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Negotiating Identity: Language and Self-Representation Among Moroccan University Students

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Abstract

This study explores how Moroccan university students negotiate identity within Morocco's multilingual landscape, where Darija, Modern Standard Arabic, French, Amazigh languages, English, and global cultural influences intersect. Rather than viewing identity as fixed or singular, the project examines how young adults construct and express their identities across shifting linguistic, social, and cultural contexts. Focusing on university students aged 18–22 in urban Morocco, the study investigates how language functions as a means of communication and as a medium through which belonging, self-understanding, and cultural affiliation are negotiated.

Using a qualitative research design, the project combines semi-structured interviews with observational fieldwork to examine participants' narratives and everyday language practices. Interviews are conducted primarily in Moroccan Arabic (Darija), with flexibility to shift into French or Modern Standard Arabic when appropriate, allowing multilingual practices and code-switching to emerge naturally. Participants' educational, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds provide additional context for interpreting their experiences. The analysis focuses on language choice, code-switching, and personal narratives to understand how students position themselves within multiple linguistic and cultural communities.

The study is guided by three central questions: what roles Arabic, French, English, and Amazigh play in identity formation; how students negotiate tensions between tradition, modernity, and global belonging; and how their narratives function as forms of cultural and linguistic self-representation. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of Stuart Hall, Pierre Bourdieu, and Edward Said while remaining grounded in participants' lived experiences, the study employs thematic and narrative analysis to identify recurring patterns of identity construction. By treating interviews as narrative texts, this project demonstrates how literary approaches can enrich qualitative research while contributing to broader discussions of multilingualism, postcolonial identity, language, and self-representation in contemporary Morocco. Ultimately, it argues that language serves as a dynamic site through which Moroccan university students continually negotiate identity in an increasingly globalized world.

Keywords: Identity, Multilingualism, Moroccan Students