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My Language, My Identity: Exploring Identity Construction Processes of Users of Ghanaian Languages in a Multi-Cultural Higher Educational Institution in Ghana

Christiana Hammond
Department of Communication & Media Studies
University of Education, Winneba
chrishammond2000@gmail.com

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Abstract



This study examines how speakers of Ghanaian languages construct their identities in a multi-cultural Higher Educational Institution (HEI) in Ghana. Situated in the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), the data were elicited through interviews, observations and focus group discussions from 12 purposively selected participants from a public university in Ghana. The data were thematically analysed and the findings revealed that speakers of Ghanaian languages construct two kinds of identities: public and private. Both strands are constructed through identification processes that include proximity to culture, massive local presence and corresponding hegemonic outlook, de-ethnisation and identity negotiation, and self-branding in virtual spaces. The study concludes on the existence of a homologous relationship between language users and identity construction from both stands of the essentialist and non-essentialist perspectives. It recommends efforts at minimizing stereotypical behaviours of 'othering' and 'categorization' in HEIs on the bases of a person's ethnicity, cultural diversity, or languages spoken in an era of internationalisation and cross-cultural teaching and learning.

Keywords: identity construction, intercultural communication, multi-cultural learning, Ghanaian languages.

1.0 Introduction

The concept of language as an individual's identity has received sustained attention and has been examined through diverse lenses within the remit of nationality, race, gender, and sexual orientation, among others. Users of languages bring differing goals and motivations to their intercultural experiences, which culminate in varying levels of communication competencies in diverse contexts. Communicators as social actors, often find themselves in a new pluralistic world where they construct multiple identities on the bases of their colour, taste, gender, religion, ideology, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and nationality. Individuals construct and organise a sense of 'who they are' and 'how they want' to be perceived by others in relation to their worldview as they persistently seek desired affinities (Norton, 2013). One such form of seeking affinity is through interactions with people from varied backgrounds in highly multi-cultural settings such as corporate organizations, health facilities and particularly, higher educational institutions (HEI). In this paper, I examine the language situation in Ghana and further explore the kinds of identities, as well as, identification processes employed by users of twelve Ghanaian languages in a multi-cultural higher educational institution.

Norton and De Costa (2018) on identity and language education contend that in recent times, the environments of Higher Educational Institutions are highly heterogeneous and have become potential sites for enacting cultural stereotypes including different forms of ethnocentrism. Research has shown that the environments of HEIs are borderless and multi-cultural in nature and individuals have the opportunity to learn new cultures as they construct and negotiate their identities. However, in spite of the vast opportunities for acts of ethno-relativism and open-mindedness to varied cultures, research has also indicated that cultural stereotyping is an overwhelming challenge in such places. This assertion is consistent with Norton (2013) who examined conversations on identity construction involving theory and classroom practices of language learning by immigrant women in Canada in a longitudinal case study. Norton's study developed new ideas on 'identity investment' and 'imagined communities'. The study draws on the poststructuralist theory to argue that, the construction of multiple identities has made heterogeneous environments

the sites of struggle with negative pedagogical implications and should be the focus of identity researches in an era of cross-cultural teaching and learning. Darwin and Norton (2015) extend this sociological construct of 'investment' and 'imagined' communities of people with differing identities, and propose that future empirical studies should focus on identity enactment processes of social actors in educational institutions in an era of internationalisation.

With a growing interest in identity construction and language learning, and perhaps, transnationalism, the literature (e.g. Barkhuizen, 2016; Darwin & Norton, 2015; Norton & De Costa, 2018; Norton, 2013) extend the debate on how theories of identities have developed and propose that future researches should also explore language, identity and power, and investigate how communicators are able to hone their identities through acts of 'categorizations' and 'othering'. Barkhuizen (2016) for instance, maintains that language is intrinsic to the expression of a people's culture as the transmission of values, beliefs, customs, traditions and aspirations of users of the language is regarded as a significant aspect of the culture. Kramsch (2009), perhaps, setting the premise for Darwin and Norton (2015) also contend that the cultural affiliations of a speech community influence their use and interpretation of symbols, signs and behaviours and create a mutual dependency between culture and language, and the enactment of communication.

Samovar and Porter (2004, p. 17), reiterating Kramsch's assertion, also state that, "language is the fundamental tool of humans to construct and exchange culture-bound meanings with themselves as well as others". Indeed, Schultz, Maguire, Langley and Tsoukas (2013) extend Samovar and Porter's contention and allude that "whenever language is used in the context of communication, it is bound with elements of the culture of users of the language" (p. 3). Therefore, placing salience on one language in a multicultural setting could be interpreted as helping to perpetuate and entrench acts of cultural stereotyping and ethnocentrism characteristic of cultural hegemony in an era of cross-cultural learning and internationalisation (Hammond, 2017).

1.1 The Language Situation in Ghana

There is controversy among writers over the number of languages and dialects spoken in Ghana as researchers are unable to distinguish explicitly between what should count as features of a language and that of a dialect (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008). Literature suggests that a 'code' is a linguistic system used for communication. Languages and dialects are codes because they are both

systems for communication with a focus on mutual intelligibility. McWhorter (2016) describes a language as a method of human communication consisting of words in a structured and conventional way. A dialect is explicated as different varieties of the same language that evolve over time, and in different geographical locations, which could shade into other languages and become languages on their own (McWhorter, 2016). However, languages are afforded more prestige than a dialect because they are given standardised codes that are used often used in written and spoken forms whilst dialects are spoken vernacular codes without a standardised written system (Hammond, 2017).

Ghana is a multi-lingual country with a population of about 26,428 million people (UNDESA, 2015). The World Bank Report (2019) estimates about 80 different languages in Ghana, and Simons and Fennig (2017) estimate between 82 and 88 languages including migrant languages such as English, French, Arabic, Chadic, Hausa, Yoruba, Mossi, Wangara, the Mande languages, (i.e. Ligbi and Bisa), two sign languages, and a variety of dialects of several languages. The inconsistency in the numbers is an indication of an on-going discursive struggle on the exact number of languages spoken in Ghana including those that are mutually intelligible. In spite of the inability to hinge on a definite figure, the literature suggest that the major indigenous languages in Ghana are Akan, Dagbani, Ga-Dangme, Gurma, Guan, Bissa/Mande and Ewe (Ansah, 2014; World Bank Report, 2019). Documented indigenous languages in Ghana are categorised into government sponsored and non-government sponsored languages. The former includes Twi, Fante, Ewe, Ga, Dangme, Dagaare, Kasem, Kusaal, and Nzema and are supported by the Bureau of Ghana languages where books and other teaching and learning materials have been written in these languages. The latter comprises Bimoba, Bassari, Anufo, Adele and Sisaala among others and are not primarily supported by the Bureau of Ghana languages. There are also no teaching and learning materials written in these languages. All these languages belong to the Niger-Congo language family, specifically, to the Kwa and Gur sub-language families (Bodomo, Anderson & Dzahene-Quarshie, 2009). The Kwa or Akan languages comprise Twi, Fante, Nzema, Ga, Dangme and Ewe and are mainly concentrated in the southern part of Ghana. The Gur languages are Dagaare, Dagbani, Gonja, Kusaal, Kasem and Gurune/Gurenne and are mainly found in the northern part of Ghana. It is worthy of note that all the government sponsored languages are studied at the university involved in this study.

1.2 The Rationale for the Study

Literature exists on varied forms of identity construction (Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018; Ofori-Birikorang, 2014; Orsatti & Riemer, 2015); media celebrification on Facebook and Twitter; micro-celebrity identification processes on Facebook (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2016; Sackey, 2015); afterlife memorials of celebrities and posthumous celebrity gossips and obituaries as identity formations (Alfano, Higgins & Leverner, 2017); processes of how non-celebrities attain Facebook posthumous celebrification to a near-celebrity status on social media through postings of tributes as memorials to either prop up, hype, or rebrand these individuals posthumously (Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). However, most of these studies have been premised on identity construction processes in the virtual world, specifically the social media and minimal studies have examined the identification processes of users of Ghanaian languages in a multi-cultural HEI in Ghana.

The literature further suggest that languages possess similar identities where the processes of enactment are varied between and among users. As a result, some research efforts on identity construction have been made from diverse perspectives. For instance, Kramersch (1998) examines the nature of identity narratives by investigating situational and transitional identities in materials for teaching English language to German immigrant students. The study reveals that writers of materials for teaching the target language also construct their identities on acts of self-sameness and flexibility in the materials that they produce. Kramersch further alludes that, from a critical discourse and anthropological point of view, the language used, culture, and voice as observed in a narrative allows authors to construct both their structural and stylistic identities (i.e., trans-lingual or trans-cultural) which may not even be the exact representation of reality. The underlying premise of Kramersch's argument is that within stories, facts are interpreted by both the author and the reader. Identity in this sense could be ascribed, constructed, or deconstructed.

Contributing to how writers as communicators construct their identities through linguistic elements such as texts and semiotics, Insaadoo (2016) also examines how remedial schools construct their identities in newspaper advertisements and advertising billboards while attracting target audiences to typify with them. The study relied on a content analysis of data from the Daily Graphic newspaper and on billboards (i.e. images and texts) of selected remedial schools in Accra, Ghana. The data gathered were complemented with interviews with some purposively sampled audiences and the findings indicated that 70% of

applicants enrol in certain remedial schools not only because of their record of accomplishment but also the enticing and alluring nature of their billboards and newspaper advertisements.

From the foregoing, it could be appreciated that some research efforts have been made on identity construction within the remit of the digital space, nationality, semiotics, and narrative texts among others; where cultural identities have been understood as dynamic negotiable experiences of people in heterogeneous groups within particular settings. However, in spite of all these research efforts, minimal studies have investigated culture in terms of Ghanaian languages spoken in a multi-cultural Higher Educational Institution. Hence, this constitutes the research gap, which necessitated this study from a constructivist point of view. As a result, the present study investigates the interplay between language, culture, and identity and explores processes of identification by users of twelve Ghanaian languages. More importantly, the study seeks answers to these research questions: (1) What are the kinds of identities constructed by users of Ghanaian languages studied at a public university in Ghana? and (2) How do users of Ghanaian languages studied at a public university in Ghana construct their language and cultural identities?

2.0 Review of Related Literature

This study is situated within the concept of identity construction and the principles of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) (Hecht & Choi, 2012; Hecht, Collier & Ribeau, 1993). The concept of identity is premised on the works of George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) where the idea of the “self” and how the self comes into existence and is enacted through communication and its products. Butler (1990) postulates that identity is not something that someone ‘has’ or ‘possesses’, but rather something that a person ‘does’ or ‘performs’ and recreates through concrete exchanges, discourses and interactions. In like manner, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) also assert that identity is the ‘social positioning of the self and other’ (p. 586) and further explicate that identity is a set of interactive sociocultural phenomena that could emerge and revolve in discourses of interactions. The assertions of Bucholtz and Hall (2005) indicate that identities are not static structures that primarily reside in the psychological make-up or inner-self of a person. Alfano et al (2017) extend the arguments by these scholars (i.e., Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Butler, 1990) and assert that individuals could create and recreate multiple identities by also subverting existing ones through varied identification processes.

The concept of identity construction is discussed under two main schools of thought: the essentialist and non-essentialist perspective (Orsatti & Riemer, 2015). To illustrate, Orsatti and Riemer (2015), from the essentialist perspective, state that identity is a pre-given which could be enacted or co-constructed through lived participations of holistic experiences which could be shaped and changed in context through the 'representational lens' offered by the society. The individual's role in such contexts includes their readiness to preserve and transmit the pre-given identity roles as representative of their uniqueness. On the contrary, Alfano et al (2017), from the non-essentialist perspective, consider identity as something 'acquired and performed' in varied forms through the 'performative lens' of the individual. Thus, identity in its true sense is fluid and evolving; the individual could construct multiple identities through processes of identity negotiations and subversions but permitted to prime the most salient identity segment in different contexts.

The Communication Theory of Identity was introduced by Hecht, Collier and Ribbeau (1993) but has received multiple iterations (e.g. Hecht & Choi, 2012) to explain varied communicative situations. The main argument of the CTI is that the self is a representation of someone as 'an individual' and also as a member of a 'social group' and both roles are presented in four interdependent identity layers or frames, comprising their personal identity, enacted identity, relational identity, and communal identity. First, the personal identity frame consists of the thoughts, feelings, and sense of spirituality that delineates the individual and their uniqueness (Jung & Hecht, 2004). The personal identity frame therefore, provides an understanding of the various roles that could designate and typify an individual as a unique person and as a member of the society. The frame is underpinned by three core assumptions namely; (1) that identities are hierarchical and ordered with meanings attributed to the self as an object in the social structure; (2) that meanings are ascribed to the self by others in the social world; and that, (3) identities are a source of expectation and motivation for both the self and the other (Hecht & Choi, 2012).

Second, the enacted frame identity elucidates that communicators express who they are through messages, behaviours and symbols used during communication. Thus, the individual's choice of words and behaviours emanate from their culture and are expressed or reinforced by two focal assumptions: (1) that identities are emergent and performed and could be deconstructed as communicators' appropriate dialogue; and (2) that identities are enacted through the social roles and of the individual during interactions. Bucholtz

and Hall (2005) on similar explications of the enacted identity frame assert that, it is an emergent product rather than a pre-existing source of linguistic and semiotic practice that helps the individual to subvert traditional roles of utterances expected of an individual during interactions. This assertion is in line with Ofori-Birikorang's (2014) affirmation that an individual's cultural identity is reinforced when they appropriate dialogue and voice their actions within a particular cultural realm.

Third, the relational identity frame suggests that the nature and trajectory of an interaction could depend on the relationship of participants of the communication, which also constitutes the context of the communicative event (Burke & Stets, 2009). This identity layer is framed around three core assumptions; (1) that individuals acquire certain identities through their relational roles; (2) that identities are enacted and built on existing relationships; and (3) that relationships develop as interrelated social entities play out in the context of interactions (Hecht & Choi, 2012, p. 74).

Fourth, the communal identity frame transcends the individual from a level of individualism to collectivism where both the 'self' and the 'other' are essential to providing insights into how the values, practices, history, and norms embedded in an individual enable him/her to construct a group or communal identity (Hecht & Choi, 2012). The frame is an elucidation of how individuals enact and communicate their identities as role occupants of the society where social behaviours are regarded as consisting of the 'self' enacted through communications as their ascribed identities become relational and also discursive.

To consolidate the explanations of the CTI, it could be realised that the four frames are interpretive and interdependent. To illustrate, it could be observed that a person's identity (personal layer) is infused into how he/she interacts with others (enacted layer) as they create and build relationships (relational layer) through communication with members of the society (communal layer). Hence, the processes of identification are non-exclusive because they overlap through complex processes and are negotiated in different ways to minimize likely incidence of identity conflicts.

3.0 Methodology

The public university involved in this study is the hub for training teachers in these Ghanaian languages; Twi, Fante, Nzema, Ga, Dangme, Ewe, Dagaare, Dagbani, Gonja, Kusaal, Kasem, and Gurune. It is a multi-cultural environment and therefore, the most suitable for investigating identity construction processes of users of the different Ghanaian languages. This study is undergirded by the tenets of the classical and hermeneutic standpoints of the phenomenological traditions. The rationale for selecting this research design is to help understand the lived experiences, perceptions, and thoughts encountered by individuals in the multi-cultural environment of a higher educational institution. Data were triangulated through in-depth interviews, observations and focus group discussions (FGD) from twelve purposively selected participants of a public university in Ghana in six months – October to December 2018, (Semester 1, 2018/2019) and February to April 2019 (Semester 2, 2018/2019). I purposively sampled a participant each from the twelve languages because my earlier informal exploratory discussions had revealed that these participants were native speakers of the languages and they could provide the needed information for the study.

The data gathering processes were guided by these thematic areas: cultural hegemony, cultural stereotyping, identity negotiation and subversion, cultural individuation, and cultural collectivism. For instance, the interviews were conducted in a conversational manner with each session lasting between 20 and 25 minutes. The focus group discussions involved groupings of the twelve participants as shown in Table 1 where the researcher acted as the moderator and was assisted by twelve research assistants who were recruited to assist in the translation and transcription of the corpus data gathered from the different Ghanaian languages. Further, the data from the observations were gathered during each of the interview sessions as well as during the FGDs.

Table 1

Groupings for Focus Group Discussions (FDG)

FGD A	FGD B	FGD C	FGD D
Dagaare	Twi	Dagaare	Kusaal
Dagbani	Fante	Dagbani	Kasem
Gonja	Nzema	Gonja	Gurune
Kusaal	Ga	Twi	Fante
Kasem	Dangme	Nzema	Ga
Gurune	Ewe	Dangme	Ewe

From Table 1, it could be seen that FGD 'A' comprises six users of the Gur languages: Dagaare, Dagbani, Gonja, Kusaal, Kasem and Gurune. The FGD 'B' is made up of six users of Kwa languages: Twi, Fante, Nzema, Ga, Dangme and Ewe. Also, the FGD 'C' and 'D' comprise a mixture of users of both Gur and Kwa languages. The groupings were informed by Schacter, Gilbert and Wegner's (2011, p. 23) assertion that, "rich thick data could be derived from participants who are made to engage in two or more FGDs in a particular study because the rippling or snowballing effects which are characteristic of such discussions could enable access to rich data from varied perspectives." Therefore, the participants provided data on their lived experiences on how they represented themselves and their language identities; how they subverted and negotiated their identities; and how they contributed to constructing or ascribing the identities of others.

3.1 Data Analysis Procedures

This section of the paper presents the analysis of data and it is premised on the research problem of the study relative to the research objectives and questions. The processes of analysis began with the transcription of data and subsequent entry into preliminary coding schemes and coding sheets. The transcripts were then read iteratively to allow a familiarization with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2017). Aiming for a detailed analysis of the data, I identified both the latent and manifest information from the codes, noted all recurring patterns, and systematically categorised them into overarching themes. The themes were then subjected to thick rich narrative descriptions to allow

interpretations to emerge (Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). The interpretations were, in some instances, supported with excerpts from the data to reinforce arguments and enhance comprehension. Further to this, alphanumeric codes (i.e. Users of Northern Languages- UNL, and Users of Southern Languages- USL) were used as pseudonyms to designate participants in order to protect their identity and secure their anonymity.

4.0 Results and Discussions

The presentation of findings and discussions are in two parts. First, I present the analyses for research question one (RQ1) which concentrates on the kinds of identities constructed by users of the twelve Ghanaian languages relative to the literature, and the theoretical assumptions underpinning this study. Then, I follow this up with a discussion on themes generated from the data. Second, I present the findings and discussions for research question two (RQ2) which is also aimed at exploring the identification processes of users of the Ghanaian languages. Following the path as indicated for RQ1, I do the same for research question two. It is important to state that in identity construction, the self is reflexive and can be categorised, classified and named in particular ways in relation to other classifications and this is made evident throughout the discussions in this section.

4.1 RQ 1: What are the kinds of identities constructed by users of Ghanaian languages studied at a public university in Ghana?

The first line of analysis is premised on data on the kinds of identities constructed by users of Ghanaian languages at a public university in Ghana. The findings indicated that every identity is unique to a particular language and evolves in varied communicative situations. In essence, although languages possess similar identities, the users enact their own identities in different ways depending on their self-value or individuation, as well as their ascribed social-group identities. As a result, two kinds of identities emerged from the data, namely, *public and private* identities. The public identity was mainly enacted through identity negotiation processes such as de-ethnicisation and co-creation and was mainly evident from users of languages perceived to be in the minority (i.e. Ga, Dangme, Nzema, Kusaal and Kasem). The users of languages perceived to be in the minority asserted that they consciously construct multiple identities for purposes of affinity and hegemony. In other words, they project different identification processes in different cultural modes where the 'self' is enacted in relation to the 'other' and regarded as the most desired. This is consistent

with Goffman's (1959) front stage identity where a particular identity could be exhibited for purposes of conformity and identity-related communicative goals.

In other words, the identity processes show a chain of interrelated identification segments indicative of 'who the informant thinks they are'; 'how they wished others to perceive them'; 'how they present themselves'; 'how others actually perceive them to be'; and 'how others perform these perceptions in relation to how they perceive themselves' (Orsatti & Reimer, 2015). The finding also affirms Farquhar's (2012) explication of the ideal identity which is public and often honed because it is the most acceptable form of identification that falls in tune with the performative lens of the non-essentialist perspective.

Conversely, the private identity also emerged from the data. This identity is often perceived to be a backstage identity (Orsatti & Reimer, 2015) which is presumed to be hidden. In instances where it was applicable, it was co-created or co-constructed and not primed as expected. The revelation in data is an affirmation of Goffman's (1959) declaration that the backstage identity is indeed a representation of the self, which is hidden only for salience to be placed on in situations where they are highly required. Farquhar (2012) also refers to this identification as the private or real identity. This identity essentially typifies the individual from a 'self-presentational lens' which is anchored on the essentialist perspective of identity construction. Both findings are in line with that of Hammond (2017) in a similar study, which revealed that whatever a speaker projects for purposes of appreciation and acceptance is perceived as their public identity and often honed.

4.2 RQ 2: How do users of Ghanaian languages studied at a public university in Ghana construct their language and cultural identities?

The next line of analysis is premised on research question two, which seeks to gather data on how the participants construct their language and cultural identities. The processes of identification are categorised into themes, namely, proximity to culture; massive local presence and hegemonic outlook; de-ethnicisation and identity negotiation; and self-branding in virtual space. A list of the identification processes with their corresponding users of the Ghanaian languages is as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Ghanaian language users and their corresponding processes of identification

Processes of Identity Construction	Ghanaian Language User(s)
Proximity to culture	Fante
Massive local presence and corresponding hegemonic outlook	Twi and Dagbani
De-ethnicisation and identity negotiation	Nzema, Dangme, Ga, Kasem, Kusaal
Self-branding in virtual space	Users of all languages

Source: Field Data (2019)

4.2.1 Proximity to culture

The development of distinct identities includes a sense of continuity, a sense of uniqueness from others, and a sense of affiliation with others (Orsatti & Riemer, 2015). The enactment of identities, therefore, involves a sense of continuity and belief in a feeling of belonging as individuals identify themselves with their own people irrespective of their geographical location. The data showed that users of the Fante language constructed an in-group identification, which was premised on the notion of proximity to their own cultural identity or relatives; made possible by the location of this campus of the university. The town in which this campus is located is one of the thirteen (13) districts in its region. The indigenes in this setting are primarily users of the Fante language and predominantly speak Fante and Gomoa; a dialect of Fante.

It is important to state that with this historical background, the users of Fante language at this campus of the university consider the township as an extension of their own cultural lineage and an important opportunity for them to appropriate dialogue, voice actions and continue to assert their Fante identity among their kinsmen. It was therefore expected that users of Fante

at this campus of the university would enjoy a certain level of hegemony with their perceived kinsmen or relatives. Some participants indicated that they are in proximity with their cultural heritage and enjoyed certain privileges of association by virtue of their present location. One of such participants aptly stated during the FGD that:

We are Fantes and we live among our own kinsmen or relatives. I am not a native of this town but I am a Fante and I speak impeccable Fante language. I am sure I can even trace my ancestral lineage to people in this town and its environs. I am among my people and I receive several favours from indigenes who ply their trade on this campus because I usually communicate with them using impeccable Fante terminologies just to create that Fante identity and a sense of belonging (USL2).

Consistent with this finding of association is Najafbagy's (2008) claim that the non-exclusive nature of identity and the existence of identity overlaps through complex processes of renegotiations, allow people with similar backgrounds who find themselves in familiar cultures to construct similar identities inuring essentially to their intercultural efforts. Being in proximity with a person's culture as a process of identification is in tandem with the communal identity frame (Hecht & Choi, 2012). The frame states that, the identity of an individual could be transcended from individualism to collectivism where the 'self' and the 'other' could become essential for providing insights into how aspirations, values, practices, history, and norms of a group could assist in constructing in-group identities for the people for purposes of acceptability and conformity. The finding is also consistent with the development of interactional relational ties through relational roles of salience on cultural values and norms as standards for acceptability as espoused by Burke and Stets (2009).

4.2.2 Massive local presence and corresponding hegemonic outlook

As can be seen from Table 3, the enrolment statistics of the University shows that the users of Twi and Dagbani languages have a significantly large number of students compared to the others. This numerical strength provided them with a massive local presence and a hegemonic outlook. Table 3 is a graphical representation of the enrolment statistics for the public university under study for the 2018/19 academic year. Table 3 purposively, displays the numerical strength of users of each of the Ghanaian languages at the university. The figures are to help in the discussion of two themes from the data: 'massive local presence and corresponding hegemony' and 'de-ethnicisation and identity negotiation' relative to the entirety of the findings.

Table 3: Enrolment Statistics at FGLE-2018/2019

	1 st Year	2 nd Year	3 rd Year	4 th Year	TOTAL
DPL 1	109	69	54	54	286
DPL 2					
Ga Unit	16	22	35	09	82
Dangme Unit	42	36	18	61	157
DPL 3					
Twi Unit	196	131	88	83	498
Fante Unit	42	33	31	35	141
Nzema Unit	15	8	14	11	48
DPL 4					
Dagaare Unit	8	21	23	18	70
Dagbani Unit	157	41	78	163	439
Gonja Unit	39	31	34	57	161
Gurune Unit	54	18	06	10	88
Kasem Unit	16	07	05	11	39
Kusaal Unit	50	22	24	32	128

Source: The University involved in the study's Basic Statistics (2018)

As can be seen from Table 3, the DPL 3 which houses users of Twi, Fante and Nzema (i.e. southern languages) has an enrolment of 687 students with the largest enrolment figure being users of Twi (i.e. 498). Users of Fante (i.e. 141) and Nzema (i.e. 48) closely follow this. Users of all the northern languages are housed in the DPL 4 with a student population of 925 students. The largest group of students are users of Dagbani (i.e. 439); followed by Gonja (i.e. 161); Kusaal (i.e. 128); Gurune (i.e. 88); Dagaare (i.e. 70); and Kasem in that order (i.e. 39). With these illustrations, it could be observed that users of Twi and Dagbani have a massive local presence, which predisposes them to constructing a hegemonic outlook and presenting them as people with a perceived in-group identity. It is important to note that the term hegemony has been used with

multiple interpretations in different context for varied purposes (Kleingeld, 2012). Although its lexical meaning is often described as dominance or control, especially from a predominant authority, it is loosely used in this research as a reference for in-group identification (Hammond, 2017). Generally, users of the term hegemony are quick to acknowledge Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony as a 'spontaneous consent' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12) and not conventional versions such as that of Fairclough (2003) which argues on the dynamics of power and projection of ideologies in hegemony as a subtle compulsion for endorsement within a group. For this research, Fairclough's assertions to an extent, resonates with the operationalization of the term hegemony and important for the discussions on the theme in focus.

Therefore, the perceived hegemonic outlook resulting from the massive local presence was noted to be enjoyed by users of the two languages in different forms. For instance, it was gathered that the hegemonic behaviour was profound during competitive student activities such as elections, debates and sports. For this, all the twelve informants asserted that the numerical advantage of the two groups contributed to their visibility and massive local presence at all student fronts. An informant who is neither a user of Twi nor Dagbani was unhappy about this subtle compulsion and had this to say:

If any student should contest for any position or even partner with a user of Dagbani or Twi, that person would win. Users of these two languages have a strong support base because of their numbers and statistical records on enrolment can affirm this. I experienced this unfortunate numerical advantage enjoyed by some people during our recent SRC elections. I declined to collaborate with another candidate from a particular hegemonic group here for an SRC position and I paid dearly for it. In spite of my message, I was blatantly rejected. Trust me; it is not about competence but numbers when it comes to student-body politics (UNL3).

This assertion from informant UNL3 affirms the revelation of how the visibility and hegemonic outlook of users of the two languages are enhanced by their numbers as well as their local presence (see Table 3). The hegemonic outlook of users of particular languages help to facilitate processes of identity co-creation and promote instances of identity subversion where users of languages perceived to be in the minority could subvert their identity and co-create that of languages perceived to be hegemonic in nature. The UNL3 participant

also inferred that the identity subversion was deliberately for purposes of camaraderie from users of the hegemonic languages. This finding corroborates the enactment identity frame of the CIT (Hecht & Choi, 2012) which explicates how individuals thrive to seek conformity and acceptance through identity subversion and negotiation from a perceived ideal or hegemonic group.

4.2.3 De-ethnicisation and identity negotiation

Closely linked to the identification process of massive local presence and hegemony is the theme of de-ethnicisation and identity negotiation. It can be observed from Table 3 that users of languages such as Nzema (i.e. 48); and Kasem (i.e. 33) are few compared to others. Without any intention to stereotype users of these languages in this paper, it is important to state that the presence of users of these languages was hardly felt at the public university involved in this study. For instance, the users of Nzema language de-ethnicised themselves and co-created either a Fante or Twi identity by communicating on regular bases in these languages. A participant affirmed it was intentional to de-ethnicise as she was the only female in her class who needed to make friends with other female users of other languages and to achieve an appreciable level of belongingness. Another participant alluded that several people from the northern half of Ghana used Dagbani in routine communication because the language was perceived as hegemonic from most people from the north. The participant inferred that it was only through de-ethnicisation and identity negotiations that users of languages that are perceived to be in the minority could also feel a sense of belongingness. Another participant supported this assertion, and stated that non-speakers of Dagbani or Twi are often forced by some language barriers to attempt speaking a kind of corrupted Twi, or consciously code-switch or code-mix to remain relevant in all communicative endeavours. Another participant in buttressing the earlier submissions made during the focus group discussions also aptly stated:

I am fluent in Nzema but I prefer to speak either Fante or Twi, or perhaps code-switch or code-mix between English and any of the hegemonic languages in order to communicate. Let me emphasise that I do not do this as a form of escapism from my identity. I do it because I need to socialise by enacting other people's identity. I am tempted to believe that those of us from the southern part of Ghana are able to negotiate our identities better because a greater number of the Akan languages are mutually intelligible (USL4).

The multilingual nature and appreciable level of mutual intelligibility of the informant is alluded to be the panacea for engaging in communicative acts of de-ethnicisation or identity negotiation processes. The finding is consistent with the concept of priming the 'self-sense' identity of belonging as advocated by Kumar, Anjum and Sinha (2011) from the essentialist perspective. The identification processes are thus, deliberative, interpretive, and evolving and enacted to achieve a desired result in mind. Bodomo et al (2009) are of the view that there are almost infinite variations between languages to an extent that no language is considered inferior or less advanced. It is important to reiterate that studies have proven that languages are tagged as either 'minority' or 'majority' based on the number of users of that language and not for the purposes of identity shaming, identity stereotyping or identity priming (Hammond, 2017).

4.2.4 Self-branding in virtual space

The Internet and the rapid expansion of the Social Media is a mark of the 21st century narrative and the virtual space has enabled a widespread use of new forms of technology and a proliferation of Social Networking sites. Studies (Hallet & Barber, 2014; James, 2015) have shown that Internet usage across the globe has triggered the formation of digital cultures and associations. This has allowed communicators to self-brand and construct virtual identities for themselves and their perceived cultures including sexuality, fashion, ethnicity, food, race, religion, and gender among others. James (2015) also affirms this assertion and states that societies are currently technology-driven and social media is seen as the extension of traditional societies where users find ways to construct identities such as language, culture, sexual orientation, taste, clothing sense, gender, faith and ideology by amassing followers through daily publications and postings; quality of content; and popularity in other social networks.

It was evident from the data that all the participants involved in this study have attempted branding their language identity through the sharing of posts in their indigenous languages, especially in the government sponsored languages (i.e., Twi, Fante, Ewe, Ga, Dangme, Dagaare, Kasem, Kusaal, and Nzema) which are studied in schools. Some informants (UNL5 and USL1) indicated that they have been sharing online, pictures and videos of culturally oriented tourism sites in their communities. The data showed that more than 82% of the participants of this study are tech-savvy and highly active on Social Media, especially, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn and WhatsApp. From the data, it was discovered that nine participants consistently shared different posts in their

indigenous languages (Ga, Dagbani, Ewe, Fanti, Nzema, Gurune, Kusaal, Kasem, and Twi) on different topics that ranged from politics, entertainment, education and tourism. On the other hand, three of the participants indicated that they usually share messages from the Bible and the Quran in their indigenous languages (i.e. Dangme, Gonja and Dagaare) on their social media handles or accounts.

A participant declared that she had successfully branded herself by sharing biblical passages, scriptures and songs in her indigenous language and receives positive 'Comments' and 'Likes' as a motivation to continue promoting her language and cultural identity. Another participant added that with appreciable knowledge of modern forms of communication and likely economic benefits accrued from sharing pictures of tourist sites in her region, she is able to write interesting reports on the festivals and tourist sites in her area using her indigenous language. This is consciously done to enable the activation of the 'translation' feature on social media and to allow non-speakers of her language to catch a glimpse of her rich language and culture.

Other participants who claimed to be doing similar things on the Social Media to hone their identities hugely supported this revelation. For instance, a participant reiterated that he had amassed a huge fan-base from sharing such posts where individuals globally send private messages of inquiry on the festivals and tourist sites in his region. Another participant revealed that through her postings on the importance of education and the role of influencers in developing the less privileged in her community, she has been able to attract opportunities for exchange programmes for educationists in her community. She has also brokered useful opportunities for collaborative researches into some endangered indigenous languages in her community. She expressly stated:

I have a strong virtual presence on Social Media and this is evident from my huge fan-base and followers on Instagram. I have instantaneously become a micro-celebrity and a brand because of my multiple roles as a blogger, social commentator, educationist, life coach, and a tourist ambassador for my region and culture. Social Media users who are able to identify with my posts would usually 'Like', 'Comment' or 'Share' them. To me, such people are invariably helping me to preserve and construct my language and cultural identity (UNL5).

The excerpt from participant UNL5 supports the assertion that individuals create strong positive perceptions of their language and culture in the minds of others through their language (Hammond, 2016). This is to enable them enjoy a competitive edge of attention from their Social Media presence and in essence, allow them an appreciable level of self-branding through the perceived salience. This finding confirms the work of Finkel and Eastwick (2015) who claim that the relevance of branding is underpinned by likely instrumental benefits of constructing a favourable identity to allow different people to typify with some perceived desirable identities.

5.0 Conclusions

It is important at this section to summarize the key findings, draw conclusions and make recommendations. First, the study concludes that users of Ghanaian languages in the multi-cultural setting of the public university involved in this study construct varied identities in different contexts from the essentialist and non-essentialist viewpoints. Therefore, two strands of identities emerged: private and public. These were manifested through these identity construction processes: proximity to culture; massive local presence and hegemony; de-ethnicisation and identity negotiation; and self-branding through the virtual space. The outcome of this study has implications for identity studies because it contributes to the knowledge and literature in identity studies in highly heterogeneous environments such as the academic environment in an era of cross-cultural learning and internationalisation. Thus, the study, like others, concludes on the existence of a homologous relationship between language, culture and identity because they are complementary and evolving. The study recommends efforts at minimising stereotypical behaviours of 'othering' and 'categorisation' on the bases of a person's ethnicity, cultural diversity or languages spoken in HEIs. This is because culture is evolving and the era of cross-cultural learning has necessitated inter-cultural communication and global citizenship for every individual. Further, the paper calls attention to the promotion of ethno-relativistic behaviours through intercultural communication and positive identity construction behaviours in an era of cross-cultural learning and internationalisation.

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About the Author

Christiana Hammond is a Senior Lecturer in Communications and Pragmatics. She is also a Speech writer, Gender advocate, Discourse analyst and an upcoming African intercultural communication theorist. She holds a doctoral degree in Arts and Culture (Intercultural communication and Identity studies) and has published widely in high impact journals. She holds a Master of Philosophy Degree in Communication and Media Studies, and a Bachelor of Education Degree in English Education, all from the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. She has presented several papers at local and International conferences and has authored scholarly articles and Book Chapters in high impact journals.

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