

**BECOMING SOMEONE ELSE IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE IDENTITY SHIFT
IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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This study examines the phenomenon of identity shift among foreign language learners, focusing on how individuals experience becoming someone else when using a foreign language. Drawing on theories from applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psychology, the research explores the emotional, cultural, and contextual factors that influence learners' self-perception across languages. The findings indicate that many learners adopt different communicative behaviors, emotional expressions, and personality traits depending on the language used. Emotional distance, proficiency level, and learning environment emerge as key variables shaping identity transformation. While identity shift can enhance confidence and self-expression, it may also create feelings of insecurity when linguistic competence is limited. The study argues that identity change in foreign language learning should be viewed as an expansion rather than a replacement of the self. These insights highlight the importance of identity-aware pedagogical practices that support learners' linguistic and personal development in multilingual contexts.

Introduction: Language is more than a tool for communication; it is a powerful medium through which individuals construct, express, and negotiate their identity. For learners of a foreign language, the process of acquiring new linguistic structures often involves adopting unfamiliar ways of thinking, behaving, and interacting. As a result, many foreign language learners report feeling like a different person when using another language. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as identity shift, reflects the complex relationship between language, culture, and the self.

Becoming someone else in another language is not merely a metaphorical experience. Research in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics suggests that language learners may

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display changes in personality traits, emotional expression, confidence levels, and social roles depending on the language they are using. These shifts can be influenced by cultural norms embedded in the target language, learners' proficiency levels, and the contexts in which the language is used. For instance, a learner may feel more assertive in a foreign language while remaining reserved in their native tongue, highlighting how language choice shapes self-perception and behavior.

Understanding identity shift in foreign language learners is essential, as it directly affects motivation, language use, and communicative competence. Learners who feel empowered in a new linguistic identity may participate more actively, while those who experience discomfort or alienation may face psychological barriers to effective communication. Therefore, exploring how and why learners experience identity transformation in a foreign language can provide valuable insights for educators, researchers, and learners themselves. This study examines the concept of identity shift among foreign language learners, focusing on how linguistic and cultural factors contribute to the experience of becoming someone else in another language.

Moreover, identity shift in foreign language learning is closely connected to the emotional and psychological dimensions of language use. Learners often associate different languages with specific emotions, memories, and social expectations, which can lead to varying degrees of emotional distance or freedom of expression. Using a foreign language may reduce anxiety or emotional intensity, allowing learners to express opinions, humor, or personal feelings more openly than in their native language. Conversely, limited proficiency may cause feelings of insecurity, resulting in a fragmented or constrained sense of self.

In addition, the classroom and social environment play a significant role in shaping learners' linguistic identities. Interaction with teachers, peers, and native speakers exposes learners to new discourses and cultural identities, which they may consciously or unconsciously adopt. Through repeated interaction, learners begin to negotiate their position within the target language community, gradually forming a hybrid identity that blends elements of both their native and foreign languages. This process highlights that identity in language learning is not fixed but dynamic and continuously evolving.

As globalization increases cross-cultural communication, understanding identity shift becomes increasingly relevant. Foreign language learners are no longer only acquiring linguistic competence but are also navigating multiple identities in multicultural contexts. Investigating this phenomenon helps explain how language learning influences personal development and intercultural awareness. Consequently, this research aims to deepen understanding of identity transformation in foreign language learners and to emphasize the importance of recognizing identity-related experiences in language education.

Literature review: The relationship between language and identity has been a central topic in linguistics, psychology, and education. Early studies emphasized the role of language as a marker of social identity, suggesting that individuals construct their sense of

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self through linguistic interaction (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956). These foundational theories laid the groundwork for understanding how language influences thought, behavior, and identity formation, particularly in multilingual contexts.

In applied linguistics, identity has been widely discussed as a dynamic and socially constructed concept rather than a fixed personal attribute. Norton (1997, 2013) argues that language learners negotiate their identities through interaction, investment, and access to social power. According to Norton, learners' willingness to communicate in a foreign language is strongly influenced by how they perceive themselves and how they are positioned by others within social contexts. This perspective highlights that identity shift is deeply embedded in social relations and power structures.

Research on bilingualism and multilingualism further supports the idea that individuals may experience different identities across languages. Pavlenko (2006) introduces the concept of emotional resonance, explaining that languages vary in their emotional depth depending on the learner's experiences and proficiency level. Several studies indicate that bilingual speakers often feel more emotionally detached when using a foreign language, which allows them to express sensitive or taboo topics more freely. This emotional distancing contributes significantly to the feeling of becoming "someone else" in another language.

Personality changes across languages have also been examined in psychological research. Studies by Dewaele and Nakano (2013) demonstrate that foreign language use can alter levels of extraversion, politeness, and emotional expression. These shifts are influenced by cultural norms associated with the target language and by learners' confidence in their linguistic abilities. Such findings challenge the notion of a single, stable personality and suggest that identity is context-dependent and language-specific.

Furthermore, the classroom environment has been identified as a crucial space for identity construction. Toohey (2000) and Wenger (1998) emphasize the role of communities of practice in shaping learner identity through participation and interaction. Language classrooms provide opportunities for learners to experiment with new identities, but they may also impose limitations through rigid norms, assessment practices, or fear of negative evaluation. Therefore, pedagogical approaches that encourage meaningful interaction and identity exploration are essential.

Recent studies have shifted attention toward the concept of hybrid or multilingual identities. Kramsch (2009) argues that language learners inhabit a "third space" where they mediate between languages and cultures. This space allows learners to develop flexible identities that transcend national or linguistic boundaries. Such perspectives underline the importance of viewing identity shift not as loss of the original self but as an expansion of identity repertoire.

Overall, existing literature confirms that identity shift in foreign language learners is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by linguistic, emotional, cultural, and social

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factors. However, despite extensive theoretical discussion, there remains a need for empirical research that explores learners' lived experiences of identity transformation. Addressing this gap can contribute to more inclusive and identity-sensitive approaches in foreign language education.

Discussion: The findings of this study support existing research that views identity in foreign language learning as fluid, context-dependent, and socially constructed. Learners' experiences of feeling like a different person when using a foreign language confirm Norton's (1997) assertion that identity is negotiated through language use and social interaction. The sense of becoming "someone else" reflects not a loss of the original identity but the emergence of an additional linguistic self shaped by cultural norms, emotional distance, and communicative context.

One significant aspect of the identity shift observed among learners is the role of emotional expression. Consistent with Pavlenko's (2006) theory of emotional resonance, many learners experience reduced emotional intensity in a foreign language, which enables greater freedom of expression. This emotional distancing often results in increased confidence, particularly when expressing opinions or discussing sensitive topics. However, for learners with lower proficiency, the foreign language may restrict emotional expression, leading to feelings of inadequacy or identity fragmentation. These contrasting experiences suggest that proficiency level is a key factor influencing whether identity shift is perceived as empowering or limiting.

The discussion also highlights the influence of cultural expectations embedded in language use. Learners tend to adopt discourse styles, politeness strategies, and interactional behaviors associated with the target language culture. This aligns with Dewaele and Nakano's (2013) findings that personality traits may vary across languages. Such shifts indicate that identity change is not purely internal but emerges through alignment with socially accepted norms of communication. As a result, learners often construct hybrid identities that blend elements of their native and foreign linguistic selves.

Furthermore, the learning environment plays a critical role in shaping identity transformation. Supportive classrooms that encourage experimentation and tolerate errors allow learners to explore new identities with less anxiety. In contrast, environments that emphasize accuracy over communication may suppress identity expression and reinforce fear of negative evaluation. These findings reinforce Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice, where participation and belonging significantly influence identity development.

From a pedagogical perspective, recognizing identity shift as an integral part of language learning has important implications. Language educators should create spaces where learners feel safe to express multiple identities and reflect on their linguistic experiences. Integrating identity-aware teaching practices can enhance learner motivation, participation, and long-term engagement with the target language.

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In conclusion, the discussion demonstrates that identity shift in foreign language learners is a complex yet natural outcome of multilingualism. Rather than viewing it as a challenge, educators and learners should recognize identity transformation as a valuable dimension of personal and intercultural growth. Future research should further explore individual differences and contextual variables to deepen understanding of identity dynamics in foreign language education.

Result: The analysis of the collected data reveals that a majority of foreign language learners experience noticeable identity shifts when using a foreign language. Participants frequently reported feeling more confident, expressive, or socially open when communicating in the target language compared to their native language. This sense of altered self-perception supports the idea that language choice significantly influences how learners present themselves in different communicative contexts.

One prominent result concerns emotional expression. Many participants indicated that using a foreign language created a sense of emotional distance, allowing them to discuss personal topics with less anxiety. This emotional detachment was particularly evident in learners with higher proficiency levels, who described feeling freer and less constrained by social expectations. In contrast, learners with lower proficiency reported frustration and reduced self-expression, suggesting that limited linguistic competence may temporarily restrict identity formation.

The results also demonstrate that cultural norms embedded in the target language affect learners' behavior and interaction styles. Participants reported adopting different politeness strategies, humor styles, and conversational patterns depending on the language used. These behavioral changes contributed to the perception of possessing multiple identities, each activated by a specific linguistic and cultural context.

Additionally, the learning environment emerged as a significant factor influencing identity shift. Learners who studied in supportive and interactive settings expressed greater willingness to experiment with new identities and reported higher levels of communicative confidence. Conversely, participants exposed to highly evaluative or error-focused environments experienced increased anxiety and reluctance to participate, limiting their identity expression.

Overall, the results indicate that identity shift among foreign language learners is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by emotional, cultural, proficiency-related, and contextual factors. These findings highlight that becoming "someone else" in another language is a common and meaningful experience that plays a crucial role in learners' linguistic and personal development. Another important finding is the gradual nature of identity shift. Participants emphasized that changes in self-perception did not occur immediately but developed over time as their proficiency and exposure to the foreign language increased. Prolonged interaction with native speakers, media, and authentic communicative situations

strengthened learners' sense of belonging to the target language community, reinforcing the emergence of a new linguistic identity.

Moreover, individual differences played a crucial role in shaping identity experiences. Factors such as personality traits, motivation, prior intercultural exposure, and personal attitudes toward the target language influenced how strongly learners experienced identity transformation. While some learners embraced their new linguistic identity as empowering and liberating, others viewed it as situational and limited to specific contexts, such as the classroom or professional settings.

These results suggest that identity shift is not a uniform experience but varies significantly across learners. Nevertheless, the presence of identity change across diverse participants confirms that becoming "someone else" in another language is a common aspect of foreign language learning rather than an isolated phenomenon.

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