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Identity, Language Practices and Ideologies among Nepali-Bhutanese in West Michigan

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Abstract

The languages that we use are a result of our identities and the social contexts and related roles in which we participate. The language practices of one small community of ethnic Nepali-Bhutanese who were revoked citizenship in Bhutan, expelled into refugee camps in Nepal for nearly twenty years, and who now reside in Grand Haven, Michigan were of interest here. *Identity, Language Practices and Ideologies among Nepali-Bhutanese in West Michigan* builds on previous research that examines the relationship between language choice and socio-cultural factors such as gender, age, language proficiency, education, citizenship, and context among multi-lingual speakers (Baquedano-López 2009, Booth 2009, Grimley 2001, Kachru et al 2009, Meinhof & Galasinski 2005, Fillmore 2000). In the current study we examined the linguistic means by which Nepali-Bhutanese negotiate American English speaking culture while simultaneously retaining their Nepali-Bhutanese languages and culture. Data included recorded ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and written texts such as email, Facebook wall posts, and essays, and were organized on axes of grammatical indicators of identity, language loss, language perception and cultural identity formation through language. A potential benefit of this study is to aid ESL (English as a Second Language) tutors and teachers, social workers and the wider community of West Michigan in better serving, assimilating and welcoming this growing population. In addition, the results of the project may help trained educators, volunteers, and the Nepali-Bhutanese better understand language practices and their effects on identity, cultural assimilation and accommodation, as well as the teaching and learning of ESL.

Introduction

Language is the primary tool by which a person forms and maintains a self-concept. Whether intentional or not nearly everything that one utters defines oneself and indicates desire for membership to groups, ideas, communities, cultures or nations. Meinhoff & Galasinski argue, “that it is hardly possible to think of any linguistic phenomena which are not in some way implicated in the process of identity construction” (2005, p. 16). Self-concept formation is thus an ongoing process throughout the life cycle and is achieved by the words one chooses, and these words are used to label the individual and clearly demarcate him from and identify him with his peers and culture.

How one uses words, however, is bound by the social and linguistic rules of the groups to which he desires affiliation, or in the case of culture, those into which he is born. Fuller writes, “Social identity is constructed through discourse” (Fuller 2005), as through discourse each person constantly identifies with any number of groups, ideologies or national identities, from choice of register, dialect or language. In addition, any given discourse is contingent upon the perceived social benefit thereof, and in any social situation value is placed not only on what a speaker says. but what linguistic means (language, dialect, etc.) are used to say it. Finally, how one defines oneself is dependent on the available personal and social linguistic resources, and how these resources can be used in group identification and the fluid development of personal identity.

The formation and maintenance of individual and collective identity through language is also influenced by and contingent upon the perceived social rewards of any given utterance. “Discourse is a symbolic asset which can receive different values depending on the market in which it is offered” (Bourdieu 1977), and the markets (culture, community, group affiliations) in which discourse is offered affects how a person ultimately perceives available speech options and therefore himself. Multilingual speakers who reside in a non-native country where certain of their languages are more useful or socially valued than others are faced with potentially difficult language choices within any given utterance. A multilingual speaker has many ways to define him or herself linguistically not only because of the various semantic and grammatical strategies available from each separate language, but also the contradictory, overlapping and various social and linguistic encounters (or markets) that are possible because of those languages. As Bourdieu further writes, “linguists are right in saying that all languages are linguistically equal: they are wrong in thinking they are socially equal” (1977). Therefore it is up to those multilingual speakers to decide which language is appropriate for countless social situations, and also which language carries the most benefits for use in an ever-changing linguistic and social environment. For those born elsewhere who resettle in America intentionally or otherwise, the process of negotiating the various identities that accompany various language choices in an English dominated private and public life this process can be bewildering.

Immigrants and particularly refugees in America face a unique process of linguistic identity formation for several reasons. First, though not explicitly required to do so, American culture compels them to learn English in order to participate in social events outside of their native language environment. Second, to reconcile this new language with attempts to retain their former language and resulting culture, they must then choose which aspects of each language and culture to make their own in a process of self definition that encompasses a lifetime. One cannot simultaneously speak two languages at once just as one cannot be completely a part of two cultures at once, but a cohesive balance between culture and language can be achieved. Furthermore, those who seek refuge and resettle in America must adapt linguistically to a culture that may have little awareness of their previous hardships or language practices and ideologies.

In addition, because the country of which they were previously a part has likely forced them (through violence or political action) to resettle and re-identify linguistically and culturally elsewhere, these refugees can experience personal, cultural and linguistic displacement. Efforts to minimize this displacement by learning English are often bolstered for school age immigrants by ESL (English as a Second Language) programs in public schools, which can be beneficial to their success in an English speaking culture. Public education does not assist parents of immigrant and refugee children however, and they must find work to support their families while receiving little formal instruction in English. As a result of this educational discrepancy, many children may surpass their parents in English proficiency and be required to adopt a more adult role within the family, abandoning their previous language practices in order to accommodate American society's implied value of English.

As found elsewhere (Fillmore 2001, Ecke, 2004), accelerated linguistic accommodation of children can result in a loss of native languages even within two generations of one family. With this loss also comes the alienation of older generation immigrants who are not privileged with extensive schooling in English, and must learn as they earn money for their families. Some come with previous exposure to or education in the English language, and though this can minimize difficulties in adapting to American society, the individual must still decide how to identify him or herself linguistically. If multiple members of a culture resettle together and form a new language community in America, the community must also choose situations where it is appropriate to retain language and culture practices. These are the circumstance that Nepali-Bhutanese refugees encounter here in the United States, and specifically in Grand Haven, Michigan.

This study built upon previous research on language and identity (Baquedano-Lopez 2009, Booth 2009, Fuller 2007, Hobsbawm 1996, Meinhof & Galasinski 2005, Nero 2005), refugee immigrant experiences in America (Pipher 2003), and language attrition (Fillmore 2001, Ecke 2004), and examines the linguistic means by which ethnic Nepali-Bhutanese form, retain and maintain individual, community and national language identities amidst a society where English fluency carries a high social value and is present in many discourse markets. This population is newly resettled in America¹, and was expelled from Bhutan, a small Himalayan

¹ About 108,000 Bhutanese refugees of ethnic Nepalese descent have been living in seven camps in eastern Nepal since the early 1990s. The US is part of a group of seven countries addressing this long-standing situation by agreeing to resettle 60,000 of these refugees. Since July 2008 nearly 100 families have been placed in Grand Rapids and Grand Haven through Bethany Christian Service's Programs Assisting Refugee Acculturation (PARA).

country between India and Tibet that had previously housed upwards of 100,000 ethnic Nepalese by stringent citizenship acts. Through these citizenship acts and the political decisions of an ethnic Bhutanese ruling monarchy, nearly all of the ethnic Nepali citizens were removed willingly or otherwise from their homes in southern Bhutan. Beginning in the late 1980's they found refuge in eastern Nepal, and for nearly 20 years lived in refugee camps (Hobsbawm 1996, Lintner 1996).

Several languages are spoken and intermingle in this ethnically diverse region of Asia (Booth 2009), and the languages spoken by the specific community in Grand Haven include Nepali, Tamang, Dzongkha and English among others. How proficiency in several languages and the choices, causes and consequences of using one or another in an English speaking culture was of interest here. Research questions included but were not limited to the following: What linguistic practices do the participants use to accommodate themselves to an American English speaking culture while at the same time attempting to retain their own distinctive identity? Is language choice a function of proficiency, context or other socio-cultural factors?

To date no study has examined language practices and ideologies among Nepali-Bhutanese refugees in Michigan, though several have identified the political, social and cultural influences on this group (Adelman 2008, Giri 2005). The investigation of the distinct language practices of new arrivals in America especially relevant to educators, researchers and community members in West Michigan, which has been designated by the U.S. government as a resettlement region. In general, understanding how Nepali-Bhutanese use language to negotiate ways of being will further ethnographic and anthropological-linguistic studies of language choice, use, and ideologies. Specifically, the project's main implication is fostering cultural awareness for ESL tutors and teachers as well as social workers, sponsoring churches and their committees of volunteers, local communities, and the Nepali-Bhutanese as well.

Methods

The study relied on ethnographic methods including sociolinguistic interviews, participant observation, artifacts such as writing samples from email and Facebook. Interviews were structured both formally and informally. The informal interviews were conducted through casual conversation during participant observation as the researchers interacted with participants in a range of everyday activities: cooking; eating; visiting local parks and beaches; and playing board games such as *Parcheesi*. Formal interviews focused on the intersection of identity and language use, specifically the use of American English, Nepali and other languages in a range of contexts.

The study population was Nepali-Bhutanese refugees aged 14-55 years currently residing in Grand Haven, Michigan. Recruitment and sample selection followed a "snowball" (Johnstone 2000) pattern, as initial contact was made with a few families in the population, and through subsequent introductions the researchers met other members of the community in an expanding network, or "snowball." 16 participants of the community were chosen for interviews, and several others were involved in participant-observation activities but will not be directly identified here. A sample of the ages represented in the population was selected. Letters were randomly assigned to participants as pseudonyms, and are used throughout this paper.

Data were organized to illustrate first grammatical features from the subjects' native languages as well as the residual effects on their English use, and how these features index

identity formation. Second, the potential loss of first and second languages was found. Third, the perceived value of the population's various languages and this value's relation to identity and language practices was examined. Finally, the linguistic means by which these speakers reconcile the differences between an individualistic, English-speaking American culture and a collectivistic, multilingual Nepali one through several language strategies were investigated.

Findings

Identity through Grammar

As identified above, members of the population studied speak several languages, and through various observations and interviews I found that in Nepali culture relationships to others supersede personal accomplishments, and the culture is therefore a collective one. Respect for social hierarchies and relation is paramount, and this relational propensity is built not only into the interactions among community members but the Nepali language as well. This relational focus was apparent in their addresses to one another and in the ways that individuals referred to themselves. One of the most striking linguistic features observed in both interviews and participant observation that indicates this collectivist attitude in through language was the absence of singular pronoun usage among nearly all of the population.

When asked questions implying a personal and individual response, nearly all of the participants formulated answers using 'we'. "We feel that we are in heaven" *D* said when asked about his personal experiences in America so far. *P*, a talkative twenty one year old responded to a question about her perception of the word refugee and American perceptions of it with 'we' as well: "When they hear the word refugee, they know us and love us." A similar occurrence of this hesitance to use 'I' was found in a cellular telephone text message sent to the researcher by *F*, a worry-laden yet fun-loving twenty-six year old man, in which he wrote, "Me F _____, instead of I am F _____." This text illustrates the difficulty that he has in adapting to a language where references to oneself alone are commonplace. There was one exception to this low personal pronoun pattern, found in *B*, a highly intelligent 15 year old boy, who used 'I' very frequently in our interview. In addition, he is also responsible for much of the family's communication with English speakers, and wrote a letter to a sponsoring organization that demonstrates his individualism and identification with his Nepali community. This individual and collective language balancing act was shown in his use of both inclusive and collective pronouns and his declaration of his individual achievement as an Honor student.

... I came in the United State one Year before and I am the only one brother of G _____, When I came here I does not know what to do and who is going to help us, later when the _____ church help us, then I know where I came, and we found we came in the right place, when I came here I don't speak good English but later on I learn and now I am the current member of National Honor Society.

The lack of personal pronoun use noted in this population was akin to the frequent use of relational and hierarchical names for address of one's family, friends or elders. In addition, none of the participants reported having or calling anyone by a nickname and many of the reported exchanges between the Nepalese in this study typically involved relational names such as (*dada*, *nani*, *kancha*, *didi*). For example, brothers and sisters would not report calling each other by name but rather by the position that person holds in the sibling birth order, such as *kancha* for

youngest child or *tulu dada* for big brother. In addition, *N* and *P*, two sisters, and *O*, *N*'s husband, all in their early twenties, reported that in Nepali, verbs are even coded for respect, as there are different verb tenses used for respectful greetings (to elders) or informal ones. The use of relational contrasted with first names, the absence of nicknames and the coding of verbs for status all illustrate the relational nature of Nepali exchanges that are not only programmed into the cultural language practices but the language itself.

The two sisters *N* and *P* both also shared positive responses to the American trend of using first names for many types of discourse (other than the most formal). *N* stated that she prefers calling people by name because "we are all similar." In this instance she reconciled individualistic English language practices with Nepali relational ones, and used a collective pronoun to communicate her preference. Instead of viewing first name use as a way to clearly etch the individual identity, she saw this practice as a way to relate to everyone. When discussing interactions with younger members of her community here, *P* reported that "they will be calling us names—I like it." In both of these sisters responses they relate their affinity for the ability to use first names liberally, yet in describing this trend both used collective pronouns. The responses demonstrated the accommodation to individualist, English speaking American culture coexisting with the maintenance of collective aspects of Nepali language and culture. These sisters still reported addressing each other with relational names yet appreciated the use of first names.

Language Attrition

Among the population were found clear examples of language attrition, whereby a previous language and culture is lost when a family or community resettles in a new culture dominated by a new language and social practices. The most striking occurrence of this loss was within one tri-generational family living in one household. This family's personal language Tamang is still spoken by *I*, a forty-nine year old grandmother and a kindly matriarch. Her children, whose ages range from 16-29, speak the family language seldom and her grandson doesn't speak it at all. This fact illustrates language attrition clearly, as their native language is being lost because members are immersed in the language and culture of a new country. This phenomenon is sometimes intentional, as *I*'s daughter-in-law *H* stated that at home with her husband, "it is only English. No Nepali." The linguistic cost of resettlement in America was witnessed in this family, as there is apparently little practical or social value to speak a language that few know. *F* described the language delineation as follows: "Tamang—our own language; Dzongkha—our national language; Nepali—our official language" Before ever arriving in this country, this family spoke four or more languages, and some carried more social value in Nepal and Bhutan than others. Tamang appears to be one with the least value to younger members, and in this family after two generations it will likely be gone.

Aside from personal languages, there was evidence that Nepali use may have already lessened within this community. *E*, a 28-year-old mother with plans for her own higher education, reported her son's resistance to learning Nepali. "He is throwing away the language," she stated, her son's aversion to Nepali demonstrates the seeming inevitability of language loss that occurs within a few generations. Her son is also friends with *I*'s grandson, and both attend a school where English is likely the dominant language in the classroom and on the playground. For these children to retain their parents' native languages probably requires a great deal of mental and social effort, effort that can be spent learning English and accommodating to American language ideologies.

Many of the parents interviewed expressed desire to maintain Nepali language practices in their families, and many of the high school aged children still speak Nepali with friends outside of school, but the limited retention and practice of this language among the younger community members indicates that not only are personal languages like Tamang fading after two generations, but Nepali as well. *O*, a twenty two year old recent arrival from Nepal discussed his thoughts on teaching his children (he has none yet) his native language. “We should not forget him or her to speak Nepali,” and though parents may desire their children to retain Nepali culture and language, for children who attend schools where every subject is taught in English and make monolingual American friends who speak only English, the value of participating in a Nepali discourse community may seem diminished as they realize the English discourse markets in America. *B* identified the value of keeping both languages, and for Americans it is “good to have a concept about how people feels that know two languages.” Without American society’s awareness of the different linguistic identities that are available for multilingual speakers and the value that many discourse options holds, native languages will be dismissed and lost quickly.

Language Perception and Choice

In contrast to the regret that many members expressed at the loss of Nepali and the pragmatic acceptance of English within America was the nearly complete abandonment of the Dzongkha language among this population. The ethnic Nepali-Bhutanese studied come from a stratified, caste-based society in which members of higher castes (Ethnic Bhutanese) maintained their power through many means, not the least being the codified national language, Dzongkha. Though the subjects were ethnic Nepali people with their own unique language, in order to maintain citizenship in Bhutan, they were forced to learn Dzongkha, a language nearly all in this study reported as extremely difficult to learn, speak and write because of structural differences but also the low social value it carried. In addition, as *P*, a talkative twenty one year old woman reported, a major difficulty in learning Dzongkha was the fact that “it is not our language.” She further demarcated her Nepali identity with the statement, “we are the Nepali people, we speak the same language.” Her sister *A* merely laughed when speaking Dzongkha was mentioned. *P*’s statements and her sister’s flippancy toward forced language learning reflect the differing attitudes toward Dzongkha and Nepali, respectively.

P felt that Nepali language should be maintained because of its link to Nepali cultural identity, though *P* also stated “Nepali words are crazy.” Though she finds Nepali difficult to speak and write as well, the affinity that she feels for the language is tied to her identification with the aspects of her culture that help her to maintain her Nepali identity. In addition to Dzongkha instruction, when in school in the refugee camps, ethnic Nepali were taught in English as a medium, and many reported that the teachers would not allow Nepali to be spoken in the classroom. As *P* related, students were either fined or beaten if they spoke Nepali in the classroom. It would follow that these students would have the same ambivalence towards English as they do towards Dzongkha. However, English is not a mandated national language here in America, though it carries a higher social value than many others.

To this population, becoming American is synonymous with speaking English. An example of this desire to assimilate to American society linked with less Nepali spoken in the community comes from *L*, a quick to smile early forties Nepali with excellent English. She mentioned the trend in larger cities that have resettled Nepali-Bhutanese refugees towards the formation of monolingual Nepali communities, which she called “Little Nepal. Always talking Nepali, not improving English.” Here she demonstrated her realization that some aspects of

Nepali language practice must be minimized in order for the communities and their members to better accommodate to American society. In this regard *L* preferred Grand Haven because of the smaller number of Bhutanese and the opportunity for English practice that it allows. Nepali is still spoken widely within this community, and a large degree of code mixing occurs, yet many still recognize the importance of using English whenever possible.

Several of the subjects (*L, J, E, K*) who were either originally resettled in other parts of America or have visited Nepali friends elsewhere reported that the English spoken in Grand Haven is also much easier to understand because of the smaller number of fellow non-native English speakers, and the resulting code-mixing that occurred among other bilingual speakers in other cities made comprehension difficult. This attitude was illustrated by *C*'s belief that English is easier to learn in America and specifically Grand Haven because "here every time English" Given the amount of code-switching among the subjects in all of my interviews and participant observations, it follows that this population is complicit in the change of the English language as much as native Spanish speakers, yet many feel that code-mixing renders the language more difficult to understand.

One other notable contradiction in many of the subjects' responses to language choice questions which further demonstrates the linguistic pragmatism that appeared regarding the question of whether English or Nepali is easier to learn, and as a result which language was preferred by the speaker. Many of the participants felt that Nepali was more difficult to write and speak (other than the older ones), yet preferred Nepali to English. Though they wish to remain fluent in Nepali so that their culture is maintained, the participants realize the social capital that English represents. As *D*, a friendly thirty-eight year old man answered to whether he preferred English or Nepali, he stated simply, "More English for better future." His statement coupled with *L*'s on "Little Nepal" trends illustrated very clearly the perception that many of these participants have of American culture: speak English to succeed. Though they all may wish to retain Nepali identity and promote it in their children, they accept the language practices of this country and are willing to sacrifice perhaps their most important cultural identity tool in order to accommodate to an English speaking American society.

A way that participants demonstrated the perceived necessity of fluency in English was seen when *E* stated that she "prefer to speak English because I already know Nepali" and when asked hypothetically that if they could only watch movies in one language for the rest of their lives no matter the social language circumstance, *N, O* and *P* all indicated that they would choose English. *O* stated, "We watch English for practice." Here again the responses demonstrate the acceptance of the language conditions in which the Nepali-Bhutanese refugees now find themselves. Language choice among this population is a function of social and cultural necessity rather than personal preference.

Cultural Identity and Language

To perhaps balance their previous political expulsion with both life in the refugee camps and life here in their new home, many subjects indicated explicit appreciation for the legal system in America. This trend appeared in many of the interviews, when participants were asked, "What do you like about America and Grand Haven specifically?" Many of the responses matched each other verbatim with, "rules and regulations" (*D, F, G, K, L, and M*). When questioned further about this response, *D* stated, "officer persons respect grassroots level people." When further referring to the legal system, he mentioned that in Bhutan there were "no written laws, no constitution." In this response a few salient attitudes appeared. Officers in Nepal

were reportedly free to do as they pleased, and *O* related his experience with police in Nepal too, “No mistakes, but police beat.” Even teachers who spoke poor English themselves were allowed to beat students for wrong answers. The laws to which they were subject were not codified in any concrete form, so the authorities could translate, invent laws and enforce laws, which is perhaps why these people have an affinity for the reasonably consistent and written laws of America. Related to this was the response from *L*, who stated that “in America freedom is free, but in Nepal freedom is not free.” Here *L* used an idiom of American culture that illustrates the respect these people have for American liberty within legislated constraints. Freedom in Nepal was only for those who had access to social assets based on language.

A line of inquiry in the study, which was the most abstract and perhaps most significant identified in the subjects: “Do you feel American or Nepali, and if so, when?” Responses displayed the various ways that the members of this growing and assimilating community adapt linguistically and socially to resettlement in America. Some answers indicated identity formation through place, some illustrated identity formation through language, and others demonstrated nearly simultaneous maintenance of Nepali and American identity, while others outlined the future goal of being American. All responses demonstrated how fluid the process of identity formation is. One of the youngest interviewed participants was *K*, a fifteen-year old girl, and when stating the times she feels American most, said, “I don’t when I am sad, because I am not speaking English.” Her response demonstrates the connection that she perceived between the English language and American society. In an (ever diminishingly) English dominated culture, this respondent’s happiness is tied to her proficiency in English. Her age and her immersion in English speaking schools may affect her happiness as well, and her response indicates the value that proficiency in English can carry, both for refugee teenagers.

Another response regarding when they feel American was from *N* and *O*, two newly arrived and married refugees. *O* responded to the question with “As soon as we landed,” which illustrates the displacement he felt until arrival in America and his immediate linguistic identification with the land here. In our interview he also described his initial expulsion from Bhutan when he was a child, stating “we have lost our properties; we have lost our identity.” To him identity is clearly tied to place and property. His wife *N* had the similar response “if I touch the ground.” These two were the most recently resettled in America of the subjects, and as many of their family members were already here their identification with America may have been strengthened by this fact. *F* gave a similar response when discussing his life in Nepali refugee camps: “I don’t like this life; no properties.” He had no country or property with which to identify, and as a result he was unhappy. Nevertheless, these responses suggest a strong link between cultural identities for the Nepalese are grounded in place and reflected in their language choices. In contrast to these two was *C*’s response. She referred to herself as “Nepali, because I’m born in Nepal.” Her identity was also linked to a country, but to her place of birth rather than her new home. In their responses these participants demonstrate the different ways that cultural and personal identity is maintained amidst permanent national and cultural relocation.

B, the exception to many of the collective response of his fellow Nepalese answered the question of feeling Nepali or American as follows: “I feel that I am both, but more American.” *A*, his sister, also reported feeling both Nepali and American. *B*, however, went on to say, “I always want to keep up my Nepali.” He is the one participant who used ‘I’ frequently in our interview as shown here and earlier, and was also the only participant to explicitly state that he felt both American and Nepali. When *D* gave an answer, he said, “We are future Americans.” In contrast

to *B*, he did not feel both or even American yet, and his response indicates that to him being Nepali or American are mutually exclusive states of being. The contradictory responses between a father nearly forty and two teenagers illustrate the younger subjects' fast linguistic assimilation into American culture coexisting with the desire to retain Nepali identity, and *D*'s perception that he, his family and his fellow Nepalese will become Americans in the future. Like *N* and *O* above, *D* will be only American, but his American identity is tied to his intended proficiency in English

Conclusions

The population of ethnic Nepali-Bhutanese that was studied is a growing one, and represents the beginning of more Nepali refugees to come. To understand how best to assimilate these linguistically diverse people into American society it is necessary to first understand the language practices and ideologies that are present not only in their culture but also within the several languages themselves that they speak. People identify with a nation, community or language, but this population has attachments to several of each. Many linguistic strategies by which this population adapts to American English speaking culture were found, and though consistent patterns in language attitudes and ideologies were found, not all were clear-cut or static.

One prevalent linguistic pattern that I found was the balance of individualist and collectivist cultural tendencies evinced by the overlap and coexistence of Nepali and English language practices in this population, such as naming practices and pronoun usage. Another trend was the recognition and acceptance by many members that in order to accommodate to an English speaking society, some of their linguistic and cultural practices must be reduced or abandoned. Both of these patterns within the population indicate the type of practices and ideologies that pre-existed in the population and are evolving now. In responses to formal and informal interview questions were found several different ways that new identities are formed and existing ones maintained through language practices.

A limitation of this study was the depth, as certain factors cut fieldwork to two months, and because of scheduling constraints not all of the community members were interviewed or observed. However, strong patterns in language practices and ideologies of this population emerged from the gathered data. The grammatical options available for identity formation are expanding through the use of personal names and pronouns, and some embrace this individualistic linguistic trend more readily than others. The pattern of language loss of a few of this population's native languages indicates that perhaps the available language choices will diminish for these people with time and successive generations. Future research on this group could adopt a more longitudinal framework, whereby language attrition trends will be more clearly seen in both the attitudes and language practices of the population. In addition, nascent linguistic and cultural identities will crystallize as these people accommodate to the language practices of an English speaking culture.

Within this multilingual micro-culture many contradictory and complementary methods by which members form unique and diverse yet contextually bound linguistic and personal identities exist; some are contingent upon the person with whom they are speaking, some upon the perception of potential benefits of the specific discourse, and some are built and maintained by the very ground that a person stands upon. Language choice and preference is an evaporating luxury that they have as each successive generation ages, becomes adults, and leaves behind an

underused or forgotten language. With this also comes the loss of a culture, way of life and means of securing an individual identity as well.

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Dissemination Plan

As of completion of the project I have no concrete plans for dissemination, however, I will submit an abstract to The Language and Linguistics Student Conference in at the University of Central Oklahoma on November 13th 2010, and will submit an abstract and personal statement as part of GVSU's CUR application for the research celebration in Washington, D.C. I may also present at a few Grand Haven Churches that have sponsored refugees through PARA.