

Analyzing the Perception of Identity in Bilingual Communities: Case Study of Eritrean Immigrants in Switzerland

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Abstract : This study examines the way second-generation Eritrean immigrants living in the French-speaking part of Switzerland behave linguistically and culturally. The aim of this research is to demonstrate how the participants deal with their bilingualism (Tigrinya and French). More precisely, how does their language use correlates with their socio-cultural attitudes and how do these aspects (re)construct their identity? Data for this research was collected via, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Participants were asked to answer questions regarding their linguistic habits, their perception on being bilingual and their cultural identity. The major findings demonstrate that generation 2 relates more with the host country's language since French is used as the main language in their daily interactions. On the other hand, due to the fact that they have never lived in Eritrea yet were raised by Eritrean born parents in a foreign country, it is more difficult for them to unanimously identify with just one culture. In that sense, intergenerational transmission plays a major role in the perception of identity. All the participants have at least a basic knowledge of Tigrinya, but the use of languages varies according to the purpose. Proficiency in the native language and sense of belonging can be correlated with the frequency of visits to Eritrea. In conclusion, the question of identity in the second-generation Eritrean community cannot be given a categorical and clear-cut answer instead, the new-self image that this social group aims to build is shaped by different factors that are essential to take into consideration.

Keywords : biculturalism, identity, language, migration

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