survey tool for ethnographic studies. This according to Senayon (2016) should not constitute a surprise as the question of the validity of questionnaire administration for certain forms of research remains a contentious issue in empirical scholarship. Silverman (2001) states that, human attitudes are rarely coherent and may change from situation to situation, or during a person's life. One informant may therefore contradict himself/herself, but still have meaningful reasoning behind his/her contradictions. A qualitative analysis allows us to understand this reasoning and to find culturally determined patterns and concepts.

In collecting data for this study, two research instruments were used. They are: interview and participant observation. These research instruments are considered by the researcher to be mutually helpful in realising the focus of the present research. The interview is considered an important instrument for eliciting data for this study because of the alignment of this thesis with the opinion of Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:107) who view interviews as accounts which are not just a representation of respondents' social world, but describe such accounts as "part of the world they describe". Korth (2001:45) further adds that such narratives are not only seen as representing experiences, but also as contributing to the construction of those experiences.

The type of interview used in this study is the structured interview. The choice of this type of interview is premised on the fact that it ensures the neutrality of the interviewer or moderator through the eradication of leading and ambiguous questions and through the standardisation of their delivery. The structured interview adopted for this study has been aptly described by Edley and Litosseliti (2006) who describe structured interviews as one which enables the interviewer to work through a series of pre-scripted questions while ensuring that both the order and the wording used is identical on each and every occasion. Despite such pre-scripted ordering of questions, interviewees were asked follow up questions where considered necessary. Such follow up questions helped to complete or clarify answers provided to the main (pre-scripted) questions where sufficient detail was lacking.

For this study, a total of 40 respondents across different age groups, social strata, local government areas, and gender were interviewed. The informal nature with which the interviews were conducted helped a lot in eliciting responses that were personal to the respondents. It is important to add that not all the interviews were conducted in English; some were conducted in the Yoruba language so as to enable the interviewer capture accurate perceptions of those with low or no proficiency in the English language. Hence, the need arose to conduct some of the interviews in the Yoruba language and later translate such into English for the purpose of the research.

It is pertinent to note at this juncture that while thoughts and emotions can be inferred on, the third element of attitude which is response, cannot be captured by interviewing or testing, but must be observed as it occurs naturally (Korth, 2005). This informs our decision to complement data obtained through interviews with those gathered through participant observation.

Participant observation as a method of data collection “is based on the idea that one has to participate in the world surrounding one in order to understand it, rather than just observe it” (Korth; 2005:55). The method has its origins in cultural anthropology (Malinowski, 1922) and requires long term immersion in the community under study. It allows the researcher to take part in the everyday life and activities of the community being investigated without interfering (Silverman, 2001). Hence, it is a necessary complement of interview in any field research. Participant observation is deemed very crucial for this study because it offers the researcher the opportunity to see if there is really a correspondence between the identity the majority of the respondents claimed in both questionnaire and interview and the ones they actually manifest in their daily lives. Countless trips to the community in the last one and half decades have left the researcher puzzled about the intricate patterns of linguistic and ethnic identities of the Fulani people of Ilorin. The period also offered platforms for familiarity with different members of the community. This was particularly helpful in earning their trust (which came in handy during interviews), gaining helpful insights and obtaining the reliable data needed when this research work commenced four years ago.

### **6. Language shift and the Fulani people of Ilorin**

A total of forty respondents were interviewed for the study. Thirty-eight of the respondents (95.0%) asserted that their mother tongue and first language was the Yoruba language while the remaining two (5.0%) asserted that their mother tongue was Fulfulde. Of these two respondents with Fulfulde mother tongue, one admitted that despite having Fulfulde as mother tongue, the language is not her first language because she acquired Yoruba first. In this case, Yoruba was her first language although she is equally a good speaker of Fulfulde. Below are excerpts from some of the interviews:

- Researcher: What is your first language?  
Ms F: My first language is the Yoruba language.  
Researcher: What about your mother tongue?  
Ms F: It is also the Yoruba language.  
Researcher: Which LGA are you from?  
Ms F: Ilorin East LGA.  
Researcher: What is your first language?  
Ms M: The Yoruba language.  
Researcher: What about your mother tongue?  
Ms M: It is the Yoruba language too.  
Researcher: What LGA are you from?  
Ms M: I am from Ilorin West LGA.  
Researcher: Which language is your first language?  
Mr M: The Yoruba language.  
Researcher: Which language is your mother tongue?  
Mr M: The Yoruba language too.  
Researcher: What LGA are you from?  
Mr M: Ilorin East LGA.  
Researcher: Which is your first language?  
Ms N: The Yoruba language.  
Researcher: What about your mother tongue?  
Ms N: The Yoruba language is also my mother tongue.  
Researcher: Which LGA are you from?  
Ms N: Ilorin West LGA.  
Researcher: What is your first language?  
Mr T: My first language is the Yoruba language.  
Researcher: What about your mother tongue?  
Mr T: The Yoruba language is also my mother tongue.  
Researcher: Which LGA do you hail from?

Mr T: I am from Ilorin West LGA.  
Researcher: What is your first language?  
Ms S: The Yoruba language.  
Researcher: Which language is your mother tongue?  
Ms S: My mother tongue is also the Yoruba language.  
Researcher: Which LGA do you hail from?  
Ms S: Ilorin West LGA.  
Researcher: What is your first language?  
Ms A: My first language is the Yoruba language.  
Researcher: Which language is your mother tongue?  
Ms A: The Yoruba language is also my mother tongue.  
Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?  
Ms A: I am from Ilorin West LGA.  
Researcher: Which language is your first language?  
Mr Y: My first language is the Yoruba language.  
Researcher: Which language is your mother tongue?  
Mr Y: The Yoruba language is equally my mother tongue.  
Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?  
Mr Y: I am from Ilorin West LGA.  
Researcher: Which language is your first language?  
Mr Z: My first language is the Yoruba language.  
Researcher: What about your mother tongue?  
Mr Z: It is also the Yoruba language.  
Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?  
Mr Z: Ilorin West LGA.  
Researcher: What is your first language?  
Mr M: The Yoruba language.  
Researcher: Is the Yoruba language also your mother tongue?  
Mr M: Yes, the Yoruba language is also my mother tongue.  
Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?  
Mr M: Ilorin East LGA.  
Researcher: Which language is your first language?  
Ms O: My first language is the Yoruba language.  
Researcher: What about your mother tongue?  
Ms O: It is also the Yoruba language.  
Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?  
Ms O: Ilorin East LGA.  
Researcher: Which language is your first language?  
Ms M: Fulfulde.  
Researcher: So, you speak Fulfulde.  
Ms M: No, I do not speak Fulfulde... I neither understand nor speak Fulfulde unlike the Yoruba language which I speak fluently and understand well.  
Researcher: Why did say Fulfulde is your L1.  
Ms M: It is because I am of Fulani ancestry.  
Researcher: So, which language is your first language?  
Ms M: It is the Yoruba language.  
Researcher: And your mother tongue?  
Ms M: It is also the Yoruba language.  
Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?  
Ms M: Ilorin East LGA.  
Researcher: Which language is your first language?  
Mr T: The Yoruba language.  
Researcher: Which one is your mother tongue?

- Mr T: The Yoruba language.  
 Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?  
 Mr T: Ilorin West LGA.  
 Researcher: Which language is your first language?  
 Mr Ta: The Yoruba language.  
 Researcher: What about your mother tongue?  
 Mr Ta: It is also the Yoruba language.  
 Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?  
 Mr Ta: I am from Ilorin East LGA.  
 Researcher: What is your first language?  
 Ms As: It is the Yoruba language.  
 Researcher: Is the Yoruba language also your mother tongue?  
 Ms As: No, the Yoruba language is not my mother tongue, Fulfulde is my mother tongue.  
 Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?  
 Ms As: Ilorin South LGA.  
 Researcher: What is your first language?  
 Ms R: It is the Yoruba language.  
 Researcher: Is the Yoruba language also your mother tongue?  
 Ms R: No, the Yoruba language is not my mother tongue, Fulfulde is my mother tongue.  
 Researcher: Which LGA do you come from?  
 Ms R: Ilorin South LGA.

These interview extracts show the prevalence of the Yoruba language as the first language among the Fulani people of Ilorin. The reason is that, of the forty interviewees, thirty-eight are L1 speakers of the Yoruba language and that constitutes 95.0% of the interview sample size while two respondents which constitute 5.0% of the sample size claim Fulfulde as mother tongue while only one of those two acquiring it as first language. Recognising Fulfulde as mother tongue by one respondent did not translate into having proficiency in the language; the recognition is only for symbolic reasons. Hence, 2.5% of the sample size identified the Yoruba language as first language but not as mother tongue. Captured in the table below are details of respondents' linguistic identities:

**Table 7.1: Respondents' first languages, mother tongues and heritage languages**

S/N	Respondent	First language	Mother Tongue	Heritage Language
1	Ms F	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
2	Ms M	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
3	Mr M	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
4	Ms N	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
5	Mr T	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
6	Ms S	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
7	Ms A	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
8	Mr Y	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
9	Mr Z	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
10	Mr M	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
11	Ms O	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
12	Ms M	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
13	Mr T.M	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
14	Mr Ta	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
15	Ms As	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde	Fulfulde
16	Ms R	Fulfulde	Fulfulde	Fulfulde
17	Mr K	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
18	Mr W	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
19	Ms T	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
20	Mr F	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde

21	Ms B	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
22	Ms D	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
23	Ms Ro	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
24	Mr N	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
25	Ms E	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
26	Mr J	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
27	Mr H	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
28	Mr S	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
29	Mr I	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
30	Mr L	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
31	Ms T	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
32	Mr A	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
33	Ms Ru	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
34	Mr H	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
35	Mr B	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
36	Mr I	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
37	Mr F	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
38	Ms D	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
39	Ms Y	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde
40	Mr G	The Yoruba language	The Yoruba language	Fulfulde

### 7. Identity shift and the Fulani people of Ilorin

Having established a clear pattern of linguistic identity in favour of the Yoruba language, it is imperative that one examines the patterns of ethnic identity obtainable in the community under study by checking the correspondence between respondents' ethnic and linguistic identities. This will help in checking if the positive attitude recorded in favour of the Yoruba language also extends to the Yoruba ethnic identity. The following are excerpts from some of the interviews:

My mother tongue is Yoruba Language but I am not a Yoruba person. I am Fulani and that is the only way I would identify myself and would want to be identified... (Mr Y).

My mother tongue is the Yoruba language but I am not a Yoruba person. I am Fulani because my family is of Fulani ancestry... I prefer to identify with the Fulani ethnic group... (Ms F).

My mother tongue is Yoruba Language although I am a Fulani person... (Ms A).

Though my father is of Fulani ancestry (from Sokoto State), my mother is from Ijebu-Ode in Ogun State... I would identify myself as a Yoruba person. I do not consider myself as either Fulani or Ilorin neither do I consider myself as Fulani-Ilorin nor Yoruba-Ilorin... (Ms M).

My mother tongue is Yoruba Language but I would not describe myself as a Yoruba person. I prefer to identify myself as an Ilorin person although I am of Fulani ancestry... I strongly prefer the Ilorin identity... (Mr M).

I do not consider myself a Yoruba person though my first language is Yoruba Language. My family progenitors are from Sokoto though we cannot trace our roots back there anymore. I prefer to identify as an Ilorin person... (Ms N).

My first language is the Yoruba language but I am of Fulani ancestry... I prefer to identify myself as a Fulani-Ilorin person... (Mr T).

My first language is the Yoruba language but I am of Fulani ancestry and I prefer to identify as a Fulani person... (Ms O).

My first language is Yoruba Language though I am not a Yoruba person. I am a Fulani person... (Ms A).

I am Fulani and my first language is Fulfulde... I would not mind being identified as a Yoruba person as that seem to be the trend now but I would not identify myself as Yoruba... I would identify myself as Fulani (Ms R).

My mother tongue is Fulfulde but Yoruba is my first language... I prefer to identify as a Fulani person though I wouldn't mind being addressed as a Yoruba person... (Ms As).

My first language is the Yoruba language but I am of Fulani ancestry. Although, I would identify with the Fulani ethnic group but would not object if I am referred to as a Yoruba person... (Mr T.M)

As seen above, respondents showed preference for their ancestral ethnic identity such that, linguistic identity has shown in the preceding section, has no significant correlation with ethnic identity. This is because the overwhelming favourable disposition towards the Yoruba language (95.0%) was not replicated on the question which bothered on respondents' ethnic identity where only 25.0% of the entire sample size indicated belongingness to non-ancestral ethnicities. On the contrary, the majority of respondents (75.0%) considered themselves Fulani people despite their linguistic allegiance to the Yoruba language and this clearly demonstrates the variance between linguistic and ethnic identities among the Fulani people of Ilorin. With this analysis, it is obvious that the experience of language shift did not translate into identity shift. The following table captures respondents' ethnic identities alongside other information:

**Table 7.1: Respondents' ancestral ethnicity and preferred ethnic identity**

S/N	Respondent	Linguistic identity	Ancestral Ethnicity	Self-ascribed identity
1	Ms F	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
2	Ms M	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Yoruba
3	Mr M	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Ilorin
4	Ms N	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Ilorin
5	Mr T	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani-Ilorin
6	Ms S	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
7	Ms A	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
8	Mr Y	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
9	Mr Z	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
10	Mr M	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
11	Ms O	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
12	Ms M	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
13	Mr T. M	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
14	Mr Ta	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
15	Ms As	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
16	Ms R	Fulfulde	Fulani	Fulani
17	Mr K	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Yoruba
18	Mr W	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
19	Ms T	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
20	Mr F	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
21	Ms B	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
22	Ms D	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
23	Ms Ro	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani-Ilorin
24	Mr N	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
25	Ms E	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
26	Mr J	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Ilorin
27	Mr H	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
28	Mr S	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Yoruba
29	Mr I	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
30	Mr L	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
31	Ms T	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
32	Mr A	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
33	Ms Ru	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
34	Mr H	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Yoruba
35	Mr B	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
36	Mr I	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
37	Mr F	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
38	Ms D	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani
39	Ms Y	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Ilorin
40	Mr G	The Yoruba language	Fulani	Fulani



It can be deduced from the table above that there is no symmetrical correlation between respondents' first languages/mother tongues and their ethnic ancestry. For example, respondents overwhelmingly claim to Yoruba as first language was not as a result of having Yoruba ancestry. The issue became even more interesting when respondents were asked to describe their ethnicity (self-constructed ethnic identity) so as to check whether their ancestral backgrounds correlated with each individual's construction of his/her ethnic identity. Four respondents which represents 10.0% described themselves as Yoruba people; two (5.0%) ascribed to themselves bicultural identities which was inclusive of their ancestral ethnicity (Fulani-Ilorin); four preferred a civic identity (Ilorin) while the remaining thirty (75.0%) stuck with their ancestral identity (Fulani). This gives huge credence to Glaser (2007:267) who posits that "language ability can certainly be assumed to be less important for a sense of belonging than ancestral connections". It equally affirms Edwards (2009:251) who argues that:

A continuing sense of ethnic-group identity need not inevitably depend upon the continuing use of the original language in ordinary, communicative dimensions – but it can hardly be denied that linguistic continuity is a powerful cultural support. It is not the only pillar, but it is clearly an important one.

Through convergence and in this case, acculturation (Giles and Coupland, 1991), the vast majority of the Fulani people of Ilorin overwhelmingly identified the Yoruba language as their first language without putting their heritage language on the same pedestal as the Yoruba language. Even the majority of those with a high degree of ethnic heritage consciousness did not mention their heritage languages when asked about their first languages or mother tongues. A noticeable trait amongst the Fulani people of Ilorin is that they have a soft linguistic boundary and this has led to the loss of their language within the community under study. The language is therefore more prominent for serving symbolic purposes and less prominent for serving communicative purposes.

These findings echo the position of the Gaelic singer, Arthur Cormack (Glaser, 2007:266) who proposes that one "one can be Gael without actually speaking Gaelic to a certain extent" because being Gaelic "is ... about your whole background, where you come from, ... your history". Cormack's position is synonymous with that expressed by Mackenzie (2002) who avers that culture is rooted in language but perhaps more importantly, it is also rooted in social structures and traditions. In this way, it is quite possible to be a Gael and not have fluent (or even working) Gaelic. Arthur Cormack and Mackenzie's positions have helped to further prove that respondents with no proficiency in Fulfulde are no less members of their ethnic group than those who speak their heritage languages.

In a similar vein, Woodbury (1993) asserts that the analyses of language shift have demonstrated that traditional communication patterns do not necessarily cease when ancestral vocabularies and grammars are abandoned. This, according to Woodbury, constitutes an interesting argument against the thesis that lexico-grammatical language shift engenders full-scale assimilation. The cases of language shift experienced by the respondents discussed above, have not led to identity shift. Edwards (2009:251) also puts this succinctly when he says that "the attachment felt by the English-speaking Irish or Welsh to a culture and an ancestry whose language they no longer possess is a psychologically real one and demonstrates the continuing power of what is intangible and symbolic". Edwards further adds that indeed, there often exists continuing attachment to the "lost" language itself as an important aspect of that ancestry. The fact that such attachments rarely lead to actual linguistic revival is regrettable in the eyes of those who feel that language is the pillar of culture. He further adds that these attachments (to a culture and ancestry whose languages are lost), however attenuated or "residual", have a meaning.

Having shown that the majority of respondents discarded their linguistic identities in the construction of their ethnic identities as a result of emotional attachment to their ancestral backgrounds, it is imperative that one examines in brief, the mosaic patterns of identity among respondents.

### ***8 The mosaic patterns of identities among the Fulani of Ilorin***

Convergence and divergence as key features of the Revised SIT/ELIT play prominent roles in this research. Hence, this section examines their impacts on the identity patterns observed amongst respondents to explain the mosaic patterns of identity that emanated from the study. These patterns are discussed below:

#### **8.1 Ethnic converts**

Glaser (2007:289) in her investigation of Gaelic and Sorbian perspectives to minority languages and cultural diversity in Europe, used the term "converts" in relation to cultural expertise to describe "the most perceptive and

committed circle of activists” which includes “individuals who come from non-Sorbian backgrounds”. The term “ethnic converts” as used in this paper is coined after Glaser and used in a similar sense but without a dose of activism. Therefore, ethnic converts refer to those individuals who show commitment to ethnicities other than theirs and who willingly identify with another ethnic group or claim belongingness to another ethnic group. The concept of ethnic conversion is also akin in some aspects to the convergence mechanism of the Revised SIT/ELIT which caters to different categories of accommodation ranging from cases of complete assimilation (which involves complete movement to another group) to those of intermediate state of acculturation and or integration. The difference however is that ethnic conversion is more restricted because it deals strictly with ethnic identity while convergence embraces a wider range of notions.

Eight of the respondents in this study fall into this category. There were however variations in the levels of their ethnic conversion. For example, four of the ethnic converts expressed preference for a Yoruba identity while the other four expressed preference for an Ilorin identity. Although there is no such ethnic group as Ilorin but these respondents’ construction of an Ilorin identity instead of their ancestral identity is an indication that they did not want to associate themselves with their ancestral ethnicities. It also shows that the respondents in question preferred a civic identity to an ethnic one. Thus, variations in the degrees of convergence affected the way ethnic converts handled their ancestral ethnicity and “new” ethnic identities.

### **8.2 Bicultural identities**

Biculturalism according to Edwards (2009) refers to the link that individuals have with more than one ethnocultural community. He described bicultural individuals as those who have their feet in more than one cultural camp adding that biculturalism does not necessarily require having more than one linguistic ability. Two (5.0%) of the forty respondents fall under the first category and they both described themselves as Fulani-Ilorin. Glaser (2007:274) came in contact with respondents similar to those described here and one of them who Glaser referred to as OL2 talked about having value for both his Sorbian heritage and the input from the German side. The respondent adds that “I actually feel that I have been more strongly influenced and inspired by German arts and culture and would not want to sacrifice what I have gained from them... We are, after all, talking of biculturality”. The famous Lebanese-French writer, Maalouf, author of the best-selling novel, *Leo the African* (1998) in his book *On Identity* (2000:3) wrote about his identity thus:

How many times since I left Lebanon in 1976 to live in France have people asked me with the best intention in the world, whether I felt “more French” or “more Lebanese”? And I always give the same answer: “Both!”

To those who ask the question, I patiently explain that I was born in Lebanon and lived there till I was 27; that Arabic is my mother tongue; and that it was in Arabic translation that I first read Dumas and Dickens and Gulliver’s Travels; and that it was in my native village, the village of my ancestors, that I experienced the pleasures of childhood and heard some of the stories that were later to inspire my novels. How could I forget all that? How could I cast it aside? On the other hand, I have lived for 22 years on the soil of France; I drank her water and wine; everyday my hands touch her ancient stones; I write my books in her language; never again will she be a foreign country to me.

So, am I half French and half Lebanese? Of course not. Identity can’t be compartmentalized. You can’t divide it up into halves or thirds or any other separate segments. I haven’t got several identities: I have just got one, made up of many components combined together in a mixture that is unique to every individual.

Though the issue raised by Maalouf here is in reference to his personal identity, it also resonates to a very large extent with the respondents discussed above whose identities are made whole by different social circumstances.

### **8.3 Sole heritage ethnic individuals**

Apart from the two identity patterns described in sections 8.1 and 8.2, other respondents identified themselves solely in line with their heritage ethnic identities. These set of respondents expressed belongingness to their ancestral ethnicity which is Fulani.

## **9 Findings from participant observation**

It is important to use this data elicitation tool to check the veracity of claims made by the respondents in this research. This is with a view to strengthening our findings and conclusions. The researcher noticed that a lot of Ilorin people of Fulani ancestry do not actually mind being identified as Yoruba people in the context of casual conversations but within the context of granting interviews on their identities, many would actually object to

being called Yoruba people. This buttresses Omoniyi's (2006) position that the location of an identity option on the hierarchy fluctuates as the amount of salience associated with it fluctuates between moments.

In terms of naming, it was observed through participant observation that apart from names with religious connotation, answering Yoruba names is the norm among the Fulani people of Ilorin. In fact, if names were considered the marker of ethnic identity, the Fulani people of Ilorin would easily be co-constructed as Yoruba people but the argument of this paper that language shift (as language is a tool for naming) does not always translate into a shift of ethnic identity holds sway.

## **10 Conclusion**

With insights from qualitative data, this paper analysed and discussed the different manifestations of identity among the Fulani people of Ilorin. It also shows how a general shift of linguistic allegiance did not translate into a corresponding shift of identity.

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