THE QUEST FOR BELONGING:
ARAB MUSLIM ESOL STUDENTS’ (RE)-CONSTRUCTION
OF LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES

by

SIKHARINI MAJUMDAR

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This case study describes the educational, social, and cultural experiences of three Arab Muslim high school students in the ESL program of a southeastern state of U.S. During the fall of 2009, the researcher spent an average of two days a week with the participants and their families and friends as a participant-observer. Data included field notes, taped interviews of the three student participants, and observation of the participants and their interaction with their families, friends and community members.

The question that guided the research was “How do the competing discourses of family, religion, and language impact the identities of Arab Muslim adolescent English language learners?”

The study draws on sociocultural theory and postcolonial theory in order to examine the ways in which the ESOL students negotiate and their identities as they learn English. Findings indicate that students’ identities are fluid and constructed in response to different social contexts. The study illustrates the ways in which English Only policy, the ESL program in the school, and the stigmatized status particularly after 9/11 have been powerful forces that marginalized the Arab Muslim immigrant students. The study shows the ways in which these Arab Muslim students have constructed hybridized identities to maintain their L1 cultural identities while at the same time learning English to become a part of the their host country.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the three most wonderful women who had enriched my life beyond measure

My mother, Srimati Mukti Banerjee

My daughters, Munia and Raka
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# CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ ii
DEDICATION ................................................................................................................................... iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................................................................ iv
LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................................ x
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................1
  Culture, Politics, and Language Learners .............................................................................3
  Purpose of the Study .............................................................................................................6
  Significance of the Study .....................................................................................................8
  General Information About Arab Muslims ....................................................................11
    Linguistic Identity of Arab Muslims ............................................................................12
    Historic-religious Relationship with the West .........................................................13
    Gender Relationship .....................................................................................................19
  Education ............................................................................................................................20
  Theories of Identity ..........................................................................................................21
    Modernist and Western View of Identity ..................................................................21
    Multiple and Situated Identities ..................................................................................24
  Summary ............................................................................................................................26
  Definition of Terms ..........................................................................................................27
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ..................................................................................30
  Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity .........................................................................................34
LIST OF TABLES

1. Four Ways to View Identity.................................................................25
CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and my windows to be stuffed; I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave. (Mahatma Gandhi, 1921)

How did you know that Arabic is read that way? Do you think it is weird and backward?

These were the questions Sabina asked me on my first day as an ESL (English as Second Language) tutor in the middle school. I encountered her questions when I was trying to impress the four Arabic speaking children who were assigned to me, by showing off my scant knowledge of Arabic. Subsequently, the children revealed that their fellow students in their classrooms viewed the style of reading Arabic from right to left as opposed to reading English as backward. Since none of the teachers had any idea about the Arabic language to enlighten their fellow students, Sabina and her fellow Arabic speaking students felt belittled in their classroom. Environments like these are hostile to differences and force language minority students to construct negative self-images since culture and language are closely related to their personal identities. Sabina’s questions echoed Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) comment, “... if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity... I am my language” (p. 59).

In many ways, my own immigrant experience mirrored those of immigrant students like Sabina. I recalled my initial struggles to become part of the mainstream graduate student community at the university in the U.S. and not being readily accepted with my accented speech
and colored skin. This was my first experience of being marginalized from the dominant mainstream society, which challenged my sense of who I was and forced me to reconstruct my relationship with a suddenly unstable identity at this matured age. This disruption of my identity – whom I thought I was in relationship to my country, my culture, my religion, my language, my education, my economic and social status in the face of an array of identities seemingly foisted upon me as a non-native English speaker and woman of color.

These experiences made me more critically aware of how ELL (English Language Learners) constitute their identities while in the classroom – their sense of who they are in relationship to the world. My view of identity does not adhere to a modernist view of identity as “fixed, apolitical and essentialized cultural representations” (p. 9). Rather, I draw on the poststructuralist notion of identity as “multiple, changing, and a site of struggle” (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1997; Toohey & Norton, 2005). Identity, according to Peek (2005), “results from internal subjective perceptions, self-reflection, and external characterizations” (p. 217). Hence, ELL students reconstruct their identities as they interact with the native speakers of the target language as well as negotiate the identities imposed on them both in the social and educational settings. While working as an ESL (English as a Second Language) tutor and during my teaching placements in schools (required for the completion of my course work), I perceived a substantial difference between my experience of learning four languages (required for school graduation) in a multilingual country to that of the students who are ELL in the U.S. school system—learning English in a monolingual and subtractive1 bilingual setting. I became interested to know and study the experience of my Arab-Muslim students who were ELL and how they negotiated their

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1 Subtractive bilingualism – Lambert (1974) distinguished between “additive” and “subtractive” bilingualism. Additive bilingualism refers to learning the second language that allows the individual to maintain the first language. Subtractive bilingualism occurs when there is a pressure to replace the first language with a second language.
identities so that they could integrate themselves into the U.S. mainstream culture as manifested in both society and schools while maintaining their family or native cultures.

Culture, Politics, and Language Learners

Literacy studies in the field of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) during the past ten years have documented how multiple identities shape the ways in which people make sense of the world and influence their literacy practices (Broughton, 2002; Broughton & Fairbanks, 2003; Hall 2002). This acknowledges the fact that a single individual shapes multiple identities depending on where one is positioned within the context – home, school, relationships, religion etc. This has enabled identity to become one of the major constructs in the context of educational research (Collins & Blot, 2003; Gee, 2000). The understanding that participation in new linguistic communities and learning new ways of knowing will require concomitant changes in identities makes it significantly important to conceptualize the complex relationships that exist among language learning, culture, and identity in different contexts (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 1999; Gee, 2000).

Norton’s (1997) introduction of learner identity in the process of second language acquisition (SLA) included not only learning linguistic components but also using it in social contexts marked a paradigm shift in research in ESOL. Language as a means of communication cannot be learned by direct instruction, but by the process of language socialization in which language learners construct shared understandings as a member of the community (Heath, 1983; Gee, 1996). Moreover, language socialization occurs through multilayered contexts of life, language, literacy, and culture in which learners construct their multiple identities using the language in a social and cultural context (Gee, 1996; Norton Peirce, 1995). However, research in SLA for decades disregarded identity as a central theme in the theories of language learning and
thus failed in establishing the dynamic relationship between the learner and the language-
learning context along with the social, cultural, and institutional dimensions of language learning

Present SLA research has focused on the influence of the sociocultural context on the
language learning process (McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 1997; Peirce, 1995). This shift from
a product- or process-oriented perception based on Peirce’s approach is called a “contextualist
perspective” by McKay and Wong (1996). They described it as a perspective attempting to
explore the interconnections of discourse and power in the social context of SLA. Norman
Fairclough (1992) stated that, “in any discourse, knowledge, social relations and social identities
are simultaneously being constituted or reconstituted” (p. 8). This acknowledges language
learning not as a straightforward and unidirectional process but as a complex interplay of many
variables in which social relationships, roles, power relations and identities are constructed and
negotiated. Norton (1997) has argued that speech, speakers, and social relationships are
inseparable. This interconnection is carried on to the extent that every time a language learner
speaks, the exchange of information involves the speaker’s constructing and reconstructing of
the self and its relationship to the social world. Based on research, Norton (1997) has mentioned
the three following consistent conceptions of identity: (1) it is complex, contradictory and
multifaceted, and hence not simple and unidirectional; (2) this dynamic construct transcends time
and place; and (3) language is the medium through which identity is constructed. As a result,
each time language learners use language, they are constructing and negotiating identities.

McKay and Wong (1996) raised some interesting questions on learner productivity. They
questioned why some learners use as many strategies possible to succeed in learning the target
language in certain contexts but fail to do so in others and why some learners use counter-
productive strategies opposing the expected language performance. McKay and Wong (1996) have insisted that it is impossible to ignore the social context in language learning: “This question – so crucial to the eventual development of successful pedagogy – cannot begin to be answered without paying scrupulous attention to the social context of language learning, and without radically redefining the second-language-learner” (p. 578).

Peirce (1995) proposed the concept of investment to capture the complex relationship existing among power, identity and language learning. The concept of investment reflects the socially- and historically-constructed relationship of the learner to the target language. The language learner here is recognized as a complex social being with multiple desires, constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who he/she is and his/her relation to the social world. Thus, an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own social identity, an identity that is constantly changing across time and space (Peirce, 1995, p. 17).

However, language learning takes place within a certain social and political environment, and so, is influenced by the embedded assumptions, attitudes, and ideologies. This means that political events will not only influence the environment but also the learners’ response to it. It can then be assumed that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 that left the world dumbfounded and shook the U.S. to its very core have also impacted the ELL particularly those belonging to the Arab Muslim ethnicity because of various governmental policies and hate crimes against them. Similar to the powerful aftermath of an earthquake, these tragic terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC have had powerful aftershocks that have affected and still continue to affect the lives of Muslims and more specifically the Arabs not only in the U.S. (Cainkar, 2004; Ewing, 2008) but also all over the world. Although Muslims have immigrated and settled in the U.S. since 1875 (Smith, 1999) and the 2000 Britannica Book of the Year estimates the number of
Muslims in the U.S. to be 4,132,000, Muslims still continue to face social and political
discrimination (Haddad, 2001). The tensions were heightened after 9/11 when “[t]he American
Muslim community has found themselves in a precarious situation . . . 57 percent of the seven
million Muslims in America have experienced bias or discrimination since the terror attacks”
(Kerr, 2003). This was confirmed by the U.S. Department of Justice which since 9/11 has
reported that over 750 cases were investigated by the Civil Rights Division, the Federal Bureau
of Investigation, and U.S. Attorneys’ Offices that involved violence, threats, vandalism, and
arson against Arab-Americans, Muslims, Sikhs, South-Asian Americans, and other individuals
perceived to be of Middle Eastern origin.

That is not to say that all U.S. citizens or all Arabs have the same negative attitudes
towards each other because there is a wide range of attitudes and views. However, there are
possibilities that these negative attitudes have impacted Arab Muslim ESOL students in the
classroom in their learning the target language placed within the socio-cultural framework of
SLA. The already complex dynamics of identity construction in the ESOL classroom stands
further complicated for the Arab Muslim students, as they would have to negotiate the negative
images relating to their culture, language, religion and the violent politics of race. They would
need to continuously reconstruct and negotiate the negative imposed identities such as that of
English as a Second Language (ESL) students to create positive identities.

Purpose of the Study

The demographic changes in the K-12 classrooms in the U.S. have been a growing
concern to teachers. Within the period 1990-91 and 2000-01, the enrollment of Limited English
Proficient (LEP)² students in U.S. schools increased by 105 percent, compared to 12 percent

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² I shall use the term ELLs instead of LEP (the official term used in governmental and state educational literature) which has a negative connotation and fails to accept the native language proficiency of the students.
overall enrollment increase (Kindler, 2002). An estimated 4 million LEP students enrolled in U.S. schools in 2001-02 (Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Stephenson, Pendzick, & Sapru, 2003). Besides the growing ESOL students in schools, there are other reasons of concern regarding their English education. The English-only movement from the 1980s has witnessed the diminishing of bilingual programs and therefore bilingual teachers (Crawford, 1992; Rumberger & Gándara, 2004). This has shifted the responsibility to classroom teachers for providing instruction to ESOL students (Menken & Antunez, 2001). In addition, the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 requires LEP students to be tested in English after their stay in the U.S. for three years or longer. Preparing these students for standardized tests in English has been another reason to enroll LEP students in mainstream classrooms (Cornell, 1995) which, in turn, puts an added burden on the classroom teachers (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2005) who are unprepared to meet the diverse needs of these students. English language learners face challenges in adjusting to the new social, linguistic, and cultural life in the new country. These challenges affect their identities in learning new patterns of knowing and participating in new communities. Hence, it becomes crucial for educators to understand the impact of family, religion, and native language in the ESOL students’ making sense of themselves while learning English as a second language and engaging in second language literacy practices. González (2001) argued that at the heart of language, literally and metaphorically, is the answer to who we are, how we present ourselves, and how others see us.

This study focused on Arab Muslim adolescents who are learning English in US public high schools. Given the contemporary political and social contexts in which they are situated, this study will focus on the following question:
How do the competing discourses of family, religion, and language impact the identities of Arab Muslim adolescent English language learners?

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to investigate how learning English impacts identity construction in the backdrop of 9/11. Because of this particular and very recent history that has had such a great impact on U.S. public discourse regarding Arab Americans and the violence inherent in these conflicting issues, a sociocultural theory in conjunction with postcolonial theory was used as the theoretical framework. It can be stated that earlier theories of SLA tended to recognize the learning process as totally psychological by not considering the social, economic, cultural, political and/or physical spaces where language learning takes place (Pennycook, 1999).

Significance of the Study

Developing a positive identity is considered a prerequisite for any successful learning (Ogbu, 1990, 1992; Lim, 2008.). Researchers in anthropology and social sciences have identified the connection between identity and language. Identity is the reference point to view the world and oneself (Holloway, 1999). Language plays an important role in identity formation because the way one speaks further defines who one is and also very importantly, who one is not. Identity can also play an important role in promoting or inhibiting motivation towards learning a second language (Saville-Troike, 2006). Because identity is the basic reference point for an individual, it is understandable that the first language tied to a student’s identity should be valued and respected. Sociocultural theory and the theory of “psychology of place” (Fullilove, 1996) insist that it is through ‘familiarity’ or cultural association that people develop knowledge and identity pertains to the sense of self, which develops out of one's intimate and immediate environment (Fullilove, 1996). As English language learners lack linguistic and cultural competence in
school, constructing the positive self-image becomes extremely challenging to them. This at times results in the ESOL students’ inability to establish a relationship with the entire process of schooling. In addition, there exists a continuous struggle in constructing the self and linguistic identities as they learn English in their country of immigration. The two major factors identified as contributing to academic failure of ESOL students and placing them at risk are poverty and the lack of English proficiency.³

We presume these to be the factors for failure of ESOL students and ignore other factors of discrimination such as speech accent, skin color, etc. For the Arabic Muslim ESOL students’ religious difference, which is easily identified in their girls, wearing the hijab and discrimination against Muslims particularly after 9/11 could be the reasons for their struggle. Since that time, the educational and economic profile of the Arabic population in the U.S. did not follow the commonly believed at-risk category.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) clearly sets a goal for limited-English-proficient (L.E.P.), or ESOL students, to meet the same challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic content standards expected of all students. The law also states that every student should be technologically literate by the eighth grade, regardless of student background or family socioeconomic status. ESOL students, moreover, will be tested in English after they have attended school in the U.S. for three years. The NCLB Act expects all students to become skilled users of English in schools so that they are able to achieve linguistic competence required to complete schooling and also acquire the skills of taking the high-stake standardized tests successfully.

The stated factors thus leave the responsibilities on teachers to enable immigrant and language minority students to succeed in schooling. Fillmore and Snow (2000) commented, “Too few teachers share or know about their students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds, or understand the challenges inherent in learning to speak and read Standard English” (p. 3). Hence, in order to teach ESOL students effectively, teachers need to know their students’ experience of the entire process of learning English and U.S. culture leading to formation of their selves for school success. This study can inform teachers about the importance of ESOL students’ cultural and linguistic negotiations in order to help them make the necessary transitions from “the world of the home to the one at school” (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p.12).

While the teacher education programs are including multiculturalism in the curriculum for linguistically and ethno-culturally diverse students whose numbers are increasing since the late 1980s, a significant gap remains in ESOL pedagogy, in which paradigms of applied linguistics and reductive multiculturalism continue to predominate (Taylor, 1997). Researchers (Canagarajah, 1993, 1999; Cummins, 1996, 2001; Lin, 1999; Norton, 1993, 2000; Toohey, 2000) in the field of TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) have addressed the unequal social relations and the politics of language hierarchy and language learning. However, they have not examined the complex interplay of multiple, embodied discourses of exclusion, normalcy and belonging which are central to students’ identity construction and its effects on learning English in a racialized, postcolonial world.

Most research conducted on ESOL addresses cultural, social, economic, and religious differences and involves Hispanics, Latino/Latinas, and Mexican-Spanish speakers, and even some include Asians – Chinese, Japanese, Hmong, and Vietnamese. However, no substantial amount of study has been reported on the culturally-diverse Arabic-Muslim population in the
U.S. against whom a history of “othering” exists. Saeed (2007) described this as “Islam-o-phobia … (that) has its roots in cultural representations of the other” (p.443). Jenkins (2002) has argued that the term ‘Islam-o-phobia’ is recently coined in the West while the hatred of Islam and Muslims existed since the Crusades (1095-1291).

Moreover, the tragic incidents of 9/11 and their backlashes saw a substantial rise on academic and scholarly studies being published on Arabs, Arab Americans, and their relationship with Islam. Most authors have given a historical overview of the Arabs and their migration to North America, the U.S., and Canada and their contributions to the North American society to create a better understanding of the religious and culturally different Arab Muslims (Kayyali, 2006). Others (Read, 2008; Howell & Jamal, 2008; Peek, 2005) have studied the multiple identities of Arab Americans as socio-politico-religious beings in the U.S. but there are very few studies conducted on their identity construction while learning English in public schools.

This study provides a framework for teachers to create new curricula or integrate special projects as teaching and learning tools for the Arab-Muslim ESOL students. In addition, the study can help mainstream teachers to effectively educate these minority students, making them aware of the nuances of culture and more accepting of cultural differences.

General Information About Arab Muslims

Geographically, the Arab world extends from Iraq and the states on the Persian Gulf in the east to Morocco’s Atlantic coast in the west. From north to south, it extends from Syria to Sudan. Seventeen independent countries make up the Arab world: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Palestinians are Arabs; however, to be included into the Arab world, they would require full national independence. Arabs are native speakers of the
Arabic language and must not be confused with the *Middle East*, which includes non-Arabic countries such as Iran, Israel, and Turkey. On the other hand, the five North African countries including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, are regarded as Arabic. Prior to the 20th century, “Arab” designated the Bedouin, tribal-based society of the Arabian Desert, the birthplace of Arabic.

*Linguistic Identity of the Arab Muslims*

The Arabic language and its poetry in particular are central to understanding the rise of the Arab identity. The poetic language was shared by the people as a cultural tradition before the advent of Islam. “Some historians argue that this literary explosion sowed the seeds of a proto-Arab nationalist consciousness that paved the way for the rise of Islam.” It was the Arabs and the Arabic language that played the most significant role in spreading Islam. The Muslims consider the Qur’an as God’s word that was transmitted to Muhammad in Arabic. Hence, the Arabic language is not only considered holy but also the perfect language. Though majority of Muslims are non-Arabs, Arabic maintains a special status among the Muslims. All Muslims study classical Arabic to be able to recite the Qur’an. With reference to the status of the Arabic language today, Dahbi (2004) wrote

> Like English, Arabic is very much a global phenomenon today not only because it is the language of Arab countries . . . but also, and more importantly, because it is the language of Islam, another global phenomenon that covers a much larger part of the world and that seems to be making headway in regions where it was completely absent a few decades ago. (p. 630)

Dahbi’s (2004) comparison of the two languages has been challenged by Taha (2006). Taha argued that Arabic being the language of the Qur’an has traveled to wherever Islam went but the knowledge of the language often remains “limited to the recitation of verses from the Qur’an, invocations, greetings, and prayers” (Taha, 2007). Most believers of Islam who are non-Arabs
are unable to actively use the language because learning the standard/literary form of the language would require formal classroom learning. Like all other languages, Arabic is used in different forms/dialects because of the diglossic nature of the sociolinguistic condition prevailing in the Arabic speaking countries (Taha, 2007), thus making it difficult for non-Arabic speakers to learn.

The West was exposed to the Arab Muslims during the eight-year campaign conducted by the Arab Muslims from 711 to 720 A.D. This resulted in most of the Iberian Peninsula including modern Spain, Portugal, and Gibraltar being brought under Islamic rule but probably for the above mentioned reasons the Arabic language did not spread into these regions.

*Historic-religious Relationship with the West*

The Muslims had successfully expanded their territory and by 632 A.D., the time of Muhammad’s death, they had consolidated their hold over the Arabian Peninsula and were poised to expand and conquer the territories of the Byzantine and Sassanian (Persian) Empires. By 640 A.D. they occupied Egypt and moved across North Africa. At that time these were mostly Christian lands and their aim was to transform it into an Islamic empire (Viorst, 2006). The Islamic armies were finally defeated at Poiters by a French force in 732 A.D. Like their Christian counter-parts the Muslims were reasonably confident that manifest success indicated that God was on their side (Geaves & Gabriel, 2004). This period was considered as the golden age of Arab civilization, which included both military and intellectual prowess. These were largely possible because they received the education that the ancient Greeks engaged in, as they came in contact and interacted with the Greeks in Byzantium (Viorst, 2006). Although, this education had brought success in the form of intellectual and military prosperity, it had also created serious schism within the Arab world. One group with the support of the monarchy and
Arab kings fought hard to liberalize Islam along the ideas of the Greeks but by the 10th century the orthodox group won and Islam was dedicated to the austere values as started by Muhammad (Viorst, 2006).

The Islamic expansion faced major setbacks in the form of the Mongol invasion in 1258 followed by the territorial expansion of Europe. These defeats seriously challenged the Muslim religious psyche (Geaves & Gabriel, 2004). The Muslims believed and were “confident throughout history, that they would inherit the earth as God’s last people” (Geaves & Gabriel, 2004, p. 2) and so their failure appeared to them as “a lack of faith and commitment to God’s revelation” (Geaves & Gabriel, 2004, p. 2). Once again there ensued a divide among people regarding the responses to this defeat. The more religious wanted to return to the ways of God by following the Qur’an and the Sunna of the Prophet. The less theological people wanted to learn and implement the more pragmatic European ways and establish education, legal and political systems based on the Western ideas.

During the 1800s, the colonial era, most of the Middle Eastern or Muslim territories came under European occupation and were significantly affected by colonialism. The French occupied Algiers from 1830-1962 and, during this period, had imposed many changes through the use of settler colonialism, segregation, and institutionalized discriminatory practices. The effects of this can be compared to the present situation in Palestine. The European countries of Italy, Spain, France, Great Britain, and Russia established their colonies in the Middle East and other Arab territories and, at times, even two or more colonial powers divided countries into spheres of interest and ruled over them; for example, Great Britain and Russia ruled over Iran. In 1916, France and Great Britain signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement resulting in the division of the
Middle East into zones of influence. This resulted in Lebanon and Syria being ruled over by France and Iraq and Transjordan by Britain.

During the early period of colonization, the colonized countries were stripped of their treasures. “In the early 1840s, Paul Emile Botta, the French consul in Mosul (Iraq) excavated the nearby mound of Kuyunjik, an Assyrian site, and dispatched its treasures back to the Louvre in Paris.” Thus, they were called “imperialistic thieves and conquerors” (Thornton, 2006, not paginated).

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Arabs were exposed to U.S. democratic ideology particularly through institutions like the American University of Beirut arousing the spirit of nationalism in them. Therefore, when Sir Henry McMohan, the British High Commissioner in Cairo instigated an Arab Hashemite to revolt against the Ottomans in Palestine, the Arabs believed it to be a promise of support towards Arab independence. However, after World War I, when the Arabs were not granted independence, they called the British and the French colonists “breakers of promises” in addition to “imperialistic thieves and conquerors” (Thornton, 2006).

It was only after the World War II that they received their freedom. Independence nourished expectation for Islamic revival because even after the discovery of oil, the Muslim world still felt a lack of power and influence, which they saw remained with North America, western Europe, and the Soviet Union (Geaves & Gabriel, 2004). The other problems that existed were internal division among Muslim nations, poverty, lack of education and internal corruption. The solution to this was perceived as an Islamic religious renaissance (Geaves & Gabriel, 2004). Cooke (2000) stated,

in the postcolonial period, the memory of belonging was to a religion, a kind of spiritual, ritual nation, which becomes the site of resistance to the West and above all to Western notions of progress. This was the rhetoric during the fight for independence; it is the rhetoric today. (p. 156)
In many parts of the Muslim world, U.S. dominance that manifests through the forms of corporate capitalism, secularism, and globalization are considered as neo-colonialism. On the one hand, they wanted to possess the power that was being enjoyed by the Western world but they also saw the ways in which they were being manipulated by the Western countries. This aroused in them a feeling of rejection of the western ways of life, which they thought were treacherous (El-Enany, 2006). The Islamic world continuously struggled to make decisions as they were caught up between the two opposite forces – the Western ways and the Islamic ways. These struggles or conflicts have never been revealed till very recent times, after 9/11 to be precise.

After World War II, the U.S.’s role in the Arab-Israeli conflict remains a significant point of contention between the U.S. and many Arab and Muslim countries (Djerejian, 2007). The invasion of Iraq based on misleading claims of “weapons of mass destruction” and “dubious links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qa’eda have only helped confirm Muslim suspicions” of renewed colonization (Geaves & Gabriel, 2004, p. 6). These views remain unspoken and unrevealed. What people view are noted all too presciently by Said (in Appelrouth & Edles, 1980) on the U.S. and the media’s role in the politics of the Middle East:

So far as the United States seems to be concerned, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Moslems and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists. (p. 613)

Television images of the Arab world support Said’s (1981) argument that the mass media plays a crucial role in creating images of people and cultures that are different and distant. Consequently, people in the West have formed their ideas about the Muslim world based on what they view in the television or read in magazines and newspapers. Said (1981) put forth an example of a television advertisement ran by Con Ed in the summer of 1980. The advertisement was about alternative energy sources for Americans and had film clips of “recognizable OPEC
personalities . . . robed Arab figures” alternated with clips and stills of “other people associated with oil and Islam . . .” followed by the ominous announcement that “these men control America’s sources of oil” (Said, 1981, p. 3). This was sufficient to arouse “a combination of anger, resentment, and fear” in the American people against “these men” (Said, 1981) and conjuring up the image of the enemy of the U.S.

Said (1978, 1981, 1993) attempted to show that the Western perceptions of the Orient did not stem from objective observation of empirical reality, to use Kissinger’s words, nor of the thought-processes of rationalism, to use Gibb’s, but of a long political and cultural conflict, reaching back in history to medieval times and culminating in the colonialism of the nineteenth and twentieth century. (El-Enamy, 2006, p. 1)

But El-Enamy (2006) argued that in his study Said ignored self-representations of the colonized and did not focus on the ways in which the colonized resist the colonial power. Hence, he promoted a static model of colonial relations in which ‘colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the colonizer’ and therefore there was no room for negotiation and change (Bhabha, 1983). Said insisted that the Orient provided Europe with its “greatest, richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (Said, 1978).

In his study, El-Enamy (2006) revealed that Arab intellectuals have displayed a very rational and appreciative attitude towards Western culture despite the colonialism of modern times and older clashes. To them the European other was simultaneously an object of love and hate, a shelter and a threat, a usurper and a giver, an enemy to be feared and a friend whose help is to be sought. (p. 2)

Discourses regarding Arab’s ambivalence and/or Michael Moore’s film Fahrenheit 9/11 that revealed through facts, footage, and interviews, the wrong decisions taken by Bush and his
cronies were hardly brought before the public. Yet, the stereotypical images are presented again and again in media and literature that leaves no space for negotiation.

While engaging in the Arab Muslim ESOL students’ identity construction, I have argued that the political discourse about the Islamic world represented by the mass media cannot be avoided. Prior to the West’s colonial expedition, Islam remained “a considerable political force” for most of the Middle Ages and the early part of the Renaissance in Europe. It colonized European domains and threatened Christianity. Hence, the close proximity to the Islamic world represented by the Middle East “evokes memories of its encroachments on Europe” and creates disturbance to the West’s psyche (Said, 1981, p. 5).

Most of the past colonies such as India have accepted the secular, modernist view of the Western civilization, which have been reflected in the continuation of the education and administrative system established by the colonizers, but not all Islamic countries have accepted it. Some Arab Muslims are torn between achieving progress as defined by the West and holding on to their religious culture. Questions or dilemma regarding the truth of what they were taught to believe always haunted the Arab Muslims as expressed by the Egyptian doctor, novelist and ardent women’s rights activist, Nawāl al-Sa’dīwī stated in 1995 in her autobiography:

I used to believe that God alone created the Arabic language, that He chose it over other languages and revealed the Qur’an in it . . . I would walk haughtily in the street, looking down on the English, who spoke a mortal language and belonged to an inferior nation not mentioned in the Qur’an. But in the darkness of the night there would be questions regarding this certainty:

If God loved us more than the English, why did He let them conquer and occupy us? Why did He let them discover the power of steam and electricity, the radio, the wireless, the aeroplane and the submarine? (in El-Enany, 2006, p. 188)

The writer was not only questioning the contradictions but also the idea of sublimity of the self and the mundanity of the other. But another group of the Arab Muslims view the revival of the
Islamic system as justified because it was under the guidance of the Qur’an that they had achieved cultural and political power during the Middle Ages. The Western world views the revival of Islam and following the Qur’anic way of life as going backwards, into the darkness of the Middle Ages from rationality and progress.

**Gender Relationship**

The traditional cultural norms are very strong in the Arab Muslim community. In order to protect the honor of women, the Arabs have insisted on a sexually-segregated society. As Stiehm (1976) stated, “men assume all public roles; women accept domestic ones . . . Men are dependent on women to maintain their honor; to guarantee that they do so, women are secluded” (p. 229). Such attitudes and practices exclude women from public life and create obstacles in their attainment of education. There had been some significant changes with regards to education and profession among the Algerian and Iraqi women and in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, but not as much among the more traditional Arab societies (i.e., Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain) (Massialas & Jarrar, 1983).

According to Islam, both men and women are to dress modestly. Usually men are not required to show any outward signs of religion. However, Muslims believe that the Qur’an requires women to wear the jilbab (a full body cloak) and hijab (headscarf). Muslim women of color face discrimination particularly regarding their decision on wearing the hijab by those who find the Islamic dress intolerable and perceive that wearing the hijab or veil is somehow connected to terrorism (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006; Zine, 2006).

In Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, girls attend all girls’ school. All through their educational journey, women attend non-coeducational institutions. In recent times, some
universities have allowed women but interactions among female and male students remain prohibited.

Caesar and Badry (2003) stated that in the Emirates “after the fourth grade, boys and girls attend separate schools . . . Even universities are single-sex . . . Only private American-style universities such as the American University of Sharjah are co-educational” (p. 239). In the U.S., both Arabic Muslim girls and boys need to adjust to these cultural differences and the different ways of life and continuously negotiate their position in the new environment.

According to Zine (2006), dress codes such as the hijab have important social, cultural, and political meaning for Muslim students. She further stated,

> We can conceive of the body as a site of variable inscriptions that visually mark and code religious, cultural, and gendered norms or, conversely, resist and subvert these norms. Such corporeal inscriptions, meanings inscribed upon the body silently, communicate social and political messages through specific forms and styles of dress. (p. 242)

The wearing of the hijab thus requires Muslim girls to continuously negotiate their multiple social identities based on the ways in which others view them and their own understanding of who they are.

**Education**

Education, including textbooks and other classroom materials in Arab countries, are centrally controlled by the government. “The Ministry of Education supervises schools for boys” while “General Directorate of Girls’ Education” is responsible for all K-12 education for girls (Rugh, 2002, p. 41). Committees in the ministries of education and higher education determine decisions regarding every minute details dealing with content of textbooks and basic courses pertaining to education. Private schools are also “required to follow these guidelines, although they may add supplemental courses to the basic approved curriculum if they wish” (Rugh, 2002, p. 50).
The traditional pedagogical approach is rote memorization. A study conducted by World Bank has reported, “The quality of education must be upgraded to the demands of the twenty-first century. The emphasis needs to shift to cognitive skills and computer literacy” (1995, in Rugh, 2002, p. 18). The schools have a strong religious ethos as Rugh (2002) stated,

... the study of religion pervades the curricula of all Saudi schools. Islamic principles and doctrine are conveyed not only in Islamic-studies classes but also in Arabic and social studies classes... Questioning of the basic tenets of Islam or of the wisdom of the monarch and his policies, for example, is understood by Saudis to be beyond the limits of public or classroom discussion (p. 50).

Theories of Identity

There are several ways in which the term “identity” has been used such as I, self (Morris, 1994), subject (Smith, 1988), social mind (Vygotsky, 1978), and identity (Gee, 1996). The definitions of the terms vary in the use and among people and their interpretation. Within the academic field, the term identity has been used for different purposes and holds a significant position in the work around literary studies (Barton, Hamilton & Ivonic, 1999; Collins & Blot, 2003).

Modernist and Western View of Identity

Within the frame of traditional modernist views of identity, it is viewed as a unified, cohesive essence and a set of determined and achieved characteristics. Thus, an individual’s identity is fixed as his/her class, socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnic identity is fixed. It is constructed within the notion that the self is separate from the world. These modernist constructs have been criticized for its narrow representation of the self as an “essential core” (Broughton, 2002, p. 3) and a “set of stable personality traits that are a social in nature” (Mccarthey, 1998, p. 127). Scholars in feminist and cultural studies (Bhabha, 1994; Butler, 1995) view identity to be constructed and constituted through social, cultural and professional practices.
However, Hoffman’s (1996) argument challenges the Western perception of identity as universal on the basis that the concepts of self differ in different cultures and ethnic groups. For example, the religion of Islam, which is “based on the traditional Arab tribal paradigm” (Aslan, 2006, p. 57), is a communal religion. “It abhors radical and reclusive individualism” (Aslan, 2006, p. 80). Muhammad attached no significance to culture, ethnicity, race, and kinship and constructed religion as the center. As a result, religion replaces ethnicity, culture and social identity and even defines politics, economics and ethics (Aslan, 2006) of the Muslims.

The modernist idea of identity centers on its dualism about relations of reality (i.e., object/subject, self/other, individual/society, ego/world). According to Sheehy (2002), mind/society and object/subject binaries are a “product of Modernism” that provide a historical and philosophical account of mind and society split and a critical examination of binary epistemology, which has been prevalent in Western discourse (p. 278). She clarified that the dominant assumption of self in Western society traces back to the Cartesian individualistic subject constructed by the claim that “reason exists within the individual mind” (p. 281). The Cartesian subject illuminates a self-distinguished from the other. This distance created between the subject and the object empowers the subject to provide a meaning to the object by using reason so that he/she will be able to be independent. Ferguson (2000) argued that a postmodern perspective of identity allows one to examine “object/subject relations in a new interactive reality” without necessarily reproducing binary others (p. 194).

Identity when analyzed from the sociological perspective reveals that the “individual is not fixed or given entity, but rather a particular product of historically specific practices of social regulation” (Henriques, 1984, p. 12). This criticism of the modern definition of subjects as self-conscious individuals can be traced to the epistemology of Western philosophy that enforces
normative self-structures as an individuated rational being (Weedon, 1997). This paradigm of the self in Western culture constructs the self as individual, independent, autonomous, and consistent.

However, Hoffman’s (1996) argument challenges the Western perception of identity as universal on the basis that the concepts of self differ in different cultures and ethnic groups. For example, the religion of Islam, which is “based on the traditional Arab tribal paradigm” of a communal religion “abhors radical and reclusive individualism” (Aslan 2006, p. 57). Muhammad attached no significance to culture, ethnicity, race, and kinship and constructed religion as the center. As a result, religion replaces ethnicity, culture and social identity and even defines politics, economics and ethics (Aslan, 2006, p. 80) of the Muslims. Hence, it is important to recognize that the concept of self in relation to society is a historical, social, cultural, religious, and ideological constructs which demands critical understandings (Morris, 1994).

To sum up, identity from a poststructuralist perspective involves two interrelated assumptions: firstly, identity is not a fixed entity; secondly, self/other relationships are historically, socially, culturally, religiously and ideologically constructed. These assumptions force us to consider the importance of knowing and understanding the self in terms of others and articulate subjects in the dynamic relationships between the individual and the social. Within poststructuralist approach conceptualizing self in new ways would mean to understand a sense of self and its formation within larger social processes in which social identities are produced, intensifies, or rejected through everyday social practices, with regard to changing social and material conditions of language, culture, life, and subjectivity (Collins & Blot, 2003; Watson-Gegeo, 2004).
Multiple and Situated Identities

Discussions of various theories of identities have been introduced to literacy studies (Gee, 2000) that have been followed by empirical research to examine how gender, language, culture, identity, and literacy are intricately entangled and mutually constitutive (Broughton & Fairbanks, 2003; Hall, 2002). These studies have documented how children respond to situated identities in local discourses (Hall, 2002), and negotiate and navigate gendered identities in school (Broughton & Fairbanks, 2003). The poststructuralist perspective initiated an epistemological shift on identity – from viewing it as inherently fixed and stable to considering its multiple forms to understand the complex aspects of socially and locally situated constructions of students’ identities.

Gee (2000) argued that multiple identities are built within different social interactions. According to his argument, people are recognized as “kind of person” based on their social performances rather than their internal traits; highlighting once more that people’s identities are closely linked to the formation of their social life and the “workings of historical, institutional, and sociocultural forces” (p. 100). The four avenues based on which identity is to be explored are nature, institution, discourse and affinity (Gee, 2000).
According to Gee (2000), different societies in different historical periods have understood identity based on any of the four perspectives. In a lucid way he explained the nature-identity as “we are what we are primarily because of our natures”; institution identity as “we are what we are primarily because of the positions we occupy in society”; the discourse identity as “we are what we are primarily because of our individual accomplishments as they are interactionally recognized by others” and the affinity identity as “we are what we are because of the experiences we have had within certain sorts of “affinity groups” (p. 101). It is crucial to realize that these four perspectives are not separate from each other. In most societies, all of them coexist.

By looking at the table and the categories of identity, it can be concluded that an individual holds and experiences multiple identities while having linguistic and cultural interaction within particular social contexts. Gee perceived identity to be situated in and acted through language. Therefore, in discourse language forms different identities at different times in
different settings with different styles of language, according to the tasks and participants of the talk. He claimed that multiple social identities are constructed and consumed through sociocultural practices that enact a kind of identity in discourse communities, where people obtain memberships and legitimate their literate practices (Gee, 1996, 2000). Gee called it “Discourse” with a capital “D.” Gee (1996) described Discourse with a capital D as

... a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and artifacts, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network. (p. 131)

As previously stated, identity is not something static but dynamic and an ongoing process of being and becoming (Sarup, 1998).

In this study, I used postmodern and poststructuralist theories of identity (Sarup, 1998; Weedon, 1997) to understand the Arab Muslim ESOL students’ construction of multiple and situated identities in social discourse. They experience multiple identities based on race, ethnicity, culture, gender, age, socio-economic background, profession, etc. The poststructuralist concept of identity is vital in order to understand the structure of self as both “being forced to negotiate multiple identities among Discourses” (Gee, 2000; McKay & Wong, 1996) as well as continually shifting and changing, never fully locating oneself once and for all in a particular identity (Hagood, 2002) Thus, the theories of identity work in support of ESOL students’ “relationships to the target language and their understanding of the world, which are socially and discursively constructed through language learning and literacy practices of the target language” (Hong, 2006).

Summary

This thesis is divided into five chapters. In this first Chapter, I introduce the background context of the inquiry, general information of the Arab Muslims followed by the theories of
identity. I also explain the rationale and research questions of this inquiry as well as the principal theoretical concepts I intend to draw on as a conceptual framework. In Chapter II, I provide theories of identity in literature where issues of identity are integrated into the discussions of current literacy studies. In the first part of Chapter III, I provide a discussion of the theoretical framework for my study and also lay out the methodology of the study. I present some relevant concepts of sociocultural theory and postcolonial theory and the qualitative traditions of case study. I will also provide a brief description of participants and sites and procedures for collecting data. The second part will focus on the detailed process of data analysis. The findings of the study will be presented in Chapter IV and V.

Definitions of Terms

At-risk: In the classroom setting, educators identify “at-risk” students (1) when they are failing two or more semester course grades, (2) who is two or more years older than grade-level peers are, (3) who misses more than 20% of required classes, (4) who experiences one or more school suspensions, (5) who moves three or more times in one school year (Vang, 2005).

Bilingual education refers to the use of two or more languages of instruction at some point in the student’s school career. It is generally defined in terms of the means through which particular educational goals are achieved. Typologies of bilingual education programs have generated myriad different types depending on the combination of program goals, status of the student group, proportion of instructional time through each language, and sociolinguistic and sociopolitical situation in the immediate community and wider society (Cummins, 1996, p. 99-102).

ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages constitutes alternative approaches of instruction for teaching English as a second language. The focus is less on the language itself
than on providing activities that require language use for communicative purposes. Exit refers to the point at which students are officially declared ready to move out of the special program and spend their entire school day in mainstream classrooms (Lucas & Wagner, 1999).

**Immigrant**: A catchall term to label students who are foreign-born and who have immigrated to the United States within the past 3 to 5 years. Immigrant students who are recent arrivals are often referred to as newcomers (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999).

**Inclusion model**: Students are enrolled in the neighboring schools in age-appropriate, grade-level classrooms, regardless of English language proficiency. Inclusion or full inclusion is the practice of serving special needs students within the general education setting with appropriate services provided in mainstream classes (Harper & Platt, 1998).

**Language minority**: A term to group and homogenize language learners of non-English language background. The underlying sociopolitical assumption is that these “linguistically minorities” do not speak English as a primary language (Chiang & Schmida, 1999).

**L.E.P.**: Limited English Proficient denotes students whose primary or home language is other than English who need special language assistance in order to effectively participate in school instructional programs. It fails to recognize such students as bilinguals and portrays them as deficient.

**Mainstream classes** are those intended for native speakers of English and other students who are fully proficient in English (Lucas & Wagner, 1999).

**Mainstream teachers** are those who are core content teachers at the middle school and secondary levels (Walker et al., 2004).

**Pullout classes**: Language minority students in mainstream schools may be withdrawn for compensatory lessons in the majority language. Such ESL pullout programs are provided as a
way of keeping language minority students in mainstream schooling and are in preference to no English language support (Baker, 2006, p. 219).

**Transition:** The term “transition(ing)” refers to the process of gradually transferring ESL learners from a special program (i.e. the ESL classroom) to primarily English language educational experiences (i.e., mainstream classrooms) (Lucas & Wagner, 1999).
CHAPTER II:
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

How do we recognize the shackles that tradition has placed upon us? For if we can recognize them, we are also able to break them. (Franz Boas, 1938, p. 204)

“The United States has probably always been a country of immigrants and migrants” (Sporawski, 1993, p. 299). Tavakoliyadzi (1981) further described the U.S as having been historically “. . . a haven for immigrants” (p. 56). Within this context, we observed that immigrants have come to the U.S. from all over the world and have experienced various degrees of success while adapting to the U.S. way of life. Studies have been conducted on many immigrant groups with regards to learning English for school success, acculturation, and identity construction. Although Arab immigrants have been coming to the U.S. since at least 1854 (Miller, 1976), very little research has been conducted on Arab Muslim ESOL students (Moosq, Karabenick, & Adams, 2001; Sado Al-Jarf, 2004). Moosa, et al (2001) studied five areas in which Arab mothers were involved in their children’s elementary education. The communication between the Arab mothers and the teachers revealed that teachers misinterpreted the Arab mothers’ verbal and non-verbal communication as the teachers lacked the skill and knowledge to effectively interact with Arab students and their families. The Arab parents were supportive and wanted to be involved in their child’s education; however, the parents lacked English skills and were not comfortable in the school setting. The study concluded by highlighting the fact that relationship between teachers and parents must be reciprocal; however, the Arab parents did not show any responsibility to understand their host culture. Sado Al-Jarf (2004) charted a study for undergraduate students
learning English as foreign language (EFL) in Saudi Arabia. The aim is to address misconceptions and stereotypes about the religion and culture of Saudi Arabia through the use of electronic resources by the EFL students by interacting with native English speakers in the U.K., U.S., and Australia using cross-cultural misconceptions and stereotypes as the theme for such dialogue.

The number of Arab immigrants in the U.S. has been reported to be at least 3.5 million (U.S. Census, 2000) of which 25% are Muslims. As per the U.S. census, Arabs are considered “Caucasian/White” (Census, 2000) and have been educationally and professionally successful in the U.S. According to the Arab American Institute report,

Arab Americans with at least a high school diploma number 85 percent. More than four out of ten Americans of Arab descent have a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 24% of Americans at large. Seventeen percent of Arab Americans have a post-graduate degree, which is nearly twice the American average (9%).

It further stated that the “mean income is measured at 8% higher than that national average of $56,644.” Yet, like all ESOL students, Arabic speaking children too have difficulties learning English and being accepted socially.

Learning English as a second/additional language in a school where it is the dominant language of the majority is inherently challenging and complex. ESOL students need to deal with learning a new language and making sense of literacy practices in new ways that may be totally different from their familiar ways of doing things and speaking (Nieto, 2002; Zamel & Spack, 2004; & Rowsell, Sztainbok, and Blaney, 2007). These students are further challenged as they have limited control over English language, which represents both an important linguistic resource and form of power in the U.S. However, as it has already been mentioned, after 9/11 the

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4 Since the U.S. census does not allow for religious distinctions to be recorded demographics are available for Arabs in general.
situation has worsened for the Arab Muslim students who are constructed as “evil” (Muscati, 2003).

Researchers (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Morita, 2002; Gee, 1996, 2000; Erdreich & Rapoport, 2002) view language learning and achieving literacy in the new language as a process of identity reconstruction. Erdreich and Rapoport (2002) further reported from their study that “though students may feel excluded from the dominant school discourse and challenged by new ways of knowing, they uniquely construct academic knowledge by drawing on their lived and living knowledge and experience” (p. 493). Similarly, Morita (2002), in her qualitative case study, described the conflicting and transformative processes L2 learners engaged in academic discourse socialization. Morita provided a rich account of the ways in which L2 graduate students reconstructed and negotiated their identities and power while participating in academic communities. In everyday discourse in the U.S. schools as well as in social contexts, very often we, non-native speakers, are ignored and silenced or suppressed when speaking in English because of our pronunciation, accent and sometimes also because of our physical appearance (Pennycook, 1985; Hodne, 1997). We are placed in a position where we are forced to listen to the “culturally insensitive” interlocutor. Although these difficulties marginalize ESOL students, they also provide the opportunities to explore a new world and make meaning of it by linking it to life experiences.

In the case of Arab Muslim students, these are huge negotiations because it disrupts both their “technical” and “subjective” aspects of learning (Erdreich & Rapoport, 2002). The “technical” aspect refers to the traditional way of learning. The Arab cultural tradition of learning is through rote memorization and reproduction of facts that discourages any “ideological and personal discussion of national topics” (Erdreich & Rapoport, 2002, p. 496). Knowledge is
prescriptive and remains uncontested or unchallenged. According to Islam, the chief source of all knowledge is “Allah the Almighty” (Kazi, 1988) and the “primary ways of knowing entail seeking “truth - correct answers”” (Kazi, 1988). Teachers in this culture enjoy high respect and obedience, as they are the bestowers of knowledge (Al-Haj, 1995; Mazawi, 1994).

Because of the technical aspect of teaching, the subjects are produced as passive learners mirroring Freire’s (1970) concept of banking education, in which passive learners have pre-selected knowledge deposited in their minds. By joining U.S. public schools, the Arab Muslim ESOL students are forced to adjust to the new ways of learning, thinking, and the concept of knowledge. They also have to adjust socially in school, which makes them aware of the power relations and “their place in social hierarchies” (Erdreich & Rapoport, 2002, p. 496). This transition from an Arab dominant self to a linguistic and cultural social minority compels them to reconstruct their identity.

The study by Erdreich and Rapoport (2002) traced the basic difference in educational ideology faced by the Muslim women in a non-Muslim environment, yet it did not discuss the religious and political tensions existing within the geographical space. It failed to recognize how the Arab Muslim female learners negotiate those tensions in the reconstruction of their identities.

Even through the topic of the history of second language acquisition (SLA), linguistic power and identity construction each has its own areas of scholarship. Their interests intersect to provide a framework for understanding ESOL students’ identity construction. Specifically, I am interested in examining how Arab Muslim ESOL students reconstruct their identities from this framework located within postcolonial studies and socio-cultural theory. This compels my interest because the contemporary bilingual/ESL education has failed to bring advancement to the language minority students in a “democratic and emancipatory way; instead, it prepares the
students it serves to take their places on the lower rungs of the U.S. social hierarchy” (Grinberg & Saavedra, 2000. p. 419), a phenomenon pervasive to European colonies. Being forced to learn the language of the colonizer, the colonized gain superficial entry into the colonizer’s society because it neither provides them full access to the cultural capital nor power. As Carlson (1997) very eloquently expressed, the field of bilingual/ESL education serves as a “settlement” where minority and marginalized groups are able to make incursions into the mainstream of the political process . . . even though they are not part of the power bloc that exercises leadership in the state . . . [the settlements] do not seriously threaten the privilege of dominant groups. (p. 61)

Spring (1994, 1997) also emphasized that “deculturalization or Americanizing” has continued to remain a historical agenda of the U.S. educational institutions (Grinberg & Saavedra, 2000). This reproduction of the socio-cultural system perpetuates the interests of the powerful and privileged (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

The next section examines the terms *ethnicity, identity, language,* and *literacy,* because meanings for these concepts have been used to reinscribe and reproduce these hegemonic relationships. I also examine the ways in which researchers and theorists have discussed the links between these concepts, academic achievement, and identity development in the existing bodies of literature. Studies on language-minority immigrant students to the United States, particularly those from Arabic and/or Islamic background will also be discussed in order to contextualize this study.

**Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity**

The terms *ethnicity* and *ethnic identity* need to be defined in order to examine their functions within the context of the school. As these terms refer to extremely broad and diverse set of ideas, it is necessary to clarify how these concepts are used in this study. I draw my perceptions of these concepts based on cultural anthropology that has a history of long and
arduous research in the field. There is a wide range of literature available on the field of ethnicity in both anthropology and social sciences proving the complexity of this issue (e.g., Barth, 1989; Cohen, 1981; DeVos & Romanucci-Ross, 1982; Espiritu, 1992, 1994, 1995; Keyes, 1981; Mead, 1982; Nagata, 1981; Smith, 1992; Trottier, 1981).

DeVos and Romanucci-Ross (1982) viewed the study of ethnicity within the scope of cultural anthropology through their definition.

Ultimately, ethnic identity is the unexpressed meaning of anthropology. Anthropologists intellectualize about human culture, yet they try to perceive in their own modes of pursuing knowledge the value of man’s past, and so, to assert, that without a consciousness of the past, the present becomes devoid of meaning. (p. 389)

Hence, ethnic identity, which is also defined as cultural heritage, is crucial for humans in order to make life meaningful and comprehensible.

Ethnicity is viewed in a variety of ways even within cultural anthropology. Muga (1982) stated,

... in my own readings around this theme I have come across sociological/modernization approaches, folkloric/cultural approaches, historical/archeological approaches, biological/genealogical approaches, legal/administrative approaches, social psychological approaches, interactional/attitudinal approaches, representational/associational approaches, polyethnic frameworks, and victimology theories, among many others. (p. 1)

Theorists and anthropologists have viewed ethnicity as a static and strictly bound biologically inherited traits to a conflation of ethnicity and nationalism to political groupings to a dynamic, changing set of symbols and strategies.

De Vos (1982) defined ethnicity and ethnic groups in the following lines:

An ethnic group is a self-perceived group of people who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact. Such traditions typically include ‘folk’ religious beliefs and practices, language, a sense of historical continuity, and common ancestry or place of origin. (p. 9)
However, this definition is a good basis for conceptualizing ethnicity but DeVos himself pointed out towards the limitation of this definition, as it does not include the “multiple levels” within the concept of ethnicity. He explored the psycho-cultural part of ethnic identity in his statement that ethnicity is a “feeling of continuity with the past, a feeling that is maintained as an essential part of one’s self-definition. Ethnicity is also intimately related to the individual need to collective community” (p. 17).

Gibson (1988), in her study on school students from the Punjabi-Sikh community, noted that these youths were able to acculturate without assimilation. She found that the Punjabi community accommodated to the cultural demand of the new society without adopting values or customs that challenged their Punjabi-Sikh (regional and religious) identity. As a community, they resisted the conformist pressures by accommodating to the norms of the dominant society only in public, while in private they maintained and practiced the Punjabi way of life. The terms of the inclusion, exclusion, accommodation and resistance of the minority communities within the larger socio-cultural background take place through negotiations. This “is integral to the process of maintaining ethnic or religious group boundaries, particularly among minoritized groups” (Zine, 2001, p. 403).

Different writers or theorists have focused on different aspects of ethnicity. For example, while Barth (1969) looked at group boundary maintenance mechanisms, Keyes (1981) focused on heritage and cultural interpretations of descent and the dynamics of ethnic change. Cohen (1981) was more interested in the relation of power and that was brought out through his statement: “Ethnicity is a communal organization that is manipulated by an interest group in its struggle to develop and maintain its power” (p. 325). Mead (1982) has focused on the
construction of the notion of “American” ethnicity as opposed to non-Western Europeans. Many other definitions and conceptualizations of ethnicity exist.

Ethnicity has often been defined by categorizing it as either “primordial” or as “instrumental” or “circumstantial” (e.g., Espiritu, 1992; Glazer & Moynihan, 1975; Goldstein, 1985; Keyes, 1981; Nagata, 1981). Nagata (1981) recognized the dichotomous relationship in ethnicity. According to Nagata (1981), the primordialist approach considers ethnicity as innate or genetic, “emanating out of a corpus of basic, elemental and irreducible (‘primordial’) loyalties, with a power and determinism uniquely their own” (p. 89). The instrumentalist or circumstantialist regards ethnicity as a tool to be used, or as “a dependent variable, created and controlled by a broad combination of external interests and strategies, which invest it with a potential for action and mobilization” (Nagata, 1981, p. 89).

It is apparent that each of these perspectives narrows the scope of the concept of ethnicity. Espiritu (1992) criticized this view and wrote, “In general, primordialists and instrumentalists have used national origin to designate ethnic groups. This approach ignores the range of ethnicity – from small, relatively isolated kin groups to large categories of people bound together by symbolic attachments” (p. 7). It is quite obvious that strict or narrowed down concepts fail to accept that identifying with ethnic group can also take place for the reasons such as nationality, cultural ties, economic, or other practical benefits.

Either attempts of conceptualizing ethnicity, according to “structural” or “cultural” models, leads to the restricted version of the concept. Approaches, which are strictly structural or cultural, tend to ignore the realities of ethnic identity and ethnic group construction. In order to illuminate all of the various components, levels, and functions of ethnicity, there is need for a multi-dimensional definition that allows space for constant fluctuation.
In addition to this general idea of ethnicity, when discussing Arab American ethnic identity, we need to take into consideration the notion of “panethnicity” or “the generalization of solidarity among ethnic subgroups” (Espiritu, 1992, p. 6). Joining of subgroups under the common label has occurred with Arabic ethnic groups in the U.S. as discussed by Espiritu (1992). According to Espiritu (1992), the phenomenon of panethnicity challenges both primordialist and instrumentalist views by calling “attention instead to the coercively imposed nature of ethnicity, its multiple layers and the continual creation and re-creation of culture” (p. 5). Though the notion of ethnicity is considered as individual choice, it is often not the case for non-Euro-Americans.

Initially the panethnicity that is imposed from the outside is reconstructed from within the group for political and economic reasons (Espiritu, 1992, p. 7). Working as a larger collectivity such as Arab Americans has more weight in the political and social arenas rather than Kuwaiti, Omani or Moroccan. A panethnic identity provides “a basis on which to mobilize diverse peoples and to force others to be more responsive to their grievances and agendas” (Espiritu, 1992, p. 7). In the U.S., there is a practice of labeling immigrants as hyphenated Americans. This forced labeling of immigrants demonstrates the prevalence of racial and ethnic categorization in this country. This is resonated in Olsen’s (1997) observation that immigrants to the United States are not only required to learn English, but also the task of “becoming racialized into our highly structured social order, where one’s position is determined by skin color” (p. 11). However, the ability to become a member of an already existing group in an unfamiliar society may help in making the transition into the new surrounding easier.

Ethnic identity may be chosen by the individual or a categorization imposed by others, but it often changes depending upon the individual’s context. Within the U.S.’s multiethnic
society, it is more important to recognize ethnicity in terms of how it is formed and changed as various groups interact. This might lead us to look at ethnic groups in the broadest sense:

To interact meaningfully with those in the larger society, individuals have to identify themselves in terms intelligible to outsiders. Thus, at times, they have to set aside their national or tribal identities and accept the ascribed panethnic label. (Espiritu, 1992, p. 10)

Apart from this, ethnicity also functions in smaller ethnic groups or subgroups within the larger one, depending on individuals’ own perceptions of personal ethnic identity. The simultaneous working of ethnicity in an individual at various levels and their experiences in society shapes their identity. For example, Arab Muslims identify themselves primarily as Muslims first and Arabs later (Moore, 2006).

In order to maintain this larger ethnic/cultural group they have gone through the process of “role performance,” (Barth, 1969) which is the “enactment of behaviors that are based upon and judged by shared cultural knowledge, value orientations and moral standards” (p. 14). Khan (2000) stated that, within the Muslim community, the role performance is described as the following:

Through various symbolic activities, like performing the salah (prayer) on Fridays, fasting, celebrating festivals, wearing traditional garb, and frequenting community places like the mosque, the restaurant, the parochial school, the Muslim individual reproduces the community, and these distinct practices give the community its meaning or identity. (p. 107)

However, this identity is also not static but always in the process of “becoming” as disclosed in research by Shahnaz Khan. Khan (2000), in her study on Muslim women decentering the monolithic notion of a Muslim woman in North America, revealed their identity in “a space of becoming” (p. 129). One of her participants expresses her views as follows: “On the one hand, I am defending the country and Muslim, and on the other hand I have this anger about it because I know the kind of impact it has had on my personal life” (p. 42). It is obvious that she neither
rejects Islam fully nor embraces it. Her ethnic identity occupies a third space, which is neither Oriental nor Muslim nor North American.

Ethnicity is thus dynamic and fluid. It emphasizes both a membership to a larger group and the ongoing processes of identity construction and the ways in which people understand and position themselves within their cultural contexts. Running along this idea, I adopt Goldstein’s definition of ethnicity as used in her study (1985). According to her, ethnicity is a multi-faceted, dynamic process of group identification, meaning and perception, and interaction. From an emic perspective, ethnicity is people’s understanding of their behavior and interchanges in terms of their shared, collective identity, and identity rooted in common cultural meanings and inherited history. Ethnicity exists as a continuum over people, time, and place such that the past imparts meaning to the present at the same time that present-time experiences can alter inherited identity. (p. 27)

Within this broad view of ethnicity, students are provided with the space to construct their ethnic identities in multiple possible ways. As stated by Proschan (1997), “scholars and analysts ought to be able to conceive of ethnicity and ethnic identity as both subtle and supple, simultaneously primordial and situational, at once fixed and fluid” (p. 106).

Religious Identity

Religious identities are mostly connected to ethnic identity and acts as a way to preserve cultural and ethnic traditions particularly among immigrants when adjusting to the new culture of the host country, and also using it as a source of identity for the next generation (Kurien, 1998; Ng 2002). Different theories have been proposed towards explaining the reasons why certain communities or individuals develop religious identities. In general, all religious communities provide spiritual, social and economic support to its people. According to Kurien (1998), first generation immigrants establish religious institutions and introduce familiar social and cultural activities in the new country to resolve adjustment issues. It happens particularly to people who
were part of the majority in their country of origin and due to immigration became a religious minority.

In addition to providing spirituality, religious institutions play an important role in all societies by offering community support and networks, economic support, educational opportunities and most importantly peer-support (Chen, 2002). Thirdly, to find semblance in the confusion and tension of immigrant status with regards to ethnicity religion helps to overcome social isolation (Kwon, 2000). Fourthly, religion also helps in maintaining personal and social distinctiveness in the context of the U.S.A. (Rayaprol, 1997).

Lori Peek (2005) explored religious identity formation of second generation Muslim Americans. She interviewed 127 Muslim college students out of which eighty-two were women and forty-five were men and their age varied from 18 to 33 years. Only forty-one students in this study identified themselves as Arab or Arab American.

She documented three stages of religious identity development. In the first stage when religion was ascribed identity – religion was not recognized by the participants as a significant identity. In the second stage the participants chose Islam as their identity. The third stage according to Peek is “religion as declared identity” which occurred after September 11, 2001. The participants of the study thought it was required to “retain a positive self-perception and correct public misconceptions” (p. 236).

Sarroub (2005) conducted her ethnographic study of six Arab Muslim girls from Yemen who “were attempting to reconcile the American lives they experienced at school with the Yemeni lives they knew at home” (p. 1). She called her participants “sojourners” stating that many Yemeni-American girls “remain geopolitically, linguistically, religiously, and culturally
isolated from American life while maintaining those same ties to their homeland” (p. 22) and also because the girls are often sent back to Yemen and married off while in high school.

The girls were expected to help their parents in managing the household, taking care of their siblings, marrying young while in high school, taking care of their own household and also behaving according to the Yemeni religious and cultural norms so that they remain “good Muslim girls.” In addition, they were also expected to earn good grades in school. Having their feet in two worlds required them to continuously struggle to construct, negotiate and sustain their identities both as Yemeni and American.

The study revealed that the Yemeni community closely scrutinizes the spaces in which the girls live. The high school boys too police the girls and if there is a little lax on the part of the girl it is immediately reported. The girls’ parents are always careful about preserving the good name of their daughters so that they do not have difficulties in marrying them off. The pressure at home is such that the girls are sometimes confused and depressed to the extent that one of the girls in the study had threatened to commit suicide and another ran away from home. The family of the runaway girl “no longer recognized or acknowledged her as a member of the family” (p. 14).

The study involved only high school girls and is limited for not having a detailed analysis of how these adolescents construct their gender identity in both Arab Muslim Yemeni and secular American cultures. In my study I explored how the roles of the Arab Muslim girls and boys are prescribed by not only their own culture and traditions, but at the same time they are also influenced by their exposure to the American society.
Language, Literacy, and Culture

In this study, language is viewed in its broad and sociocultural aspect rather than focusing only on grammar and vocabulary. This approach is consistent with a cultural anthropological understanding of language and culture. According to cultural anthropologists, cultures are made up of numerous components including language, which are integrated into symbolic systems. It was in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that an explicit relation between language and culture was expressed. This hypothesis proposed, “language is not only the means of communication, but actually shapes perception and exemplifies each society’s unique model of the world” (Garbarino, 1977, p. 64). Sapir (1949) stated that different cultures interpret the world differently and their languages encode these differences and reflect their perceptions of reality. Whorf (1956) mentioned that the language people use profoundly affects how they think; there exists a causality – a determination of thinking processes that is caused by language. To be more specific, “continuous use of a particular language, or a discourse within that language, reinforces the perceptions encoded in the language so they become firmly entrenched and difficult to question” (Whorf, 1956, p. 30). Within this view, language is not merely the product or tool of culture but is an active agent in creating culture and the cultural group’s ways of thinking and viewing the world. Hence, learners of English along with learning the language would also need to learn a new way of perceiving and comprehending their surroundings. However, this hypothesis has been challenged on various grounds but it remains useful in understanding the struggle of the second language learners. It is particularly true in the case of ESOL students who learn English for school success, as it includes acquiring literacy in English. Becoming literate is “developing mastery not only over processes, but also over symbolic media of the culture – the ways in which cultural values, beliefs, and norms are represented” (Ferdman, 1990, p. 188). This
means that in order for language minority students to become literate in English, they need to learn English vocabulary and grammar along with using the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways enabling them to move fluently in society (Gee, 1989a, 1989b; Hymes, 1980; Roberts, 1994).

Most interestingly, this concept of literacy has been widely accepted by theorists in recent times and as Street (1995) commented,

the trend has been towards a broader consideration of literacy as social practice and in a cross-cultural perspective. Within this framework an important shift has been the rejection by many writers of the dominant view of literacy as a ‘neutral,’ technical skill, and the conceptualization of literacy instead as an ideological practice, implicated in power relations and embedded in specific cultural meanings and practices (p. 1).

Street (2001) framed literacy in his “ideological model,” which “does not deny technical skill or the cognitive aspects of reading and writing, but rather understands them as they are encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power” (p. 161). Within this perspective, language learning is inextricably linked to a number of cultural factors. Hence, it is obvious that in order for language minority students to become truly literate in English acquiring the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar are insufficient. As literacy “always occurs in a social and cultural context” (Roberts, 1994, p. 214), language teaching must always happen with reference to the accompanying culture. In this context, Damen (1987) claimed that meaningful language learning involves some degree of identity conflict as language learners take on a new identity along with their newly learned language.

Zaharna (1995) highlighted the differences between the roles played by the languages English and Arabic and how it “is mirrored in the cultural communication style as well” (p. 245). According to the author, most U.S. citizens view the English language as a medium for conveying or “transmitting messages.” Hall (1982) identified American as low-context culture
that emphasizes more importance to the language code and very little meaning in the context. Hence, the preference is for clarity, objectivity, and directness as opposed to high-context culture of the Arabic. Hall (1982) stated in the Arabic language, “most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message” (p. 18). Within the practice of discourse in English, emphasis is on accuracy and factual presentation of the information by the speaker as opposed to Arabic where “the listener must understand the contextual cues in order to grasp the full meaning of the message” (Zaharna, 1995, p. 242).

Zaharna (1995) argued that the linear and literate patterns of the English language emphasize accurate and factual presentation of information for the purposes of documentation, argumentation and reasoning while the Arabs view their language more “as an art form, a religious phenomenon, and as identity tool” (p. 245). Scholars such as Shouby (1951) have commented that the melodious sounds of the Arabic words are like music and the recitation of the Koran may be compared to Western classical music. Hitti (1958) have summed it up in his statement,

Hardly any language seems capable of exercising over the minds of the users such irresistible influence as Arabic…The rhythm, the rhyme, the music produce on them the effect of what they call ‘lawful magic’ (sihr halal). (p. 90)

Zamel (1997) expressed her concern on such emphasis on difference between L1 and L2 as it “reinforces the idea that each is separate from, even in ways in which the two intersect, mingle with, and give shape to another” (p. 341). Her suggestion for a model of transculturation was for recognizing the wide range of factors that are specifically engaged in second language writing practices and to eliminate the tendency to “reduce, categorize, and generalize,” and places limitations on students by stereotyping them on the basis of language and background (p. 342).
Her view on reductionism was supported by Smith in her work that includes Arabic Muslim students and stated that

reductionism leads to failed observations about facets of identity that “intersect” or “transcend” language issues, [and] the existence of “multiple ways of being” not only when speakers shift languages, but also within the same language, and importantly, that what “individuals do in and with language, either their own or another, is contingent on and embedded within specific situations” (Smith, 1992, p. 82)

Thus enabling students to engage and permit their languages to interact and feed one another while writing in L2 as they receive second language instruction in support of their discourse.

Identity and Second Language Literacy

Since language has been identified as an agent in creating culture, acquiring literacy in a second language would mean for learners to see and make meaning of the world by using a different lens. It would also mean making adjustments around communication style involving the cultural aspects. It would thus require reconstructing of their identities, as some theorists view literacy acquisition as a process of identity reconstruction (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Erdreich & Rapoport, 2002; Gee, 1996, 2000; Street, 1984, 1993). The study conducted by Erdreich and Rapoport (2002) reported that though ESOL students felt excluded and disempowered from the dominant classroom discourse, they constructed academic knowledge and also explored and articulated their new ethnonational identity. In another study, Morita (2002) gave a rich account of how L2 graduate students negotiated power and reconstructed their identities while participating in academic communities of practice. What is common in both these studies is that the learners used their L1 literacy to inform their L2 literacy and reconstructed their identities/subjectivities.
According to certain literacy theorists, the practice of literacy takes place within society and so involves people’s values, attitudes, and beliefs about literacy and the discourses of literacy (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Street, 1984, 1993). Being placed within the scope of all other human activities literacy too, structure social relations. This makes literacy political and ideological and caught up with other broader concerns involving race, class and gender in the construction of identity.

Discourse and the Construction of Identity and Agency

The concept of language as social practice and language learning within the scope of communicative methodology is that of discourse. The common definition of discourse, offered by the Oxford English Dictionary, is a spoken or written treatment of a subject, in which it is handled or discussed at length. Even within users of the same language, the use of language varies considerably among its speakers and their speech communities. Michel Foucault (1972) viewed discourse from the social aspect rather than linguistically. He identified discourse as an institutionalized way of speaking that determines not only what we say and how we say it, but also what we do not say. [He] rigorously identified and typologized the structures of discourses, emphasizing how discourses affect everything in our society while remaining nearly unobservable. (Johnson, 2005, p. 23)

An example of which could be the language of the standardized tests. Test-takers, particularly in the K-12 setting, are at times not even aware that when one language is used over another in administering tests, it actually sends a direct message that this particular language has more importance over others. Both students and their parents without any resistance or negotiations have accepted the practice. They do not understand how this practice translates into the outcome – how it discriminates students whose home language is not the same and the effect of it on their test scores and its consequences on their lives.
The same idea has been reflected in the definition of language provided by Fairclough (2001) as “a product of social differentiation – language varies according to the social identities of people in interactions, their socially defined purposes, social setting and so on” (p. 17). However, not all people have access to the language required for participating in certain discourses because of its unequal distribution (Fairclough, 2001, p. 20). The standardized tests are examples of such language inequality. Language that has more value remains unavailable to a large segment of society including ESOL students. Yet, they are expected to take part in the test, an educational discourse, without having access to the right tools required for participation. Thus, an individual because of his/her social existence belongs to a range of discursive fields that require “competing ways of understanding the world and experience” (Weedon, 2001). It provides possibilities of interpersonal and intergroup action and provides the individual with the possibility of many subjective positions. According to Davies (1990), “the individual gains access to what it means to be a member of different discursive fields by learning how to use available discursive practices. While sometimes accepting and sometimes rejecting assigned categories, the individual becomes a subject “implicated in and made sense of through such practices”” (Her, 2005, p. 23).

Within discourse, individuals constantly engage themselves in practices that are inherently competing or contradictory, multiple, constantly changing with time and place, and a site of struggle over meaning, access, and power (Norton Pierce, 1989), so are the subject positions taken up by the individuals. This complex situation raises the question what drives an individual to take up a particular position within competing discourses.

It is the notion of agency that holds the key to know how an individual constantly renegotiates positions while moving through wide ranges of available discourse (Collins & Blot,
According to Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), agency is “a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large” (p. 148) and infers that agency is connected to the power relations in discourse and are related to society’s system of stratification.

Read (2008) conducted her research in Houston, Texas, a year after 9/11, to do a comparative study of the ways in which the Arab Muslims and Arab Christians have been renegotiating and co-constructing their ethno-religious and national subjectivities. She stated that people belonging to both religious groups “identify strongly with multiple cultural identities, including religion, ethnicity, and national origin” (Read, 2008, p. 122). Most remarkably, they share a strong sense of American identity and acknowledge the ability to enjoy these overlapping identities to being American. The inner struggle of negotiating subjectivity is brought out in the words of a thirty-eight-year-old Muslim immigrant man, she interviewed. He said, “I see myself as an American, as an Arab, and as a Muslim. I need to support the troops but they’re killing Arabs and Muslims.” (p. 124). A Muslim woman expresses very much the same thing, “Being American means being free. I’m an American, but since September 11, I’ve lost my freedom . . . I hide who I am in public, which isn’t free at all” (p. 124). People need to reconstruct their identities with the changing socio-political fabric of a society, which is intricately connected to power relations.

Gee (1992) has asserted that certain discourses are considered having higher status and stated that “discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society. Control over certain discourses can lead to the acquisition of social goods (money, power, status) in a society” (p. 112). Gee (1989b) has named it “dominant discourses” and the groups that easily master them with fewer problems in the process the “dominant
groups” of society (p. 20). Children from these “dominant groups” or mainstream families have fewer conflicts in mastering the dominant discourses. Non-mainstream students and students from different cultures face more conflicts between dominant discourses and their primary or L1 discourse that results in creating barriers to fluency and proficiency.

Bourdieu discussed the social position in relation to language use. The use or production of language is directly related to the speaker’s position in society. He further added that not all styles are appropriate for all settings, nor are they all “legitimate.” Not all speakers possess the competence necessary to speak the legitimized version of the language, which depends upon their social positions. “Speakers lacking the legitimate competence are de facto excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence” (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991, p. 55).

Bourdieu elaborated on the inequality of forms of speech, and frames his discussion in terms of exchange value in the linguistic market. “Linguistic utterances or expressions are always produced in particular contexts or markets, and the properties of these markets endow linguistic products with a certain value” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 18). He likened them to market products where some are more valuable than others, and “different speakers possess different quantities of linguistic capital – that is, the capacity to produce expressions a propos, for a particular market” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 18). “Linguistic capital” and the ability to “make a profit” in the linguistic market would mean possessing the ability to produce and have mastery over the right modes of speech. There is a clear affinity between linguistic capital and material wealth both of which is distributed unequally and depends on the location and the position of the individuals in society.
The unequal distribution of linguistic capital is neither accidental nor natural. The fact that certain individuals or groups have more capital or have greater mastery over profitable forms of discourse is not an arbitrary happening. Though we have no control over being born into certain cultural and societal groups, it determines our original social positions and linguistic patterns. However, according to cultural anthropologists, there are no groups or cultures inherently superior to others; similarly, certain modes of speech are not inherently better than others. The hierarchy of linguistic forms, which rules the linguistic market, is socially constructed and enforced by the dominant social group. Bourdieu called the prestigious linguistic form the “official language,” and much like Gee’s “dominant discourse,” becomes normalized by societal forces (Thompson, 1991, p. 45).

The educational system in particular plays a significant role in perpetuating the status of the official language or dominant discourse and imposes it upon students from generation to generation. In fact, without social institutions like the school, the official language or dominant discourse would not retain its status. According to Gramsci (1971), the school system is a part of the system of ideological hegemony in which individuals were socialized into maintaining the status quo enabling the dominant group retain its position of power. Similarly, Bourdieu (in Thompson, 1991) stated

The position which educational system gives to the different languages (or the different cultural contents) is such an important issue only because this institution has the monopoly in the large-scale production of producers/ consumers, and therefore in the reproduction of the market without which social value of the linguistic competence, its capacity to function as linguistic capital, would cease to exist. (p. 57)

He further stated that the educational system “contributes significantly to constituting the dominated uses of language as such by consecrating the dominant use as the only legitimate one, by the mere fact of inculcating it” (in Thompson, 1991, p. 59-60). In the classroom, success is
measured by the proper use of the dominant or official language. ESOL students who use other modes of speech are told in the form of low grades that they have little capital in this market. The educational system is so strictly defined and stratified by grade point averages that, students quickly learn their position on the social ladder and also whether or not they are going to make it educationally. Depending on their grasp of the dominant discourse, students are tracked towards various sectors or levels of society.

Since speakers’ social position can be recognized from their use of language and modes of speech, it will be useful to examine the relation between speech and speakers’ identities. Bakhtin asserted that all individuals involved in discourse “are socially marked in the very language they use” (Dentith, 1995, p. 34). In interacting or communicating with others through speech, we show who we are. The ways in which we speak, or the genres we use, position us within contexts and shape the ways our identities are presented in each setting, making each time we speak an act of identity construction.

Gee (1989a) stated that discourses are closely related to speakers’ identities. Since discourses involve various behaviors, appearances, and attitudes, using a particular discourse involve presenting oneself in a certain manner. Gee asserted that discourse works as an “identity kit” meaning that we construct and present our identities in particular context through discourse (Gee, 1989a). We use many different discourses as we move through our daily lives, each of which corresponds to a different identity and way of being. Both consciously and unconsciously, we shift among these discourses and identities, depending on the context and situation.

Gee (1989a) further argued that discourses play significant roles in delineation of social groups as well as in the definition of individuals’ identities. He stated that we start with our
primary discourse, which “constitutes our original and home-based sense of identity” (p. 8) and added,

Our primary Discourse, which always affects behaviors in secondary Discourses to a certain extent, is like a theme that runs through all of our behaviors (sometimes very submerged, sometimes quite apparent). It constitutes our personal persona and is part of what gives a sense of unity and identity to our multiple social selves (constitutes by our many secondary Discourses). (Gee, 1992, p. 109)

Practices of discourse are tied to the world views of social or cultural groups, and these practices are “integrally connected with the identity or sense of self of the people who practice them” (Gee, 1994, p. 169). Gee (1989a) remarked that using a discourse is a display of identity denoting the person’s affiliation with a certain group. Changing discourse practices by utilizing the practices of another group, changes the individual’s identity (Gee, 1989c). Within this understanding, Maybin stated that “in acquiring a new set of discourse practices, a student may be acquiring a new identity, one that at various points may conflict with the student’s initial acculturation and socialization” (Maybin, 1993, p. 189). Because of this potential identity conflict, it should be recognized that shifting discourses is not a simple, superficial act and much more may be at stake for the learners.

Though languages and modes of speech or discourses have many similarities and parallels, there are certain significant differences that prevent the terms from being used interchangeably. Gee (1989a) acknowledged that languages and discourses work similarly: “Two Discourses can interfere with one another, like two languages: aspects of one Discourse can be transferred to another Discourse, as one can transfer a grammatical feature from one language to another” (p. 9). However, discourses and languages also differ in certain ways. For example, “Someone can speak English, but not fluently. However, someone cannot engage in a Discourse in a less than fully fluent manner. You’re either in it or you’re not” (Gee, 1989a, p. 9).
An important difference that exists between languages and discourses involve the ways in mastering them: namely, the difference between learning and acquisition. Language learning is done in an active and conscious way while passive, unconscious language acquisition takes place. Gee (1992) defined these terms as

> Acquisition is a process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice within social groups, without formal teaching. … This is how most people come to control their first language. (p. 113)

On the other hand, learning

> . . . is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching (though not necessarily from someone officially designated a teacher) or through certain life experiences that trigger conscious reflection. This teaching or reflection . . . inherently involves attaining, along with the matter being taught, some degree of metaknowledge about the matter. (p. 113)

Basic language skills can be learned but true fluency involves acquisition. However, discourses cannot be learned as Gee (1992) wrote, “Discourses are not mastered by overt instruction . . . but by enculturation (apprenticeship) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse” (p. 114). Adults can formally learn a language by training and memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules, but in order to be fluent, acquiring discourses would be necessary. According to Gee (1989a), “one cannot acquire Discourses save through active social practice” (p. 13). He further expanded by saying, “discourse classes” are an impossibility.

Most Arabic Muslim students come to the U.S. with no or very little knowledge of English. They enter school without the “legitimate competency” in the official language, dominant discourses, or appropriate speech genres, which puts them at a great disadvantage in the academic and social hierarchies. The lack of legitimate competence could exclude them from the culture of the school consequently denying their access to educational success. This also
makes communication difficult with the mainstream students as they are minimally understood and results in them being seen by both themselves and the others as non-speakers or less-than-competent speakers. The positive identity that they had constructed of themselves in their native country or at home is challenged in the school environment.

According to Bakhtin, language only becomes real in dialogue with others, and so when ESOL students are unable to engage in dialogue, their languages, and therefore, their identities lose validity. Their inability to communicate might get them defined or labeled. If they internalize these labels, they may view themselves as incompetent rather than capable individuals.

*Cultural Identity and Academic Success*

Anthropologists and other theorists have observed connection between not only language and culture but also their close tie with identity. Identity, which is also related to self-worth, has direct link affecting achievement. The value of a child’s cultural identity has direct consequences to his academic achievement and is often evident in measures of literacy skills such as reading and writing. According to Ferdman (1990),

> When a child perceives a writing task or a text and its symbolic contents as belonging to and reaffirming his or her cultural identity, it is more likely that he or she will become engaged and individual meaning will be transmitted or derived. In contrast, those tasks and symbols those serve to deny or devalue aspects of the individual’s cultural identity, or even those that are neutral in relation to it, may be approached differently and with less personal involvement. (p. 195)

The assumption in Ferdman’s argument is that there needs to be engagement or investment for achieving school success. If a student feels that in order to be proficient in English and gain literacy in the mainstream culture, she/he would need to abandon home culture she/he might choose to resist the school culture. The growth of a negative feeling towards school will not make her/him perform to the full potential. To counteract the negative effect, students’ cultural
identities should be acknowledged and given importance in their school. Simple acts like
including minority students and ESOL students in school activities also support in constructing
positive identity; they then develop a sense of belonging to the school community.

Many authors (e.g., Au & Jordan, 1981; Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Ogbo, 1978, 1983, 1987,
1993) have discussed about the connections between cultural identity and academic achievement.
In this context Hertzberg (1998) commented, “Problems can arise for students when verbal and
nonverbal communication and learning patterns at home environment are inconsistent with those
topic. His cultural ecological theory emphasizes the importance of non-school community forces
in minority children’s academic success. In general, these researchers have argued that the
relationship between the students’ home cultures and the dominant cultures of the school have
significant impacts in the decision whether students will engage and succeed in school or feel
alienated and threatened by the school environment.

Issues of language, identity, and school achievement have been examined from different
perspectives and from different populations. Some studies have looked at language development
and its relation to academic achievement, while others have paid more importance to the role of
language in the development of identity and roles of the larger community. Despite these
differences, these studies are all anchored in school contexts, and offer valuable insights into the
issues of language, identity and education.

Within the broad category of immigrant education, the specific topics that were explored
include the role of language in the school performance of immigrant students and the
significance of native languages in these students’ educational experiences (e.g., Hertzberg,
1998; Ferdman, 1990). Cultural ethnographers, for example, Goldstein (1985) and Olsen (1997),
have emphasized the role of ethnic identity in the context of schooling and included language as one of important components. Au and Jordon (1981) and Delgado-Gaitan (1987) have highlighted the importance of possessing positive self-identity in order to succeed in American schools.

These studies are valuable for setting the background and context for my own research. The relationships between ethnicity and identity and language and identity have been explored in detail. However, research in the field of second language learning involving language and identity and academic achievement focusing on Arab Muslim students have never included the Southeastern states of the United States. This study provides additional information of the ways in which ESOL students reconstruct their identities in order to adjust with the new culture while they learn English in school.

Theoretical Framework

Colonialism breaks things. It shatters an imagined wholeness. Colonialism’s will to power creates binaries where a unified field and healthy singularity of cultural purpose once existed. The self of the colonizer explodes a native cultural solidarity, producing the spiritual confusion, psychic wounding, and economic exploitation of a new and dominated other. Colonization imposes evil, fear, and ignorance on the innocent native landscape. (Houston A. Baker, Jr. PMLA Forum, 1995)

Following Said (1978, 1994), Gandhi (1998), and Gilroy (2000), I use post-colonialism in addition to Vygotsky’s (1934/1986) sociocultural theory as my theoretical tools to examine the data collected in this study. I argue that these theories analyze most competently the relationship existing among postcolonialism, its intersection with racism and other isms involving language learning in the context of my research problem related to Muslim students’ negotiations of cultural and linguistic identity in the U.S.
Postcolonialism with its diverse and inter-disciplinary usage coheres around “an exploration of power relations between Western and Third World countries” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995, p. 1) in order to expose systems of oppression. Ashcroft et al. (1995) defined post-colonial studies to be “based on the historical fact of European colonialism and the diverse material effects to which this phenomenon gave rise” (p. 2). Postcolonial theory, they argued, interrogates the “material effects of colonization” as well as the “wide range of activities including conceptions and actions which are, or appear to be, complicit with the imperial enterprise” (p. 3) including language and knowledge.

Postcolonialism theorizes colonialism as an exploitative relationship between the West and its Others while addressing the historical, cultural, and political alterity, or difference. Gandhi (1998) traced the beginning of postcolonialism in Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* based on a variety of Foucauldian paradigm. Foucault defined discourse as a system of statements within which the world is known. He stated that the dominant groups in society create their “regimes of truth” by imposing specific knowledges, disciplines, and values upon dominated groups (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 42). In his book *Orientalism*, Said (1978) used colonial discourse to examine the ways in which it operated as an instrument of power. Gandhi (1998) added that “it is through poststructuralism and postmodernism – and their deeply fraught ambivalent relationship with Marxism – that postcolonialism starts to distil its particular provenance” (p. 25). This shift from an exclusive economic Marxist perspective through poststructuralism enabled postcolonialism to “implicate colonialism as an epistemological malaise as the heart of Western rationality” (Gandhi, 1998, p. 26). As a theory it critiques Western civilization and has a very specific understanding of Western domination as a symptom of an unwholesome alliance between power and knowledge.
Edward Said (1978), Stuart Hall (1995, 1996), Homi Bhabha (1994, 1995), Leela Gandhi (1998), Paul Gilroy (2000), Gayatri Spivak (1994) and many other scholars from the field of humanities and social sciences have contributed towards the development of the theory. As a result, the interpretations of postcolonial theory varies widely depending on the approaches that includes anti-racist theory, feminist theory, and postcolonial indigenous theory in diverse disciplines such as sociology, political science, cultural studies, literary criticism, and linguistics. According to Ashcroft et al. (1995),

the term ‘post-colonial’ [is used] . . . to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. (p. 2)

Broadly defined postcolonial theory can be said to be an interdisciplinary family of theories that share a common political and social concern about the legacy of colonialism and how this continues to shape people’s lives and life opportunities (Young, 2001).

In spite of the existence of a dichotomous relationship between the East and West, the them and us, there is also mystification of the oriental. Said (1978) argued, “The Orient . . . is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of the deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (p. 1). The Orient has been an integral part of Europe’s material and cultural civilization but there also existed the relationship of the colonizer and the colonized. The West and the East had a trade relationship. The countries that were more prosperous and could offer more in the form of material and labor were defeated and made into colonies of the West. These countries were thoroughly exploited to bring material prosperity to the West. The West also created its identity by positioning itself against the non-western Other. Europe (or the West) was everything that the East was not – the East’s “contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.” The West is
male, rational and everything positive while the East was female, irrational, and negative. This is also echoed in Abdul Jan Mohamed’s (1985) reference of the Manichean allegory.

The concept of Manichean allegory has its root in the religious belief based on radical dualism and Buddha’s teachings. Generally the concept of dualism claims the existence of two ideas or principles, which are essentially different. These are often represented by pairs of opposites as light/darkness, knowledge/ignorance, spirit/matter (also mind/body), good/evil, etc. But ‘radical dualism’ denotes two such principles that are opposed to each other on their very essences, and they are eternal and indestructible. Franz Fanon defined the relationship of the conqueror and native as a Manichean struggle as a never-ending process. Jan Mohamed (1985) accepted Fanon’s idea and argued that the Manichean allegory is the central trope of imperialist duplicity that transforms “racial difference into moral and even metaphysical difference” (p. 61). It also “dominates the power-and interest-relations in colonial societies between the putative superiority of the colonizers and the supposed inferiority of the native” and remains ineradicable (p. 63). The colonizer, the west is masculine, hence, rational, ordered and good while the colonized is feminine and so, irrational, chaotic, and evil. Jan Mohamed (1985) further stated that what was probably perceived on the basis of physical difference (skin color, physical features) had metonymically extended and dominated every facet of imperialist mentality (p. 80). Most interestingly, these oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superior and inferior, civilized and savage, rational and sensual, intellect and emotion, self and Other, subject and object – are interdependent. In order for white to exist there is the need for black. Similarly, the good needs the evil, the rational the sensual and so on. The colonizer creates the dichotomous relationship between [his] self and the other. This construction of the self comes from the
position of domination that Michelle Fine (1994) referred as “listening to elites as they manicure them-Selves through Othering” (p. 75).

The practice of Othering is a process to secure a positive identity for the self through negating or stigmatizing the other. The markers of social differentiation that shape the meaning of us and them varies from racial, geographic, ethnic, economic, and ideological. A term that originated in the writings of Hegel was developed by Lacan in the field of psychoanalysis. According to Lacan during the pre-Oedipal, “mirror-stage” an infant gains an idea of itself as discontinuous from the rest of the world. From this phase “a process [creating the binary of self/other]5 begins that eventually leads the child to acquire gendered subjectivity” (Weedon, 1989).

In post-colonial studies the self-identity of the colonizing subject and the identity of imperial culture is inextricable from alterity of colonized others. Spivak (1995) argued that this alterity is determined by the process of othering - a process that is used to disempower and colonize peoples. Within this understanding the colonizer projects the values of the self as superior to those of “others” justifying colonization.

As a movement, postcolonialism is to expose to both the colonizer and ex-colonized the falsity and validity of their assumptions of colonization. The acquisition of the native markets, resources, and manpower by using brute force were done in the name of “educating and civilizing the savages” (Mansur, 1999). Mansur (1999) further added, “They subjugated the natives, imposed their will at large . . . eroded the natives’ cultures and languages, plundered the natives’ wealth and established their orders on settlers’ supremacy.” The colonizers who were Europeans developed their theories from particular cultural traditions and practices which were then imposed as the standard ‘norm’ or ‘universal’ on the colonies by ignoring their (the

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5 Italics mine
Language and Postcolonial Theory

Control over language had always been an integral part of colonialism. Postcolonial theorists (Gandhi, 1998; Loomba, 1998) argued that language plays a crucial role in the continuing colonization of the world by influencing the thoughts and life-style of people in the Western ways. Firstly, language is “the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated,” and also a conception of truth, order, and reality is established (Ashcroft et al., 1995). As language and culture can be used interchangeably forcing the language of the colonizer in the colony is also enforcing the culture. As culture is the very basis of the network of concepts that form identity (Ngugi, 1986; Achebe, 1975), it alienates colonized people from their roots when forced to learn the colonizers’ language and form positive self identity. The language and knowledge of the colonized or the ‘other’ are marked as inferior. It goes to the extent of using language as a tool to differentiate between the ‘civilized and barbarians’ (Seed, 1991, p. 18) and civilizations that used written languages are considered superior than those who did not. Based on this relationship of power, of domination, the British imposed English as the language of education.

On the second of February, 1835, Macaulay’s Minutes decided that English would be the medium of instruction in educational institutions in India. According to Bailey’s (1991) interpretation, Macaulay’s purpose was to enrich Indian languages, so that they could become vehicles for European scientific, historical, and literary expression (p. 140). In reality English
gradually became the language of government, education, and advancement, “a symbol of imperial rule and of self-improvement” (McCrum et al., 1988, p. 325). The entire education system, carried out through the standard form of the colonizer’s language, was established as the norm and marginalized all other languages. It assisted in creating a new privileged class who received education in English while a large chunk of the population remained deprived of even basic formal education. The intention is clearly brought out through the words in Macaulay’s Minutes (1835) that “a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect” (p.138) would be created who would act as interpreters between the British and the locals. It would also enable the colonizers to exercise social control over the people, and impose western ideas (Pennycook, 1994, p. 102).

Pennycook (1994) argued that the decision regarding language in education for which Macaulay gets sole credit was not as simple as it is made out to be. Macaulay’s arrival in India, writing the Minute, and returning to England with English firmly transplanted in the colony was much more complex than it apparently appears. According to Pennycook (1994), Macaulay just articulated a position that had already been discussed for a long time (p. 77). He further argued that the Indian bourgeoisie demanded English-language education as they saw knowledge of English, the language of the colonizer, as an essential tool in gaining social and economic prestige (p. 76). But they failed to see how it disempowered the entire knowledge base of the colonized people.

In the U.S., the ESOL student suffered from similar experiences as that of the colonizers that Lankshear and McLaren (1993) have identified as exposure “to forms of domination and control by which their interests are subverted” (p. 379). Within the dominant discourse the
assumption remains that the faster ESOL student becomes able speakers of English, they would be able to express themselves and also acquire literacy.

Language and Literacy Development as a Socially-mediated Process

One major assumption that guides this study was the notion that language and literacy development are contextually situated and constructed through social interaction with meaningful others. In the late 1960s, anthropologists and sociolinguistics took a new step in their research towards issues related to the uses of language in diverse cultural communities and societies. They did not limit their theoretical lenses, as in prior research, to the structures of languages and individual, and the isolated learner’s ability to manipulate linguistic units (Hymes, 1972). As researchers concentrated on the ways in which social worlds frame realities and how learners negotiate meanings in relation to the contexts in which they live, concepts of culture and its relation to language use, consistent to this study, were broadened. Culture involves dynamic, natural, and complex ways of making sense in one’s community and society (Geertz, 1973).

Although some researchers have reduced notions of culture to static traits that can be analyzed to explain complex phenomena like school performance (Lewis, 1966; Ryan, 1971), such a view is in opposition to the anthropological notion of culture adopted here. Culture thus is viewed as a rational adaptation to sociocultural environments in which learners develop linguistic and cultural patterns that serve particular goals within their particular communities (e.g., Ochs, 1987; Scribner & Cole, 1988). Cultures, then, are shared ways of interpreting action; in essence, they are socially-established structures of meaning (Geertz, 1973).

Lev Vygotsky laid the foundation for advancing sociocultural research. Vygotsky (1978) asserted that psychological functions are social in origin and that they acquire structures tied to the sociohistorical means necessary for adapting to society. Signs or tools, the most important of
which is speech or language, allow for internalization of culturally appropriate ways of thinking and acting. Vygotsky explicated the concept of a zone of proximal development, which refers to the distance between what a learner can accomplish alone and what she or he can achieve with the assistance of a more knowledgeable peer or adult. The intellectual and problem solving skills utilized by this other are displayed and negotiated with the learner as these processes become internalized and transformed in later learning situations. Thus, as Vygotsky purported, development progresses from the social to the individual level; processes move from an interpsychological state to an intrapsychological one. In Vygotsky’s (1978) words,

> Every function in the cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level. First, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the [student] (intrapsychological). (p. 57)

Vygotskyan theory builds on sociocultural definitions of literacy and available tools shared by cultural group members. The development of intellectual processes, then, is viewed not as occurring in static isolation, but rather through social interaction and symbolic mediation. Language and literacy, situated within complex and dynamic learning contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1988), are acquired through a mental construction of meaning that develops through negotiation with significant others (Bruner, 1986). Halliday (1980) explained that

> . . . a child is not an isolate individual, and learning language is not a process of acquiring some commodity that is already there. Learning language is a process of construction . . . Mental construction is not and cannot be an individual process. A child has to construct language, but he or she does not do this alone-rather in interaction with others; and the others are not simply providing a model-they are also actively engaged in the construction process. (p. 8)

Any use of oral and written language is intentionally driven to serve some function within a learner’s environment. Literacy, consequently, must be investigated for its links to the structures, features, and specifics of a given task. Responding to linguists’ strict focus on the structures of speech and text, Hymes (1972) focused on the functions of language for children in
the classroom. According to Hymes, language holds specific meanings for participants in a communicative event, and thus, teachers, children, and communities organize language to represent the messages driven by their social goals. The communicative event involves components – including the participants, roles and relationships, mood, and genre – that are embedded in norms of communication and interpretations of relationships between community and school.

Consistent with these theorists’ conceptions of the positionality and contextually bound nature of language use, my emphasis in this study was the dynamic processes of literacy development meaning, the ways in which the ESOL students manipulate talk, text, and other systems of symbol for complex sociocultural and cognitive functions while reconstructing their identity/subjectivity.

Rationale for Using Postcolonial Theory and Sociocultural Theory

I have used Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and postcolonial theory as the frameworks of my study because I find the two theories have a close relationship particularly in the realm of second language learning and identity formation. According to sociocultural theory, human beings learn by interacting in their society and within its cultures that include both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. The word language is so significant in interpersonal communication that we refer to non-verbal gestures as body language and these non-verbal gestures are culturally produced as well. For example, in order to convey a non-verbal positive response in India, except in the southern parts, people either nod their head once forward or sideways. In the southern cultures of India, people nod their heads sideways and in both directions a couple of times to say yes which means no in other cultures. Hence, language and the meaning it conveys are learned from the cultures to which an individual belongs. It is through
this language that the individual makes meaning of the world and tries to understand who s/he is. In other words, it forms his/her identity.

Identity formation relates to an individual’s psychosocial being. Even within the same cultures, each individual continuously reconstructs his/her identity. This happens because each mind interacts with its cultures in different ways and assumes different positions, which is reflected in the forming of identity.

The history of colonialism and its aftermath have had effects on certain cultures and societies. The asymmetric power relation that existed during colonial period between the colonizer and the colonized has played out differently during postcolonial period (Tanabe, 2003; Santos, 2002; Anand, 2007). On the one hand, during the British rule, the Anglo-Indians considered themselves closer to the colonizers, the British. Many of them held governmental positions particularly because of their oral and written fluency in English. During the postcolonial period, the same identity placed them at a disadvantageous position – they suddenly lost their position of power, and were marginalized and treated as the other (Caplan, 2003, p. 16). On the other hand, it has left indelible colonial mentality among the people and its culture. People still feel proud when called sahib, a white man. The colonists have left but subjugation of indigenous languages can be seen taking place in education systems (La Belle & White, 1978; Bewaji, 2002)

The colonized either have a tendency to blindly submit to the colonizers while looking down on the cultural and social norms of their own heritage or else develop resistance to everything associated to the colonizers. Post colonialism is constructed on otherness and the oriental particularly the Muslims have been othered since the time of crusades. The dichotomous
relationship between the Christians and the Muslims exists for a long time as have already presented in details in Chapter I.

Purpose of Study/Research Questions

The purpose of this dissertation was to contribute to the literature pertaining to ESOL students’ struggle in constructing their cultural and linguistic identities as they prepare for school success with specific reference to Arabic Muslim students. After 9/11, minority groups have suffered as a result of both Arab and Islam-o-phobia, which have had serious negative implications for students belonging to this minority group.

A Tennessee high school girl has written about her harrowing experience that started from 9/11 and continued for two months. The shock had silenced most of the students but they carefully avoided the Arabic students. On the next day, some of the students who were thought to be Arabic had the word terrorist written with red lipstick on their lockers. There were verbal threats and obscenities hurled but the worst was physical assault. She wrote, “In one week, three kids taken to the hospital—two of them being Arabic—six Arabic kids dropped out of that school, and the only remaining Arabic student was me.” And there were scars in their minds that went unnoticed. A similar incident took place in this southeastern city where an Arabic girl was beaten up in the school bus after 9/11. Similar incidents and their repercussions have been reported by Sabry and Bruna (2007). In a three-year study conducted by Louis Cristillo, a faculty member of the Teachers College finds that New York Muslim youths have developed hyper-conscious religious identity as a result of various forms of harassment.

Fillmore and Snow (2000) have commented, “Too few teachers share or know about their students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds, or understand the challenges inherent in learning to speak and read Standard English” (p. 3). Hence, in order to teach ESOL students effectively,
teachers need to know their students’ experience of the entire process of learning English and
American culture leading to formation of their selves for school success with respect to the
influence of their native language, religion and also the expectations of their family. This study
intends to inform researchers and all those interested in knowing the ways in which ESOL
students negotiate their cultural and linguistic identities in order to help them make the necessary
transitions from “the world of the home to the one at school” (Fillmore & Snow, 2000. p.12). It
would also provide a framework for teachers to integrate special projects as teaching and
learning tools for the Arab-Muslim ESOL students. In addition, the study could help mainstream
teachers to effectively educate these minority students.

Summary

This literature review examines issues relating to language, identity and education within
SLA. It also explores postcolonial theory and sociocultural theory serving as the framework for
this study. The relationships between language and school education and between language and
identity have been examined thoroughly. I specifically explore and examine the relationship
between language and discourse and the role of discourse in learning English within the context
of immigration in the US. I also examine its intersections with race, class and gender and its
implications for hybrid identities.
CHAPTER III:
METHODOLOGY AND RATIONALE

This chapter provides a methodological map in which I illustrate the process that I used to conduct this research including the details for collecting and analyzing the data. The chapter will also address how my previous identity as a teacher influenced my decisions regarding the choice of research topic, research design, participant selection, and the development of interview questions. Being on both ends of the spectrum, as an ESL tutor and as an international graduate student at a university in the United States, this topic evoked my interest in studying what learning English means to these children.

My experiences as an outsider has changed my perception of myself; from who I was to who I am now in order to make myself belong to the present community, even though for a short period of time. In contrast, these ESOL students, whom I interviewed, have come to the United States to stay and make it their home. Their learning English is not only learning the language but learning the culture and acculturating to the extent that they fit in to the dominant society. Seeing the Arabic-Muslim students from a close proximity while working as an ESL tutor drew my attention in studying the challenges they faced in school to succeed academically, particularly after 9/11 when school children belonging to this community and also other immigrant communities became targets of violence.

I believe that there are multiple realities about a particular social issue and every phenomenon is experienced differently by different people in a given context (Patton, 2002). Even though all the student participants of the study were Muslims from Arabic affiliation, their
experiences were diverse because of the individual’s cultural and family background, previous school experiences, and their perception and interpretation of events. My primary purpose was to understand how cultural and linguistic identities were interpreted by these participants individually. I found the naturalistic paradigm to be a compatible theory in regards to this study.

I describe the following as the research design: 1) rationale for adapting the naturalistic inquiry paradigm; 2) gaining access to the site; 3) participant selection; 4) data collection; 5) instrument for collecting data; 6) validity; 7) data analysis; and 8) limitations of the research. At the end, I provide a description of my three case study participants and of the two teacher participants.

Rationale for Adapting the Naturalistic Paradigm

The research question that guided this research is, “How do the competing discourses of family, religion, and language impact the identities of Arab Muslim adolescent English language learners?”

Since the research question asked about how identities are negotiated within cultural context, it was studied in its natural environment and context. Family being a community of linguistic and cultural practice was the naturalistic setting for data collection particularly with reference to the research question. The reason why a qualitative researcher investigates the phenomenon in its natural settings is because human behavior is extensively influenced by the social context in which it takes place (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Schwandt, 2000). According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), “one cannot understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions” (p. 49). In the words of Lincoln and Guba (1985), naturalistic inquiry is a “phenomena of study, whatever they may be – physical, chemical, biological, social, psychological – take their meaning as much from their contexts as they do from themselves” (p. 189). It stems from the belief of naturalistic
researchers as they begin their research that the realities cannot be separated from where they are experienced and constructed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is also crucial that the researchers avoid influencing the natural flow during the research study so the participants act as naturally as possible (Patton, 2002). To monitor events in their natural flow, the naturalistic researchers need to become a part of the social setting (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

With regards to these principles of naturalistic inquiry, I adopted a case study methodology that took into account the various social factors that ESOL students face in their everyday lives. Case studies are frequently used in education particularly pertaining to instructional situations. As stated by Boisjoly and DeMichiell (1994), business schools have been implementing “active learning” or case-based learning with Harvard University being the leader in this area (Tellis, 1997).

Despite its frequent use, case study research methodology is at times criticized because it “lacked a sufficient number” of cases and traditional research hesitates to generalize from small quantities for providing a generalized conclusion. Both Hamel (Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993) and Yin (1984, 1989a, 1989b, 1993, 1994) argued that the goal of the case study research sets up the parameters, which can then be applied to larger research endeavors. Thus, a single case study becomes acceptable as it meets its established objectives. This, in its turn, ensures the transformation from the local to the global for explanation. Hamel (Hamel et al., 1993) characterized such singularity as a concentration of the global in the local. Yin (1989a) stated that general applicability results from the set of methodological qualities of the case, and the rigor with which the case is constructed. He further defined case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (2003a, p. 13). The use of
case study allowed me to get the important features of acculturation and enculturation often associated with language learning and migration. In Chapter II, I have acknowledged the multiplicity of cultural forms, which enables me to view cultural boundaries as porous and explore the ways in which the Arabic Muslim ESOL students negotiate and reconstruct their identities through their interactions in heterogeneous communities with special emphasis on dialogic communication.

Identity is associated with the individual’s conscious, unconscious thoughts, and emotions and can be studied in depth through this method because case study methodology helps researchers to get detailed information from a small sample and increase the depth of understanding of the situation being studied (Patton, 2002). Using this methodological approach in language-based research allowed me to use direct quotes and to portray a complete picture of the setting where the research was conducted to my readers. Such an approach allowed me to get closer to the site and situation of the study, captured what the people actually said, and helped me to include a great deal of description of people involved in the study, activities, interactions, and settings (Patton, 2002). In a case study, the investigator does not control the data collection environment (Yin, 1994), which also allowed me to understand the relationships between language, identity, and institutional power while in discourse.

The case study makes it possible to consider the various data sources – observation, interview, study of documents – and converge on a unified representation. To sum up, the case study method allowed investigators to keep a holistic characteristic of “real-life processes” (Yin, 2003a, p. 2).
The Original Study Design and Site

My original plan was to start collecting the data for my study in the fall of 2009 in Cambridge High School (pseudonym). The school is a professional development site working in conjunction with a public, comprehensive university in the southeast. Demographically, according to the Cambridge High School’s (2006) website, the student population was composed of 67.8% African American, 30.3% White, 0.8% Hispanic, 0.7% Asian/Pacific Islanders and 0.4% Native Americans. 53.8% of the students were on free or reduced lunch, while the state average for free or reduced lunch is 51.9%. The state average for student diversity in public schools reflected 1% Native American, 1% Asian, 3% Hispanic, 43% African American, 52% White and 2% are marked as Unknown by Public School Review (2008). Although the school does not represent a typical high school of the state with regard to diversity and socio-economic status, the school was chosen because it is a typical U.S. co-educational public school having the core curriculum and extracurricular activities for students. The school did not provide information on students as English Language Learners (ELL) but provides the following information on ethnicity. .8% of students were Hispanic and .7% of students were Asian/Pacific Islander.

I chose this particular high school because of its location and my previous knowledge of the students. It was conveniently located for me to commute to this school where I had volunteered as an ESL tutor. I had a fair knowledge of the layout of the school and had been exposed to the environment that I felt was comfortable while working with the students and teachers.

I had contacted the school principal of Cambridge High School just after I submitted my IRB asking about the procedures that I would need to follow in order to conduct my research at their esteemed institution. I was asked to contact the assistant superintendent at the school
board’s office. I contacted the assistant superintendent by e-mail and attached an entire copy of my research application that I had submitted to the Internal Revenue Board for approval. When I heard nothing back I became concerned about the time it was taking to get a response, which would result in the delay of my data collection. I went over to the school board’s office in person as my repeated requests for an interview went unanswered. It was on my second visit to the office that the secretary of the assistant superintendent came to see me and promised that I would receive a call from the assistant superintendent sometime later that day. I received the call and thought that it was a verbal approval, which would provide identification of the target students and ease getting approval from them and their parents to complete my formal written approval. My expectations ended when I contacted the school’s ESL specialist with an aim of identifying the Arab Muslim ESOL students with whom I had already worked as an ESL teacher. She informed me that the assistant superintendent had instructed her not to provide me with any information with regards to any student and that the assistant superintendent would contact me. I waited for a week for the call from the assistant superintendent but never heard from that office. I knew that a change needed to be made.

The Changed Site

I contacted the Islamic Center where the families came to attend prayer services. I took the help of the Arabic teacher of the university’s “Foreign Language Institute” to talk to the parents of the target students for my research project so that they have a better understanding of my study and allow their child to participate in the study.

I visited the Islamic Center in the evening of Jumma (Friday) during Iftar (breaking the fast or rojah) before the festival of Eid. I joined the ladies in the dining hall and waited patiently for the arrival of the family and the target participants of my study. On their arrival, I talked to
them and received their telephone numbers and home addresses. The families insisted that I go to their house to conduct the interviews. After arranging for an alternative research site and sources of data collection, I had a thorough discussion with my major advisor following which I moved the site of my research away from Cambridge High School. Hence, I did not require further permission from the school board.

Participant Selection

For this study, I needed to obtain permission from the Institutional Review Board. I recruited diverse teacher participants (with the intent that they will have different experiences and views) willing to volunteer in the study. Believing “all sampling is done with some purpose in mind,” I used purposeful sampling methods in selecting the two teacher participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 199). The primary aim of purposeful sampling is to “select information-rich cases for the study in depth” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Purposive sampling is defined by Tashakkori and Teddu (2003) as a means of “selecting specific units (e.g., event, people, groups, settings, artifacts), or types of units, based on a specific purpose rather than randomly” (p. 713). My purpose as a researcher was to select the teacher participants belonging to the same school as my student participants so that the requirement of the natural setting is maintained. The ESL specialist plays several important roles in my project. Firstly, she had direct contact with all ESOL students of the school and her attitude toward them could significantly impact their identity construction. Secondly, she was the best person to comment on how effective or successful the second language teaching methodology adopted by the school for its students is.

A social studies teacher was my second selection because a social studies teacher has to derive his/her content from history, political science, sociology, geography, and economics. Each of these subjects has its “own specialized jargon and concepts” which are embedded in the
American culture (Szpara & Ahmad, 2006). The ELL students were constantly exposed to the culture of their newly adopted country in the social studies classroom as the curriculum was inherently culture specific. It can be assumed that the ELL students would compare their newly learnt American culture with their home culture and home educational system and face additional challenges while preparing to enter into the new civic and cultural life. Thus, the role of the social studies teacher becomes crucial. The teacher’s respect for the ELL students’ home language and culture creates a learning space where they feel comfortable. Research shows that it can also facilitate ELL students’ feelings of connection to the content and sense of belonging to the school community (Crawford, 1999; Ovando & Collier, 1998; Torrey, 1983). Within this purposeful sampling, I have used convenience sampling.

Using convenience sampling, I selected three Arabic Muslim ESOL students whom I had taught while working as an ESL teacher in the local school system. The purpose for convenience sampling is to identify a specific cultural and linguistic group of people who live in circumstances relevant to the learning of second language. “Informants are identified because they will enable exploration of a particular aspect of behaviour relevant to the research” (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. 109). Moreover, selection of participants also depended on getting permission from students’ parents. In order to have access to the specific group of high school students, I chose Arabic Muslim ESOL students whom I had taught and their homes as my research site.

I also selected two teachers to interview. I believed that interviewing teachers who teach at the same school would provide me better understanding of the ESOL students’ experiences in the school. By including teachers in the study, I aimed to gain better understanding of how the students negotiated their identities for success in the school environment. It has provided the opportunity to view how teachers look at Arabic Muslim ESOL students and interpret Islam as
well as the Arabic Muslim students’ perception of the American teachers and the dominant culture.

The naturalistic paradigm requires understanding the complexity of the phenomenon under study from the participants’ point of view and thus, intense interaction between the researcher and participants is necessary. My purpose here was to “deal with multiple, socially constructed realities or qualities that are complex and indivisible into discrete variables and understand and interpret how various participants in a social setting construct the world around them” (Glesne, 1999, p. 5). My intention was to share as much as possible with my participants so that I can build a relationship with them. My plan for establishing interactions (i.e., having conversations, helping them with homework, and exchanging ideas about each other’s cultures) enabled me to establish a trustworthy relationship so that students shared some of their personal experiences and feelings with me in the context of speaking English and their daily living culture that is so alien to their parents particularly to their mothers. For example, during my tutoring, one of the ESOL students narrated that while talking to her sister about her American friend’s boyfriend, a topic which is considered taboo in their culture, had upset their mother so much that she started making plans to send them back to their native country. As the incident indicated, some students, particularly girls, felt comfortable sharing their feelings and states of confusion about how to negotiate this new culture their parents have placed them in, but at the same time reject it.

The Student Participants

Participant One: Faiza

Faiza who is 19 years old was born in Yemen and migrated to the U.S. towards the end of 2003. After living in the state of Louisiana for a year, her family moved to Alabama where she
was admitted in a public high school. Her father initially migrated to Canada but had married and kept his family back in Yemen till 2003. Faiza, along with her mother, four sisters, and one brother came to the U.S. to join her father in February of 2003. She and her siblings received their early education in Yemen where the language of instruction was Arabic. She has been receiving ESL education all through her schooling in the U.S. In her present school she receives ESL education under the state’s pull-out program. She speaks Arabic and it is her home language. The only exception she makes at home is while speaking to her brother who speaks more English than Arabic. She and all the women in her family wear the hijab (head cover) and identify themselves as Arab Americans.

Participants 2 and 3: Arzab and Mehmet

Arzab and Mehmet are brothers. Arzab is 15 years old and is in the ninth grade while Mehmet is 17 and studying in the eleventh grade. Their father came to this country in 2001 after retiring from the Navy in Yemen. He owns one-fourth of a gas station and a convenience store. After the processing of his green card, the family moved to the United States in 2005. Prior to coming to the U.S., the family lived in Egypt for three years because of political disturbance in Yemen. Arzab had his schooling till the third grade in Yemen, till the sixth grade in Egypt, and joined the U.S. public school system in the sixth grade. Mehmet was two grades ahead of him and had gone through the Yemeni education system till fifth grade, followed by education in Egypt till eighth grade and joined the public education system in the U.S. in the eighth grade.

Their parents do not read or speak English and so their eldest sister acted as their guardian and signed the parental consent form. The women wear hijab and are conservative. Surprisingly, their middle sister does not speak much Arabic and the family is making concessions for her which I was told seldom happens in case of a girl child. This family consists
of four sons and three daughters and all of them except the youngest daughter (18 months old) have attended public schools in the United States.

Apart from these participants who are high school students, I interviewed two graduate students at the university who are high school teachers. One of them was a high school social studies teacher and the other was an ESL Specialist. I have included teachers in the study as it has been identified that teachers have considerable influence on the achievement of all students, especially low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse students (Tucker et al., 2005) and also contribute to the formation of students’ cultural identity (Unger-Palmer, 2006). Teachers who use self-instruction based learning, motivation, and adaptive skills are able to effectively empower ESOL students and inspire them to become successful against all odds (Benson, 2001). It has been observed that students have different needs, preferences, beliefs, learning styles, and educational backgrounds, and any imposition of change upon these factors often lead to negative reactions. Based on this observation, a key factor leading to success is for learners to discover for themselves the methods and techniques by which they learn best (Rice, Pappamihiel, & Lake, 2004). Teachers who have high expectations of their ELL students have received good results by following this methodology. Similarly, low expectations of teachers with regards to language minority students set them up for failures (Bae, Holloway, Li, & Bempechat, 2008).

Academically-rich programs that integrate basic skill instruction with the teaching of higher order skills across multiple content areas can spell achievement for ESOL students. The ESL programs followed by different states and their school systems vary immensely, yet the purpose of all programs is to ensure that ESOL students participate fully in learning the curriculum at their grade level while learning the English language (Gitomer, Andal, & Davison, 2005). Successful implementation of an ESL program consists of a variety of resources,

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6 See Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005;
including textbooks and other instructional materials, along with a curriculum appropriate for ESOL students (Rodriguez, Ringler, O’Neal & Bunn, 2009). In schools that employ ESL pullout programs, success depends particularly on content area teachers’ implementation of the resources and high expectations of the ESOL students. But the most important factor for these students’ achievement remains to be the teachers’ open-minded acceptance of the minority ESOL students’ language and culture.

Data Collection

I conducted this study by interviewing the three students and the two teachers and by observing the interactions of the students with their families, communities, and friends. During the interviews, I audiotaped and took field notes. I observed the dialogic negotiations that the target students made while interacting with their parents and other family and community members in the process of reconstructing their identities and establishing who they are, and included these in my field notes.

According to Yin, (2003a) case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). He further stated that case study inquiry “copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one results relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (p. 14). In a nutshell, “the case study method allows the investigator to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p. 2).

The sources of evidence in a case study method included 1) documentation; 2) archival records; 3) interviews; 4) direct observation; 5) participant observation; and 6) physical artifacts
(Yin, 2003a). In order to enhance the study, Yin suggested three principles in data collection: 1) using multiple sources of evidence; 2) creating a case study database; and 3) maintaining chain of evidence.

I have collected the data from multiple sources: interviews, observations, and students’ documents. I have interviewed two teachers of the target students, which have provided an in-depth picture of the students’ acculturation and resistance, if any, towards acculturation and the ways in which they negotiate with their mainstream social and educational environment of the school.

My observation of the participant students in their home and in natural social setting outside of the school premises made them feel at ease as they went about being themselves in their natural surroundings. I think it has enabled them to be more themselves and ignore the fact that they are being interviewed and observed for a study. Observing the participants in their natural settings allowed me to understand their experiences in the context, which shaped their experiences. I was able to observe their interactions with their parents and siblings and also people from the mainstream, as they did in their everyday life. Because, to understand cultural identity and the ways in which students construct and reconstruct their selves the researcher needs to observe them very closely (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I spent time with the students after school to see how they spent their time as compared to the white American adolescence. I kept a journal with me for making field-notes to describe the atmosphere of life at home and life outside home by watching their various interactions with people. I took extensive notes about what I saw both inside and outside of their home.
I maintained individual contacts with the students by e-mail so that I was able to set up the interviews as and when they accepted to do so. Each interview lasted for approximately an hour. The interviews were semi-structured leaving room for follow-up questions.

The Human as Instrument

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), naturalistic researchers use their senses and abilities during data collection process such as during interviews and observations. Human instrument refers to the researcher’s use of “him-or herself as well as other humans as the primary data-gathering instruments (as opposed to paper-and-pencil or brass instruments)” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the human dimension of research is important because human actions influence the ability to adapt to the environment and also influence ethical dimensions of research.

During my contact with ESOL students while working as an ESL teacher, my personal experiences of living in an Arabic speaking country for several years and my familiarity with the culture had allowed me to understand some of their experiences in school with the mainstream teachers and students. My status as an international student, and one who had to deal with issues regarding accent, had made me more acceptable to them.

Modes of Analysis

Literature on qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004; Rossman & Rallis, 2003) offered definitions and methods for executing case study analysis. According to Mertens and McLaughlin (2004), “a case study uses qualitative methods to obtain an extensive description of a single unit bounded system, such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community” (p. 97). With regards to case study analysis Creswell said that
When multiple cases are chosen, a typical format is to provide a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, called a within-case analysis, followed by a thematic analysis across the cases, called a cross-case analysis, as well as assertions or an interpretation of the meaning of the case. (p. 63)

Following the guidelines provided by Rossman and Rallis (2003) to develop and implement cross-case analysis, I foregrounded a case study analysis of the data. The questions that I used to analyze the data were the following: 1) what social actions and dialogues are taking place in a particular setting; 2) what does it mean to the participant; 3) what are the social and cultural construction of these actions and dialogues; 4) does a pattern or rule exist; 5) how do these patterns relate to each other across different dimensions (p. 95); and 6) how do the patterns of action and dialogue affect the power relationships (p. 93). In accordance to the guidelines provided by Rossman and Rallis (2003) regarding cross-case study analysis, I focused on the patterns or themes that are present in one form or another in each case.

After the individual interviews and observations, I transcribed them verbatim and manually coded them for categories or themes. I used different colored highlighters to organize the data indicating their experiences and interactions associated with gender, language, race, school and family cultures, and religious contexts. I went over the content and reexamined them individually as groups according to their color code with the aim of exploring themes. The re-examination of data allowed me to further categorize the data according to specific subcategories contained within the larger classification. I examined the ESOL students’ interactions, speech patterns, and texts to understand how they manipulated English and Arabic languages to interact with their friends and families and in carrying out their academic tasks successfully and also mediate the specific objectives for building social and linguistic identities.

The role of language is significant in identity formation. For the Arabic speaking students learning and becoming competent in English would make them bilingual. This would enable
them to participate in their home culture and the culture of their host country. Memmi (1967) stated that “possession of two languages is not merely a matter of having two tools, but actually means participating in two physical and cultural realms” (p. 107); it further enables bilinguals in reconstructing identities by engaging in discourse.

Validity

Qualitative research is often criticized for its lack of reliability and validity (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Creswell, 1998). Anfara et al. (2002) stated, “because of the difficulties with qualitative research is the recognition that it is not, in the classical science sense, replicable, we recommend analytic openness on the grounds of refutability and freedom from bias” (p. 28). Thus, I implemented data from various resources and provided an account of the ways in which the samples were obtained including the multiple data collection methods and the various modes of data analysis in this study.

To establish validity to the qualitative study that was derived from analyzing data, I employed triangulation, member checking, and feedback strategies. Five types of triangulations were identified. The first one, data triangulation, uses various data sources. I have collected from multiple sources including interviews, observations, my field-notes, and the Internet. Considering this, I meet the criteria for the first form of triangulation.

The second form of triangulation, the theory triangulation, requires the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a set of data. I conducted an in-depth analysis of the collected data in the context of colonial/post-colonial and sociocultural theories keeping in relation to the conceptual framework of this study. The term postcolonial is used in this study based on the views of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995), Gandhi (1998), and Pennycook (2001) did not only engage
the ideology developed towards the dominant ideologies and neocolonial practices that continue in countries such as North America, Britain etc.

Pennycook (2001) regarded the term “colonial” not merely as political and economic exploitation through ideologies of progress and modernism. He perceived it more as a cultural process that constructs the knowledge and culture of the colonizer and the colonized. This cultural process will thus influence the societies involved and become an intricate part of their lives. Therefore, sociocultural theory becomes another important lens to examine the ESOL students’ answers to the questions. Some of the identifiers that I looked for in these two categories were strange, insecure, un-Islamic, other, important, ashamed, etc. in order to understand their relationship with the English language.

The other triangulation utilized in this study was methodological triangulation. By using multiple sources for collecting data and several modes of analysis (e.g., cross-case analysis, coding, content analysis), I fulfilled the principles of this triangulation in this research.

For purposes of validity, copies of transcripts were sent over to the interviewees for reviewing. They were told that they were entitled to make any changes that they want. Finally, to prevent researcher bias, I asked for feedback from professors and colleagues.

Summary

The present study focused on the lives of Arab Muslim language minority ESOL students. It involved three Arabic Muslim high school students and two high school teachers. Three focal students belonging to the Arab Muslim community were selected for close observation and interviewed upon each student’s consent. As they are minors, their parents’ approval was taken prior to data collection.
The Arabic Muslim students were in high school and had immigrated to the United States after having studied in schools in their native countries. My short stay of two years in an Arabic speaking country had given me some exposure to the culture but not enough linguistic competencies in Arabic. Therefore, the medium of communication between these students and their families and me was in English with some Arabic phrases.

As the study explored the cultural self of high school language minority students with an ethnographic approach, the major research tools were interviews, observations, and students’ expressive or creative work. Yin (2003a) explained that the sources of evidence that are most commonly used in doing case studies are documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation and physical artifacts (p. 85). Hence, I accessed a wide range of relevant information through interviews, observations, and review of students’ documents.

I have observed the participant students after school in their home for an extended time and reviewed some of their work with their approval. I asked them about their creative work. They were interviewed twice and each interview was approximately for an hour.

Data collected through teacher interview, the ESOL participating students’ interviews and observations have provided multiple perspectives on the students participating in this study.

For thorough observation and recording, electronic devices such as tape-recorder and voice transcription kit were used. These devices have assisted in collecting data and also enhanced the credibility of the research and data. Since, this research required a variety of data sources, I organized my data sources into the following categories: 1) home observations (HO); 2) teacher interviews (TI); 3) student interviews (SI); and 4) other observations (OB). Based on these categories, I designed a calendar and maintained a data-collecting log.
Interview Questions

Interview Protocol for ESOL Students

1. How many years have you attended U.S. public school?
2. What is your native language?
3. Have you received ESL education in your previous school?
4. Tell me about your favorite friends or classmates.
5. What is your favorite subject and why?
6. Tell me about your classroom teachers.
7. How do you spend your time after school?
8. How often do you speak English at home?
9. Tell me when you feel happy in a classroom.
10. Tell me when you feel anxious in a classroom.
11. How many languages do you know?
12. Which language do you find most fluent or comfortable speaking and best expressing yourself in?
13. Do you need to switch from one language to another to express yourself? Why?
14. What languages do you use while speaking to your family/friends/others?
15. How did you start learning English? Did you enjoy learning the language? Tell me what you like about this language. How has it influenced you?
16. Do you remember any happy and not so happy event with learning English?
17. Do you think learning English has helped you?
18. Do you have any difficulties with the language?
Follow-up Interview Protocol

1. What kind of cultural activities do you observe?

2. With whom do you observe these cultural activities? Tell me about these people.

3. How do you think your culture has influenced you? Do you observe / follow certain cultural dos and don’ts? What are they?

4. Who are you culturally (American/Arab)? Are you happy with who you are? What makes you feel that way?

5. Do you think culture is important in making friends? Tell me, why you think so. Is language an important issue?

6. What kinds of books do you read? What books have you read?

7. Do you think you will lose your culture if you learn English?

8. Now that you know English, how do you feel? Do you feel at an advantage? Why or why not?

9. Do you think the languages you know make you think in certain ways? Tell me, in what ways.

10. How do you think English influenced you? Do you think it has made you who you are?

11. How would you describe yourself before learning English?

12. How do you describe yourself after learning English? What changes do you see in yourself?
CHAPTER IV: PARTICIPANT PORTRAITURE

Introduction

The present chapter explores the ways in which the three Arab Muslim ELL students reconstruct their linguistic and cultural identities through their interactions with their friends and community members outside their high school. A case study research methodology was employed to examine the identity (re)construction of these three Arabic speaking ESOL high school students in a rural county in the state of Alabama. The case study design will be observed all through this chapter in the selection of interviews and field notes.

The three participants for this study are high school students who were interviewed for two hours each. They have acquired English to the degree that they are able to socialize and are learning the language to gain academic proficiency. Of the three participants, two are boys and one is a girl. In the study, original names are replaced by pseudonyms.

I interviewed Faiza, Arzab and Mehmet, three high school students belonging to the Arabic Muslim ethnicity. I also observed the students’ interaction with their friends, members of their families and community during the social and religious event of Ramadan, in the mosque, and at the participants’ home during the interview process from September 2009 to December 2009. I also worked for three semesters with these students as their ESL teacher from Spring 2005 to Spring 2006 in the pull-out program adopted by the school system. I was assigned an
elementary school and a middle school attended by these students. One of the participants attended the summer ESL program where I did the first part of my internship.

Because the participants are Arab-Muslims and have also come from the same country, they share certain social, cultural, religious, and historical similarities. Sharing these similarities might lead one to think that identities would also be shared. But constructing an essential identity would lead to exclusion of individual experiences, as identities are multiple and always in the process of developing. To understand the complexity of the participants’ construction of their identities while they learn English within the context of the school and family, I provide narratives of selected experiences shared in each case study. This provides the readers a better picture of their experiences of negotiating and mediating multiple identities as ELL students.

Swann (1987) defined identity negotiation as a process within which individuals construct their identities in context across different domains. In the case of Arabic-Muslims, the process will be influenced by their personal domains (e.g., religious background) and social and structural contexts (e.g., the events of 9/11 and its after-math). For immigrant minorities, this process involves being a member of a collective group based on linguistic, racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds and navigating between different cultural frameworks of the host country (Berry, 1990; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Suárez-Orozco, 2005). Berry (1990) recognized identity construction for immigrants to be based on two independent domains: 1) the degree to which the individual is willing to identify with and is allowed to participate in one’s home (e.g., linguistic and religious) culture; and 2) the degree to which the individual is willing to identify with and is allowed to participate in the host (e.g., US) culture.

I present the stories of Faiza, Arzab and Mehmet based on my interviews with them, my interactions with their community and parents, and their recollections as reported to me during
the interviews and my field notes. I have taken into account (1) the social actions that took place at a certain particular circumstance and place, (2) what it means to the participant, and (3) how these are organized in social patterns (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, P. 95) to conduct the within-case analysis.

Faiza, A Portrait

My interaction with Faiza started two years ago when I was volunteering as the ESL teacher. When I asked her about her experiences in the U.S. schools she said that, “I have always been referred to as ‘the girl with the head-scarf.’ Yes, they see me but because I am different.” There is no doubt that she stands out among the entire group of students because of her head-scarf.

Faiza is the fourth daughter among her mother’s six children comprising of five daughters and one son. She and her siblings were all born in Yemen. Her father migrated to Canada when he was in his late teens and stayed there to work. He married Faiza’s mother in one of his visits to his native country, Yemen but did not bring his wife to Canada when he returned. His wife stayed back in Yemen and he visited his family once a year or once in two years while his family kept growing. Faiza’s mother received assistance from her parents and siblings in raising and taking care of her children and so Faiza and her siblings became close to their maternal grandparents.

Faiza, along with her mother, and five siblings came to the U.S. to join her father in February, 2003. They first came to Louisiana and stayed there for a year. On arrival, they found that their father had a Mexican wife and a daughter. As Islam allows a man to have four wives and the practice of polygyny is prevalent in Yemen, Faiza and her siblings were exposed to it. But they were shocked as they did not know about their father’s remarriage and thus it was
unexpected. A year later the family moved to Alabama. Soon after, one of their relatives filed a complaint against Faiza’s father for committing polygamy, which is illegal in the U.S. As a result, Faiza’s father was arrested and the family that was still in the process of adjusting to the new country and its culture faced considerable challenges. Faiza revealed that her father’s second marriage gave him the opportunity to become a U.S. citizen and so his entire family became U.S. citizens. However, she and her siblings felt that their social status as Arab Muslim in Yemen was better than their minority status in the U.S.

Faiza’s family lives in a semi-detached townhouse. The living room is very simply furnished with a dark leather finished sectional sofa and center table and on the wall is a framed photograph of the Kaaba at Mecca. From the living room a door leads to the kitchen and another door leads to a bedroom. Her second sister Zainab, who is married lives four houses over on the same street. Zainab lives with her husband and two sons. In the afternoons, Zainab comes over to Faiza’s house, which is closer to the bus-stop from where the school bus picks up and drops the neighborhood children. She comes to pick up her elder son. Faiza’s eldest sister lives with her family some sixty miles away, in one of the neighboring cities of the state.

Faiza received assistance in learning English in Louisiana under the state’s ESL program and on her arrival to Alabama, the school placed her in the ESL program and she felt that along with other ESOL students she too was labeled deficient, incompetent, and/or even lacking in cognitive ability (Harris, 1997). Faiza did not understand English and her inability to speak the language made her feel inadequate which silenced her. She did not understand English and also did not understand their behavior in school. She said, “I saw the others going up and talking to the teacher, putting up their hands but I did nothing, I sat down . . . I felt so bad, like others are smart, I come to school but learn nothing.” It made her compare the school she attended in
Yemen to the schools in the US. She could observe the cultural difference between the schools belonging to the two different countries, Yemen and the U.S.

In Yemen, teachers would call upon individual students to answer specific questions and raising hands to answer questions were considered bad manners. Cultural differences led to some misunderstandings in the class. In Yemen when a teacher speaks to a student, the student is supposed to cast his/her eyes down and not look directly at the teacher. Faiza’s father told his children that in the US, teachers expect that during a conversation the students look at their teacher because not looking at the teacher would mean ignoring him/her. Faiza would try to look at her teacher but failed to keep looking during the entire conversation and would look down. “The teacher’s voice rose, I know she is mad at me, she thinks I don’t care but that’s so wrong.”

The confusion arising from cultural differences leading to communication breakdowns have often silenced Faiza. She kept quiet in class for more than one reason. Firstly, she was learning English and it was difficult for her to follow the dialogue between teachers and students who were native speakers and then respond to them. Secondly, she was busy trying to understand and learn from the discourse. But when other students spoke among themselves ignoring Faiza as she spoke in class made her shut up and feel insignificant. “There are four girls who will always talk when I say something. They will talk among them, but I feel bad. No, they never said anything to me but they keep on talking. I take time to say something I become conscious…”

Faiza’s dress set her apart from the American mainstream teenagers. She wears the hijab, a head covering and a loose jacket or coat (jilbab) over her normal dress. In school her hijab makes her more visible than the Muslim boys because boys dress like mainstream American boys. The non-Muslim students were inquisitive about Faiza’s hairstyle hidden by the hijab. Their curiosity “often made them rub their hands on the head” and ask if Faiza was bald.
Sometimes they pulled her hijab which they called “douché bag.” One day some girls and boys pulled off her scarf. They did not care to realize that they were in fact hurting her physically as pulling the hijab pulled her hair and it was an act that humiliated her. She cried in the lunchroom but pretended to be fine in front of her classmates because “if you go mad, they keep doing it again and again.”

Faiza loves to listen to Bollywood music and watch Hindi films. She also loves to dance but in her home, girls are not allowed to dance. Her parents want her to learn English and complete her schooling so that she is able to join college but they are opposed to her making friends with American boys. She is allowed to go to her American friend’s house to learn English but only when her friend will confirm that no boys will be present. She is expected to maintain her Arab Muslim ethnic-religious cultural self and at the same time attain English and be able to interact successfully with the mainstream Americans which require constant negotiation between the two worlds.

Diasporic members, living on cultural borderlands, cluster around remembered or imagined “homelands”, practise “authentic home cultures,” form ethnic communities, so as to re-root their floating lives and reach a closure in making sense of their constantly changing subjectivities (Shi, 2005, p. 57).

**Gender Identity**

Human beings acquire gender identity through their socialization meaning their exposure to the society its expectations about the appropriate ways in which males and females should behave and conduct themselves. Arab Muslims who are living in the US are exposed to the Arabic Muslim cultures through their family and community and also to the cultures of the US where they live. The idea of the Islamic roles of women are often in conflict with the US
mainstream cultures and Arab Muslim adolescent girls are exposed to both cultures and are sometimes required to mediate between these two cultures.

The hijab or head-scarf worn by Arab Muslim girls in schools makes them more prominent than the Arab Muslim boys. The Arab Muslim boys are not readily identified because they dress like the rest of the boys in the school. The wearing of the hijab and jilbab/abaya applies to all Muslim women but depending on the cultures they are worn and stitched in different fashions. Hence, by looking at a Muslim woman’s head-scarf and loose coat, their country of origin or cultural background can be ascertained.

Faiza wears the hijab and abaya/jilbab, which she claims to be her choice, and had not been forced on her. She reported to me that most students know that Muslim women wear headscarves but they were inquisitive about Faiza’s hairstyle hidden by the hijab. She said, They (non-Muslim students) often rub their hands on my head and ask if I am bald. Sometimes they pull my hijab. They have bad attitude of touching all over and then ask ‘why did you come here?’ In Islam girls are not touched by boys who are not close family – it is haram. We don’t talk to boys and men if we have no work. You’ve been to the mosque, you saw ladies and men are separate they also pray in separate places. One day some girls and boys pulled off my scarf. They said, Muslim women are ruled by men, so women have to cover but men don’t. But all the people of the ‘book’7 i.e., the Jews8, the Christians9 and the Muslims10 believe that hair is half of the beauty of women and so women must not show their hair but cover it. Christians don’t cover now but Muslim women wear hijab. Jewish married women must to cover their hair - only their husbands are allowed to see.

The non-Muslim students did not care to realize that they were in fact hurting her physically as pulling the hijab pulled her hair and it was an act that humiliated her. This act demonstrated disrespect and resentment towards the religious practice of Islam. The non-Muslim students

7 People of the Book (Arabic: ‘Ahl al-Kitāb) is a term used to designate non-Muslim adherents to faiths which have a book of prayer. The two faiths that are mentioned in the Qur’an as people of the book are Judaism and Christianity. 
8 (Igros Kodesh, Vol. X, p. 92)
9 First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 11. Read verses 3-10.
10 Surah an-Nur verse 31 and Surah al-Ahzab verse 59.
interpreted the hijab as oppressive to women, thus Islam as a religion was oppressive to women. Their mean and violent conduct revealed their dislike towards this girl who looked and dressed differently.

R: You must be hurt and humiliated when they forcibly pulled away your hijab. What did you do?

Faiza: I smiled and kept quiet because if I said anything, they would be mad and …I don’t know what they would do…

R: But what did they do?

F: Some go away, some smiled…I think some of them did not like…did not support.

Within this particular incident where the students forcibly removed Faiza’s hijab, she clearly felt violated and her femininity challenged. Hair has always been regarded as a woman’s glory and if she were to cut her hair in a way that obscured her femininity, it would be undeniably inappropriate (1 Corinth 11:1-16). Thus, calling Faiza bald was a way of questioning her femininity. Faiza reacted to the incident by being ultra feminine – she was quiet and kept a pleasant demeanor instead of fighting back but cried in the lunchroom. She was the model compliant and docile Arab-Muslim woman who does not question but accepts and endures difficulties that come her way. This incident could be read as any other bullying that occurs in schools but Faiza’s religious and cultural background regards such actions as “haram” meaning unacceptable or forbidden.

Further discussion on the topic revealed that Faiza followed her dad’s instruction of not reacting or complaining if the friends behaved rudely. Faiza’s goal was to avoid conflict with the majority group of students while seeking and negotiating her identity by mediating through the identity that was imposed on her by the other students. Since, Faiza’s dad lived in Canada as a teenager and was exposed to being rudely treated by the mainstream children, he had similar
experiences. He said that, “when I reacted, I was beaten up by the boys; but when I ignored them and smiled …some of them would go away, some would also feel sorry and talk to me nicely, so I tell my children to ignore the mean and hurtful behavior whenever possible.” Britto (2008) commented that this was an act minorities often chose to survive hostility.

Faiza has adopted this Arab Muslim cultural practice because she “feels secure and being protected by Allah.” She wants to be a good Arab Muslim woman but at the same time she is also appreciative of the American mainstream women’s independence. Faiza admires her best friend, Brittany’s independent character by saying “My best friend is Brittney. She is good to me, she talks to me . . . Yes, I go to her house. She is smart! She also helps me in learning English. I question her, What makes her smart? Why do you think she is smarter than you? Faiza replies, She is good in math! I say, “You’re smart too. You drive, you plan to go to college and math is your favorite subject which you find to be “easy” while most people find math to be hard; so what is especially smart about Brittney?” From my conversation with Faiza, I understood that she actually appreciated the decision-making or independent nature of Brittney, “she knows what she wants!”

I observed that Faiza not only admires her best friend’s independent character but she also tries to emulate her by creating her own space and empower herself when she has the opportunity. Faiza’s mother permitted me to interview Faiza only if I agreed to conduct the interview in their house. When I reached their house, she insisted that I conduct the interview in Arabic. I had to say that my Arabic was never fluent and whatever little I knew I have lost it and so I will need to speak in English. She sat on a sofa while I questioned Faiza and from time to time she would question Faiza about what I was asking. I noticed that when we were discussing her learning experiences and the ESL program, she would say it to her mother. But when it came
to talking about her friends and the cultural differences that she was experiencing while interacting with them, she held it away from her mother. She would provide one-word answers to her mother’s inquiry.

Although Faiza admired her best friend’s independent character, she was critical about dating. Since, the Qur’an plays an important role in Islamic cultures, the dating practices are viewed as incompatible with the values of the Qur’an and thus the Muslim students are prohibited from participating in proms, an American high school tradition. In fact, socializing with the opposite gender is discouraged. It is only in school where Faiza speaks to boys but the conversation is restricted to school work or lessons. But Faiza does not hesitate to speak when she feels that it will help her in her school work. Often at home young girls and boys would be told religious maxims in support of maintaining segregation of men and women i.e., “When a man and a woman are alone, the third person is the shaytan (Satan)” (Hadith in Hermansen and Khan, 2009, p. 96). Even in the community center, which also is the mosque, men and women here are situated in separate spaces; they socialize and pray separately. The community and the family both try to preserve this separation, in order to have control over the girls, which is done through “shaming.” An enormous importance is placed on the girls’ reputation and safeguarding the good name is particularly important at the time of arranging marriages. This constant surveillance by the family and the community can be compared to Foucault’s idea of the ‘Panopticon’ that shapes the girls’ behavior and is ultimately internalized by the girls.

Faiza’s American friends asked her why did only the girls have dress code under Islam and boys did not. If a girl’s beauty is not to be enjoyed by men other than her immediate relatives wouldn’t that hold true for boys or men too? These questions, according to Faiza were assumptions that Muslim girls do not have freedom of choice. Thus, Arab Muslim girls/women
as oppressed become an imposed identity that the Arab Muslim girls need to constantly negotiate and also contest in appropriate spaces. At her best friend’s home Faiza takes off her hijab and the loose jacket. Her slim, tall frame clad in jeans and top like the rest of the teenagers do not mark her as different and she becomes one with the mainstream teenagers.

Religious Identity

In this study, where we recognize multiple identities, we might even view the dominance of one identity over others (Calhoun, 1994; Hovsepian, 1995). Within certain groups religious identity becomes dominant as religious traditions and institutions are one of the most stable forms of culture that provides strong attachment and meaning in a new socio-cultural environment (Mol, 1976). For the Muslims it seems more apt because Islam has written instructions on gender specific dress and code of behavior. Faiza has adopted the hijab and abhya according to the Islamic dress code for women. She also maintains the gendered behavioral codes according to the teachings of Islam. Faiza prays five times a day. She adjusts and improvises her postures depending on where she is at the time of prayer. She makes every effort to be the “good Arab Muslim girl” by listening to what her parents say and adhering to the tenets of Islam. She believes that the Qur’an is the source of all knowledge. The incident of 9/11 has made religion an important aspect of racial identity. In the context of the U.S. racial identity cannot be avoided. Any form that needs to be filled has a racial category that one needs to address. After the unfortunate incident of September 11, the Muslims have been identified as the ‘terrorists.” The mass media, video games have all identified Islam as the religion of “intolerance.” The video games that Faiza saw her friends played portrayed the Arab Muslims as terrorists, which drew her attention. She said:

You may think it is weird but there are games, video games where we are the “bad” and “terrorists.” Yes, we are Arabs and Muslims. They ask me if I carry guns and bombs like
suicide-bombers, if I know Osama Bin Laden, if I will blow America blah, blah, blah… One day a boy in my class asked me if I have seen Osama Bin Laden. I said, “Yes, he’s my cousin and I met him yesterday.” He said “Don’t lie,” and started laughing. He stopped asking me such stupid questions.

An answer like Faiza’s would land a boy in trouble under the zero tolerance policy observed by the schools. For instance, a couple of years ago, a similar incident took place in the same town where a South-Asian boy was made fun of and called an Arab and terrorist. The boy retaliated by saying that he was a terrorist and that got him suspended. Finally, the parents had to move him to a different school district. In her encounter with the boy who called her a suicide-bomber, Faiza mediated the volatility of such discussion by dealing with it in a lighter way. Her softly spoken accented tone deflected the boy into a totally different direction, to amusement.

Faiza’s concern regarding the video games portraying the Arabs and the Muslims as terrorists and anti-American, is genuine. She says she is an American and has American passport. She does not want others to think of her as a terrorist or a suicide-bomber. She came to the U.S. when she was around twelve and happens to remember her life in Yemen. She says “life in U.S. is way better than life in Yemen” even her mother endorses it. Faiza’s mother said that she had to work in Yemen and she has to work in the U.S. but here she doesn’t tire easily as she did in Yemen. Faiza not only claim to be American, she actually wants to “belong” to this country, and remain loyal.

Ethnic Identity

It is very difficult to assume where ethnic identity, cultural identity and gendered identity can be clearly demarcated and separated from religious identity particularly in constructing Arab Muslim identities. Faiza’s difference in appearance was easily visible but the other differences as reported by her were more critical in the context of school, education and English learning; it was the difference in language. Faiza did not understand English and her inability to speak the
language made her feel inadequate which silenced her. She said, “I could not understand what the teacher said in class and my classmates said; I felt stupid, totally stupid!” She was placed in the ESL program and she felt that along with other ESOL students she too was labeled deficient, incompetent, and/or even lacking in cognitive ability (Harris, 1997). Faiza was unable to speak and understand English, the only mode of communication in the U.S. schools and ended up feeling “stupid” and “dumb.” Faiza not only explained that she felt “dumb” but also felt that she was hard of hearing and unable to speak as she could not respond, as a result of language.

Faiza: I saw the others going up and talking to the teacher, putting up their hands but I did nothing, I sat down,…I felt so bad, like others are smart, I come to school but learn nothing.

R: What did you do in Yemen? Your teachers didn’t ask you questions, you didn’t raise your hands?

Faiza: Teachers will ask a girl and she will answer. No you don’t put up your hand that is bad, you know, you are showing off. Also there we didn’t have boys in our school. Cultural differences created misunderstandings in the class.

Faiza: I know, my father said look at the teacher’s eyes when she speaks…when she speaks to you. But I can’t, I try just look at her once and then …I look down…The teacher speaks loudly, I know she is mad at me, she thinks I don’t care but that’s so wrong.

The confusion arising from cultural differences leading to communication breakdowns have often silenced the ESOL students. Faiza said that she kept quiet in class for more than one reason. “I try to understand what the teacher and other students are talking about. They are fast, I don’t know English. I am trying to follow their talk.” First, she was learning English and it was difficult for her to follow the dialogue between teachers and students who were native speakers and then respond to them. Secondly, she was busy trying to understand and learn from the discourse, which may be the ‘silent period,’ the time when most new English language learners are unable or unwilling to communicate orally in the new language. This silent behavior does not
mean that students are not learning; however, it may be that they are not ready to speak
(Krashen, 1985). Lastly, reactions from some students and teachers also caused her to keep
quiet.

Faiza: There are four girls who will always talk when I say something. They will talk
among them, but I feel bad. No, they never said anything to me but they keep on talking.
I take time to say something I become conscious, I’m not conscious with you (laughs).

As a high school teacher I have noticed that students do not have patience for others. The
other students probably do not mean to humiliate Faiza but they lack patience and do not pay
attention to Faiza but engage in talking among themselves. For Faiza this is a way in which
mainstream students ignore her and do not consider her words important enough to listen to. She
sees herself being less valued in class and teachers do not act to change this environment.

Regarding her teachers, Faiza remarks, “they are good, they explain lessons to me and
give me time one-on-one, are patient with me...I had one teacher who did not look at me, speak
to me while looking at me, yeah...did not like us, maybe.” From Faiza’s experiences it can be
inferred that she has received mixed reactions from her teachers – while most of them are aware
of the requirements of the ESOL students there are a few who are totally insensitive and unaware
of the additional support needed for this specific group of students. Not looking at ESOL
students is ignoring them to the extent of creating them as non-existent, invisible. The message
that this teacher sends across through her action is that ESOL students do not matter; they are
expendable and educating them is not worth the time and attention.

Simultaneous to this kind of invisibility, Faiza also experienced hyper-visibility because
of her wearing the hijab. Goodwin (2002) explained this paradox by stating that, “As a
consequence of racial classifications and racial politics, they find that they simultaneously stand
out and are overlooked by U.S. society where racial boundaries, erected over hundreds of years,
have become deeply embedded in the social and psychological makeup of all Americans” (Carter & Goodwin, 1994, p. 293 in Goodwin, 2002, 165). Identities being constructed through discourse, the invisibility of ESOL students in general classrooms have rendered them powerless which would in turn prevent them from negotiating their position. As a result, Faiza hated some teachers, did not interact in their classes, never enjoyed learning the English language though she is invested in it and believes that her English language skills will be her first step towards meeting her goals of college entrance.

I asked Faiza to tell me about the languages she speaks and her experiences while she was learning English, both good and bad meaning and what made her anxious. I also asked how often she code-switched. Faiza answered that she speaks Arabic and English, and she is comfortable in both languages11; she is comfortable in both languages and found no difference between them. She was happy when she first spoke English and her friends were excited too and said, “Hey, now you can speak.”

Faiza: Nothing happened that made me sad about learning English. At home I speak in Arabic, only with my brother I speak English because he’s not good in Arabic. When he speaks Arabic, we can’t understand his accent; I think he’s forgetting his Arabic yeah; with my mom and dad and my other sisters in Arabic. I speak in English with my American friends and Arabic friends. When I talk in Arabic, I continue in Arabic and when I talk in English I continue in English, yeah...I do not mix Arabic and English together. It feels weird if you use English when you talk in Arabic.

Mostly, children of immigrant parents who attend U.S. schools develop a hybridized identity (Hagiwara, Barton & Contento 2007; Liu, 2007). As the ESOL students learn English and participate in discourse they automatically start negotiating their identities so that they can fit into their host country’s cultural activity. Faiza started learning English after she arrived in the United States as she revealed, “We used to have a teacher teach us English in Louisiana, high

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11 This is contradictory to my assessment of her language skills. She has gained the ability to socialize but has failed her reading tests as she does not comprehend academic or literary language.
school. Learning English was boring.” However, she clearly stated that she understood the importance of learning English in the context of U.S.: “Learning English has helped me…ummm I can talk to people, and yes I’m also thinking of going to college, it’s my dream!” In order to understand how she valued her native language and was constructing her hybridized identity, I asked her, “What do you like most about the Arabic language?” Her response “nothing” shocked me immensely.

After overcoming my initial state of shock from hearing that she hated her native language, I started probing a little deeper to understand Faiza’s stand on language and culture that informs her identity construction. My observation of her interactions with her family and friends forced me to recognize the complex processes of her identity negotiations. I argue that though she has been navigating through her dual identity – the Arab-Muslim, and the American, she is also trying to keep them separate from each other and the reason is probably because of the mixed and conflicting messages she receives from her parents and her community as opposed to her own desire to become more independent and enjoy life as she sees most of her mainstream American friends do.

Faiza loves to listen to Bollywood music and watch Hindi films. She also loves to dance but in her home, girls are not allowed to dance. Her parents want her to learn English and complete her schooling so that she is able to join college but they are opposed to her making friends with American boys. She is allowed to go to her American friend’s house to learn English but only when her friend will confirm that no boys will be present. Even Faiza’s half-sister complained saying that Faiza’s mother is not “American” and was very dominating. She meant that Faiza’s mother has not been enculturated into the American culture. Faiza’s stepmother is Hispanic and so Faiza’s half-sister, Nagma, grew up in a more liberal way. Faiza’s
half-sister, Nagma came one summer to spend two weeks with them. Nagma went back never to return, and Faiza said Nagma complained about Faiza’s mother being too interfering and controlling. Within the Arabic culture it is the duty of the mother to supervise and have total control of her daughters so that the daughters do not bring any bad name to the family. I have observed that Faiza creates a space for herself through the use of the English language. As the interview procedure was being carried out in English, Faiza took the opportunity to create an independent identity by keeping control of the information she shared with her mother. When she did not want her mother to know the subject of our discussion, she would give a matter of fact answer to her mother’s question but during other times she would answer elaborately and let her know the topic of our discussion. Her parents want her to have mainstream success, and the community, which is constituted around religion, wants to have its members become successful U.S. citizens for its own survival and prosperity. However, there exists a tension between the family and the community. Faiza’s parents want her to have a profession and enjoy an affluent lifestyle but also want to have control over her sexuality by restricting her going to the prom, dating and having male friends. The religious community is not concerned about her individual success and supports the traditional role of women as the homemaker. The community leaders’ idea is to see her and other young girls as “good” Arab-Muslim woman settled with a successful man because the Qur’an places the man as the provider of the family whereas “a woman has no financial responsibilities whatsoever except very little of her personal expenses, the high luxurious things that she likes to have” (Qur’an, 4:11-14, 176). As a result, neither Faiza’s parents nor the community’s interests match Faiza’s wishes of becoming independent. I see her keeping the two languages separate as a conscious decision of keeping her Arabic self and her English self separate – but uses one to control the other as with her mom.
Faiza is not very enthusiastic about school in general and her learning experience according to her has been “boring.” The time she feels good in school is “when it’s time to go home. I like school but not much, it’s a lot of work and it’s boring. It makes me happy when I finish my class work, makes me happy when I am able to solve the math problems. That’s all…”

Her parents support her in pursuing a career. Her father asked me to help Faiza with her English as she was failing her reading tests. He shows genuine interest in his children’s education – their learning English and also having a career, even for the girls. Her mother does all the chores and does not involve her daughters as she wants her daughters to use every moment available for study. Yet, she wants to know everything her daughter’s do or say even all that I ask and Faiza’s response during my interview. She believes that it is the mother’s right to know everything about her daughter so that they do not become too Westernized.

Summary of Faiza’s Identities

It is evident that the context of “difference” was raising some contradictions and complexities between Faiza’s home culture and school culture. At home there is a pressure to maintain the religious and traditional cultural practices and ways of the Arab-Muslims as well as learning English, being able to succeed in school and in the U.S. Her parents have little knowledge regarding the relationship between language and culture. According to them Faiza should be competent in English so that she can access all that the U.S. has to offer but remain faithful to her native culture. They fail to realize the contradictory messages that are sending through their wishes. As a result, she is required to constantly negotiate between two opposing ideas and cultures. Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (2001) expressed similar experiences while conducting their research in the following:

Immigrant parents walk a tightrope, they encourage their children to develop the competencies necessary to function in the new culture, all the while maintaining the
traditions and (in many cases) language of home. Hence, children are encouraged to learn English, but at the same time may be asked to keep the new language and cultural ways out of the home. If they do not do so, children may be accused of “becoming American.” (p. 89-90)

Faiza identified “Americanization” as becoming disrespectful towards elders and also becoming selfish, although she thought her friend Brittney was smart as she was capable of making decisions for herself.

The issues of language, religion, culture, politics and loyalty surrounding her Arab-Muslim immigrant status and conflicts arising from them need her to continuously negotiate and reconstruct who she is, or rather who she is becoming. She is continuously struggling to achieve all that she and her family had thought of attaining in the U.S. Her identity is fragmented and a combination of various communities of which she is a member of. As I have already mentioned, her identities do not blend together to form a collage but leave ragged edges because of the contradictions and since identity construction is always in the process of becoming, its manifestation is not possible to predict.

Arzab, A Portrait

Arzab is 15 years old and is in the ninth grade. His father came to this country in 2001, after retiring from the Navy in Yemen. He owns one-fourth of a gas station and a convenience store. After the processing of his green card the family moved to the United States in 2005. Prior to coming to the U.S., the family lived in Egypt for 3 years because of political disturbance in Yemen. Arzab had his schooling till the 3rd grade in Yemen, till the 6th grade in Egypt and joined the U.S. public school system in the 6th grade. Arzab is the youngest among his four brothers and the fifth child of his parents. He has one older sister and two younger ones.

When I first taught him in the middle school, they lived in a rented apartment. Presently, they have shifted to a brand new house in a new housing district. The house looks big with a
two-car garage. I had the privilege of moving from the formal sitting room to the living room area. The formal sitting room is well furnished with sofa sets, winged-back chair, a television set. On the wall there is a photograph of the Kaaba and a small miniature model of the same on top of the television.

His parents do not read or speak English and so his eldest sister acted as his guardian and signed the parental consent form. The women wear “hijab” and are conservative. His mother acknowledged me by nodding her head and his father greeted me but I had no conversations with them. The parents’ lack of communication skill in English silenced them. It is sad that as parents they were unable to participate fully in their children’s life. Arzab and one of her younger sister have become more comfortable in English and there is a chance of their losing the native language. The family is making concessions for her by letting her speak English at home which I was told seldom happens in case of a girl child. This family consists of four sons and three daughters and all of them except the youngest daughter (18 months old) have attended public schools in the United States.

Arzab hangs out with the Mexican/Latino boys as his life revolves around soccer, “I play soccer, watch soccer, soccer is my life.” He plays soccer after school with his friends in a park. He watches soccer and wrestling on the television. Arzab is not as easily identifiable as different from a distance like Faiza. But as one comes closer, his brown skin and black hair is visible which might make one think him to be a Mexican or a Latino. In school, Arzab’s placement in the ESL program sent the message that he is not a native English speaker and has also not mastered the language. Secondly, his brown skin and black hair set him apart from being white, so he was not readily accepted by the white boys. He has joined U.S. public school system in the fifth grade and even now he says that he knows the white boys in his grade but they are “not
really my (Arzab’s) friends.” Finally, Arzab’s familiarity with soccer, a popular sport in his native country made him instantly become friends with the Mexican/Latino boys who were in the ESL program and played soccer.

Arzab’s experience at school with regards to his speaking English silenced him. Students who are native speakers of English would make fun of his accent, which they would not for other English learners who appeared to be white. He felt dejected and kept quiet. At home usually he speaks Arabic but sometimes he talks in English because his younger sister does not speak much Arabic. He and his siblings are also losing their written ability of Arabic as he says, “it needs practice.” He is also trying to become more “American” by learning English so that he could go to college.

School is the place where he learns English and also where he learns American culture. He enjoys his History class and likes his teachers who help him and explain lessons and provide him with clear instructions. His school experience in the US is very different from that in Egypt. He likes living in the U.S. but misses his life in Egypt. He does not recollect much about his life in Yemen.

Arzab had to make more compromises to adjust to the US life than he had to when living in Egypt. He enjoyed his stay in Egypt as culturally Egypt is a mixture of Western and Islamic or Muslim cultures. He compares and contrasts his experiences in Egypt with that in the United States and says that he felt he was one of the people in Egypt, which he does not in feel in his host country. He does not feel included in the mainstream life and culture.

*Learning of English and Its Effect on Ethnic Identity*

From my interview with Arzab, I understood that he was not conscious of his racial identity. When I asked him, “what is your experience regarding racism?” His response was “I’m
not Black!” The Arabs have ascribed the Africans as an inferior race\textsuperscript{12} and based on that belief Arzab thinks that racism implicates only the African Americans. But his description of the ways in which his ethnicity differed from his white classmates, can be explained by the racial stratification that exists in the society. As Arzab expressed during the interview when asked: Do you remember any sad moments while you were learning English?

    Arzab: Hmm...when in school we were trying to learn English I tried to say something and said different stuff they, the U.S. kids...they make fun of me...

    R: Did you see anything different with other students?

    A: With white kids (ESOL) it was cool or okay.

    R: But white kids speak English...

    A: White kids from different country.

As is evident from here that when white (European origin) ESOL students who spoke little English immigrated to the United States, they not only blended with the mainstream students but even their accented English was more acceptable than those who looked different and were considered as “foreign” or “others” even though they may be American citizens. This imposed identity as the “other” as opposed to being accepted as American acts as constrictions for Arabic students in constructing their American identities. Since, race is determined based on superficial anatomical characteristics such as skin color, body shape, hair texture and facial features people who look different and do not fit into the category of Caucasians remain as the “other.”

\textsuperscript{12} BBC News reports: Sudan’s Darfur conflict: Arab Janjaweed militia - who are accused of trying to "cleanse" black Africans from large swathes of territory.
Arzab joined the public school in the U.S. in the fifth grade and since has been receiving ESL support. His friend group consists of “Mexicans”\(^\text{13}\) who are also in the ESL program and they help each other in learning English. He said,

> We have someone I mean one of them don’t speak English we help him sometimes when he needs. At home we don’t speak English a lot but sometimes we speak English because you know my little sister she does not speak a lot of Arabic. I speak Arabic but I don’t write, I forgot...Sometimes I also need to speak English when talking in Arabic, you know I don’t know the Arabic word...learning English is good because I can speak to others here, go to school, in America.

It is obvious from the discussion that Arzab and his sister are both losing their native language, Arabic. Firstly, they spent long hours at school where they do not receive any support to maintain Arabic, their native language. Secondly, after school they play and spend time with friends where they speak English. At home, they do their homework in English; it is only with family members that they use Arabic. The limited use and practice along with the pressure to “become American” or assimilate make ELLs ignore their native language. Though these ELL students forget to speak their native language, the culture and history lingers because of the elders in the family and community. This could be a reason for Arzab to be interested in studying history.

> A: History is my favorite subject I like to know about ancient times, what happened long time ago. The history teacher is very nice because she give us not hard work, she make us write a lot, give us like important stuff. We do projects and stuff…

Arzab fails to understand that doing easy work and not being challenged sets him up for being placed into non-college track. Low expectations of ELLs actually do more harm than benefit, despite Arzab’s opinion of this as important work. When the teacher points out something as

\(^{13}\) In the southern part of the U.S., the term ‘Mexican’ is often used to indicate the entire Latino population. Arzab uses the term “Mexican” for all those whose native language is Spanish without understanding that Spanish speakers are a heterogeneous population. Though in the 1960’s, U.S. state agencies began to disseminate the ethnic label “Hispanic” as the proper term for identifying all people of Latin America and even Spanish descent.(Oboler 1995, xiii)
important that needs to be memorized and/or understood as critical, Arzab accepts it as important. My argument is from the perspective of important being higher standard or college preparatory level of education. Research demonstrated that ELLs perform much better when they are challenged in class and are placed according to content-area knowledge rather than language proficiency (Callahan, 2005). When teachers’ set high expectations for ELL students, they are fighting the “deficit” model of education that blames students’ cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors as reasons for failure. The policy of systematic exclusion of people of color, language and culture denies ELL students to have access to a good and robust curriculum. Language minority kids are often deprived of quality education and held responsible for their poor performance.

The culture in Egypt was more like in here. I don’t remember Yemen much…I miss Egypt, I was happy there, the culture…I was one of them. I feel like an outsider like in the U.S., you know… the way you feel if you go somewhere to vacation, not your home…like that… Here I do not have many white friends, they do not come to my home…do not invite me to their home… I was hurt when I was told “Go back to Egypt, go back to Yemen, go back to where you came from…”

Before coming to the U.S., Arzab and his family had to leave Yemen due to the civil war and live in Egypt. He enjoyed his stay in Egypt as culturally Egypt is a mixture of Western and Islamic or Muslim cultures. He compares and contrasts his experiences in Egypt with that in the United States and says that he felt he was one of them in Egypt which he does not in his host country, the U.S. Arzab feels he has been alienated from and rejected by the mainstream Americans as he says, “they (white American classmates) do not come to my home…do not invite to their home” I read it as his yearning to “belong” by forging meaningful relationships with the mainstream students.

The immigrant children enter the U.S. classrooms without the cultural knowledge and social practices of the U.S. “Their behavioral norms stem from lives they are no longer living but
cannot forget” (First, 1988, p. 206) and in spite of their wish to become a part of the mainstream, they are held back because they lack the “cultural capital.” The Arab-Muslim immigrant students are burdened with additional tensions arising from post 9/11 and the U.S. government’s “War on Terror” that have portrayed the Arabs and Islam in general with terrorism. Mainstream students think them either to be terrorists or supporters of terrorism and hence, their violent behavior towards the Arab-Muslim students.

Panethnic Identity

Soccer became the common ground for Arzab’s association with his fellow ELLs from the Hispanic community background. But being English language learners in the same school and sharing minority status has given them a panethnic identity. Arzab’s ethnic identity becoming embodied in soccer, a sport which is mainly dominated by Latino players and spectators, a minority group in the U.S. does not place him in a favorable position in a racialized society. In the context of post 9/11 U.S., Arab Muslims are feared as terrorists, and/or suicide-bombers, his self identification with soccer places him with the Mexicans who are constructed as a culturally and educationally inferior race – a combination of these two identities would definitely require him to make more negotiations. In spite of sports being popular culture, most of the time we inadvertently do not pay much attention to it in examining how cultural differences and racialization occur through sports. The common belief is that sports unite. This is true to the extent that we see people from different races representing and working harmoniously in a team. Mosqueda and Valeriano (2007) state that “sport reflects the struggle of war and also the policy struggles endemic to cultural conflicts” (p. 3) and makes it a “common window of analysis” through which to scrutinize the construction of “race”. In the case of soccer or fútbol (in Spanish) complications arise from as Sawyer and Goodyng (2007) claim, “the argument being
that Soccer (football) games are not just sporting events, but have political significance, because of the symbols they embody.” Soccer being the national pastime of most Latin American countries is used as a marker of identity by Latin American immigrants in the United States.

Arzab is unaware of all the complexities involved in soccer but he believes himself to share more similarities with the Latino students in his school than the white American students. In his words:

I look more like them than the white guys with my black hair and brown skin. Some Arabs look like whites but I don’t. I’m in ESL program with my Mexican friends and we also play soccer together. In middle school, I tried to make friends with a few white boys, I really liked them and think they are great, I will learn from them. They did not take me in their group.

Arzab and his friends have access to public parks and facilities and in this process they are creating a social place for their minority group. He identifies himself as a minority like his Mexican friends but does not comprehend how, if in anyway, his embodiment with fútbol will further complicate his position under the contemporary “Islamophobia” that Werbner (2005, p. 8) calls the new racialization.

Religious Identity

As I have already mentioned while discussing Faiza’s religious identity, that it is very difficult to separate Arab Muslim cultural, linguistic and religious identity as they are interconnected. The Qur’an and the Shariat codifies Islamic laws and by-laws, social and religious behavior and dress codes based on gender, food that can be consumed and avoided by Muslims and recreation or amusement that a Muslim can partake in. As a result, the religious and cultural identities often overlap.

I asked Arzab whether he considered culture to be an important factor in making friends and why it would be so important. He answered, “Yes, culture is important to make friends.
Yeah, you know I’m not dating. Dating and stuff that people speak in school is different, not in Arabic.”

What I understood from his excited speech said in one breath is that culture is an important factor in making friends because the American high school culture where a lot of discussion revolves around girls and dating is prohibited in the Islamic or Muslim culture and in fact considered “haraam” or forbidden and that culture is alien to the Arabic culture.

When asked, how does he identify himself culturally? He replied, “Arabic.”

They (native speakers of English and also Christians) don’t say a lot of religious stuff like we say in Arabic like “Inshallah” but they say “all the best” or “good luck.”

They (native speakers of English and Christian) are religious but don’t talk about it in school. No, I don’t talk about religion in school here.

Arzab points out that the Arabic language has a deep connection to the religion of Islam. The idea of secularism is new to the immigrant Arab Muslims which probably was a culture shock for Arzab as most greetings and wishes have the name of Allah in them and religion to the Arab Muslim is a way of life.

**Summary of Arzab’s Identities**

Arzab experiences discrimination in school; he understands that he is not part of the mainstream but he is trying very hard to speak English with a white Southern American accent. He feels powerless yet is hopeful that by learning and speaking the English language he will be part of the mainstream or will have higher education that will help him to establish himself in a higher social status. He has also adapted a secular way of greeting by saying, “Salaam” instead of “As-Salaam-Alaikum.” He does not acknowledge ‘racism’ as a major reason for discrimination since his dad’s application to seek asylum was accepted and they were granted the
green-card status. A significant number of people serving in the Yemeni military sought and received asylum in the U.S. during the 2000’s Civil War in Yemen. Presently, this war has spread into Saudi Arabia (CNN, 2009).

Arzab is more comfortable with his Arabic identity which may be due to the gender hierarchy in Islam. As the Quran in Sura 4:34 says, *Men are managers of the affairs of women because Allah has made the one superior to the other.* (Maududi, vol. (1), p. 329). Even in matters of property rights: The Quran in Sura 4:11 says, *The share of the male shall be twice that of a female . . . .* (Maududi, vol. 1, p. 311) (See Sura 4:176.)

As opposed to enjoying a privileged position as a male in the Arabic Muslim identity an American identity places him in an equal position with the female. In a conversation with him regarding their immigration, he mentioned that men are required to protect and look after their family. Since, his father considered U.S. to be safe, he brought his family here and his mother followed her husband as that is the expected and the rightful behavior of a wife. But he feels good to be engrossed in soccer.

From my conversations with Arzab and his brother, Mehmet regarding racism I understood that they see the history of slavery connected to racism. The Arabs also had African slaves so they can relate to it historically. Even the present struggle in Darfur, Sudan is about the Arabs control and domination over the native Africans. Thus, as an Arab, Arzab and his brother do not belong to the black, African, inferior race because blackness had servile connotations (Sharkey, 2008). Arzab explains his Mexican friends and his own rejection into the white boys’ group (Mehmet, Arzab’s brother has white friends) as a result of their ESL and socio-economic status. But in reality, it could be that Arzab realizes racism against him and his Mexican friends. Arzab is in denial as his recognition of racism against him will put him in the same position as
the African Americans whereby the political and social superiority of the Arabs will be questioned. Recognizing racism against his Mexican friends too puts him in similar position as the Mexicans because of his brown skin.

It seems that Arzab is dealing with racism, classism, and sexism as they intersect and create an extremely complicated condition under which he has to reconstruct his identities. In comparison to Faiza, I find Arzab’s identity having more jagged edges that would require him to make more negotiations and mediations to make in order for him to find the answer to the question, Who am I?

Mehmet, A Portrait

Initially I was hesitant about interviewing Mehmet as he was Arzab’s brother. Because I assumed that it might not contribute towards my collection of “thick description.” I am glad that ultimately I went ahead and involved him in this project. He is very friendly and his friends come from all different ethnicities unlike his brother Arzab. He is seventeen years old, studying in the same high school as Arzab and is presently in the 11th grade. Their father came to this country in 2001, after serving in the Navy in Yemen. He had to flee when the Civil War broke out. Mehmet’s father initially moved to Egypt with his family, stayed there for three years and applied for political asylum in the US. They lived in Egypt till they received their green card or work-permit to the US. Mehmet’s family came from a well-to-do family in Yemen and offered to invest money in the US in the form of business, which made it easier for the family to receive the green card. Mehmet’s dad owns one-fourth of a gas station and a convenience store. Mehmet had gone through the Yemeni education system till 5th grade, followed by education in Egypt till 8th grade and joined the public education system in the U.S. in the 8th grade.
His parents do not read or speak English and so their eldest sister acted as their guardian and signed the parental consent form. The women wear “hijab” and they are a conservative family. His eldest sister has attended high school in the US but needs to take the school exit exam. The two older brothers work in the gas station and the convenient store. Mehmet also works in the store whenever he finds time. He is very focused and determined to fulfill his dreams and become a successful businessman.

*Shaping Identities through Schooling and Language*

Out of the three ELL students in my study Mehmet is the only one who said that he is “more comfortable with Arabic” although he admitted to be doing a lot of code-switching “sometimes I speak Arabic and then I need to use an English word because I don’t know the Arabic word.”

He said that his friends helped him to learn English. “When I came one of my friends teach me English all the time” said Mehmet. He acknowledges the fact that learning English is of vital importance to survive in the U.S. and without mastering it he will fail to fulfill his dreams of getting higher education and a higher paid job. He further stated

> English helped me at school, like first thing is like go to the shop, go to Walmart anywhere that’s where you have to communicate with people, that’s why you have to learn English. Basically, like everything, if you don’t know English you can’t do anything. Like by learning English people will get better jobs…

Education is important, yeah, of course! That’s why we go to school. If it wasn’t important we wouldn’t be going to school...keep studying get an MBA degree and then like...whatever you like you can do it. Do whatever you are interested in, so we learn English. Have knowledge, more knowledge

He perceives acquiring proficiency in English as the key that will unlock the door to “Aladdin’s cave” (my phrase) and provide him access to social mobility. There is no doubt that acquiring English is the first step to getting education but its intimate relationship with culture requires the
new immigrants to acquire the language which has higher value in society and learn appropriate
behavior. While comparing it with Arabic and the culture of Yemen and later Egypt he said:

You know, there’s lot of difference, like it was my country, my language, my culture,
and my religion. This country is good but I have to make my place here…I have to
learn English, I have to know their culture, their way of thinking to make it my…

Mehmet understands and feels the difference of belonging to the dominant group of a country as
opposed to living as a minority, which is not only based on economics but language and culture.
Without having the conversational skill of the dominant language, one would have all
communication breakdown which will also take its toll on survival.

U.S. Experience and its Effect on Identity

M: I have friends…like (pause) a lot of friends we help each other in working or play
soccer. We go out some times to have lunch together or play in the park. I don’t think
skin color has anything to do with making friends.

But he felt some teachers discriminated against students of color and that he was a victim of
racism. He loves school and said,

I want to be a business-man, I like business classes and teachers who explain to us, you
know…difficult things so that we can understand…and not some teachers they didn’t
care just gave us work! Some teachers did this with every student, with white, black,
brown all students. But there is one teacher (M) in particular who does not look at
us…never…I mean me and the Mexican (ELL) students.

I am also working after school in my father’s business. Yes, he has a gas station and a
store so I go and work there. I meet people, talk to them, and try to learn from them –
English and also how they think. Most of them don’t know anything about Arab
countries, they think we all ride on camels and live in the dessert, we did not have house
to live in. Life here, I mean in the U.S. is better . . . but you also need to work very hard if
you want to be rich. You can be but you will also have to work hard.

He has the American dream and the hope that hard work will provide him opportunities to
become successful in his business and be rich. This dream has made him invest in school and the
learning of English. He talks about the difference in schools here in the U.S. and back in Yemen
and Egypt. He says that most students here do not show respect to their teachers and some are disrespectful, there is even lack of discipline as teachers give too much freedom to their students.

I asked him what he meant by not showing respect. His answer was

Students don’t greet their teachers and when they speak they talk as if talking to their friends. They behave badly in front of them, like fooling with their friends…pushing others, in the hallway when they see teachers they don’t stand aside and let them go first,…in Egypt teachers were very strict.

I question him about the learning and teaching scenario and whether there were any differences observed in these fields. Mehmet said that

the teacher would speak and we had to write it or follow it in our book. Then we had to memorize them because in the next class we had to answer the questions from the previous lesson and if you failed to learn you were punished. Teachers were really, really strict. Here teachers are lenient, they do not punish if you have not learnt. Also, they will not know because they ask questions and we raise our hands but teachers normally do not call students by names to make them answer.

Mehmet said that he was more relaxed in school here in the U.S. than he was in Egypt and he does not have very good memory of schools in Yemen. He even said that since, here people don’t know you so you can also relax. In Egypt everyone knows you in your locality and you have to be good in your behavior or they will report to your family and you know. According to Mehmet he enjoys more space and liberty here than he had in Egypt and he enjoys his life here more than there.

Out of the three ELL students in my study Mehmet is the only one who said that he is “more comfortable with Arabic” although he admitted to be doing a lot of code-switching “sometimes I speak Arabic and then I need to use an English word because I don’t know the Arabic word.”

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Mehmet understands and feels the difference of belonging to the dominant group of a country as opposed to living as a minority, which is not only based on economics but language and culture. Without having the conversational skill of the dominant language, one would have all communication breakdown which will also take its toll on survival.

   Cultural Identity

   I was curious to understand how Mehmet compared the Arabic and American cultures. So I asked, Is there a great difference between the Arabic and the American culture? He replied,
“To me there’s not a very big difference, it’s small like you know, it is in how they think. Like “dating” which is so important to them but not to us. Islam does not talk about such things.”

From my experience of interviewing three Arab Muslim subjects, I gather that to these adolescents the American culture of “dating” has made a remarkable impact. All the three ELL students discuss about it and at times it holds a central position. It may also be that parents, community members and religious teachers at the mosque discuss the culture of dating and ask them to stay away from it.

Within the understanding of Islam dating has been constructed as the equivalent of sexual activity. It is assumed that the relationship between man and woman is primarily sexual and is rooted in the Prophet’s sayings: “Whenever a man is alone with a woman the Devil makes a third” (Hadith-Al-Tirmidhi, 3118).

With regards to respecting elders Mehmet says, “There’s not much difference here as the Arabic students have started copying the American students.” But then he contradicts his own remarks and says that, “They do not stand and give their seat to elders, like you know, they don’t care. If there’s an elder and he (American boy) is sitting, he’s gonna keep sitting and won’t get up and offer his seat.”

With regards to showing respect to teachers, he compares situations, conditions and his experiences between his country of birth and host country by referring to them as “over there” and “here.” To him, over there teachers were like our parents. They think that students are their kids, especially like in elementary school and middle school they beat, like a slap on the hand, if you did not do what the teacher said. And they have more respect. Like you know, here if a teacher does not have strong personality like if you don’t know how to deal with them, or be strict with them they’re not going to respect you. I see a big difference between “me and them”, I mean my American friends. Like I listen to everything my parents say. But some of them will argue with their parents and not listen.
Then Mehmet says that the root of this difference in attitude towards parents lies in the cultural difference in the very relationship between the parents and their sons. He says, “Some of them (white American kids), like some of their parents, they will all have cigarettes, they smoke with them, they drink together…I mean my parents, my parents do not smoke or drink.” I was taken aback by Mehmet’s comments. So, I ask: They drink together? How old are they, I mean your friends?

Mehmet: Yeah, sixteen, seventeen. Some parents they’re like if he’s gonna drink, I’d rather, I’d rather let him drink with me instead of him doing that with his friends. That’s how they think and that’s totally wrong. It’s wrong like…he’s not supposed to drink. So, yes there’s a differences between “us and them,” and yes, it is cultural.”

The “us” versus “them” dichotomy seems to have found a place with Mehmet in his attempt to explain the differences he sees existing between the Arabic and the Western cultures. Through this dichotomy, Mehmet spatializes it as well as temporalizes it, by creating distance, so as to distinguish them from one another. It provides us the perspective of the Arabs’ construction of the western permissive cultures. Most often we have observed the colonist west create the east as inherently inferior, the other. Here we see Mehmet judging the western culture as opposed to his eastern Islamic culture.

I have a lot of friends. I do sometimes go to their house but not much. I mean, they (white kids) don’t like to come because they like to drink and they cannot drink here. So they don’t like to come here. We (Mehmet and his Mexican, and Arabic friends) go out and play soccer and have fun but my white friends don’t like it.

His experience is probably with a very small number of white rural boys that he is generalizing as the white American culture. Valentine, Holloway, Knell and Jayne (2008) have shown through their research that in rural areas of United Kingdom parents actually give alcoholic drinks to their own children as young as twelve and thirteen years of age. A similar trend or practice may exist within the working class, rural population in the state where this study takes
place but is definitely not the common culture across board. Moreover, like Heath (1986) expressed, “Every social group is ethnocentric-and ‘linguacentric’-viewing its own ways of behaving and talking as better than all others and as appropriate for establishing the standards by which all others will be judged” (p. 86). Mehmet also views his language and cultures as the best and the standard against which he evaluates other cultures.

Religious Identity

Mehmet does not understand the secular mind-set of the American kids as religion to them (the Arabic Muslims) is not an option. Coming from countries where Islam is the state religion i.e., the state, culture and religion is inseparable it is difficult for the Arab Muslim kids to accept the concept of secularism and understand how the American kids separate culture and religion. The Arabic-Muslim culture is so infused with religion that it is hard for them to think of their linguistic and cultural identity without their religion. With regards to his fellow students in school he says:

Some people do not like to talk about religion, like they don’t care about Islam. They have never said anything on my face but I’ve heard them talking among themselves saying Muslims are suicidal bombers, they are terrorists. They have asked me some crazy questions too like ‘have you seen a bomb, have you shot a gun, like this.’ Then do you live in desserts and ride camels? They ask me these kinds of questions. They think we didn’t have houses like they have and we didn’t have cars and ride camels - like it was some hundreds of years ago.

This is a common question that people from the east get to hear from American kids. I had spent some time doing observations and teaching for my practicum in different schools and often encountered questions, such as: Do you ride on elephant- back and live in mud houses with thatched roofs? This again shows the power of the west to create the eastern culture as ‘primitive’ and establish the dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ The obvious question that comes to mind while discussing cultural differences is what do people belonging to two different cultures
do when they are exposed to each others cultures? Particularly when it is related to immigration
and the immigrant has to learn the dominant language to survive and get established in the host
country. So I asked Mehmet, “Have you or your brothers changed after learning English?”
Mehmet said, “When I came here I did not know English, I did not know anything about this
country, the culture. After I learn English I know how do they (the Americans) deal with each
other. But learning English has not changed me, if I lived in Yemen or Egypt I would be the
same.” He identified himself as an Arab-American but said, “I will follow the Arabic culture but
I think I am Arabic-American.”

The two boys call themselves Arabic-American yet held on to their Arabic culture more
than the girl. Maybe they were more secure in their identity than she was because Faiza was
being challenged in terms of her femininity, which she had to cloak. But the boys could display
their masculinity on the soccer field. The parents’ inability to speak English has made it
mandatory for everyone to speak Arabic at home and so the Arabic culture also remained
dominant in their house.

Summary of Mehmet’s Identities

Mehmet said that he did not see much difference between his Arab Muslim culture and
the culture in the U.S. and then contradicts himself by saying there are big differences. What he
sees as defiance in the American kids is their first step towards establishing their independence.
In Mehmet’s Arab Muslim culture decision comes from the family patriarch and other family
members follow the decision. They have a hierarchy within the family structure and to them
exerting independence is being disrespectful and showing defiance. It is the basic difference that
exists between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.
Both boys feel more comfortable in their Arabic culture as opposed to the girl which could stem from the gender position of the two cultures. According to the Qu’ran men and women have equal rights but men have a higher status and culturally the men in Arab countries enjoy more power than women. In the U.S. legally women have equal rights and status which probably poses as a threat to Arzab and Mehmet and so they cling more tenaciously to their patriarchal culture and religion.

Summary

In Chapter IV, I provide the ways in which the three Arab Muslim high school ESOL students have been shaping their identities. I provide their unique themes and their negotiations in shaping their identities and also the common themes both inside and outside the school with which they interact to continuously reconstruct their identities.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION OF EMERGED THEMES

*Everything fleeting, and nothing stable, everything shifting and changing and nothing substantial.* (George Lippard, *The Quaker City*, 1845)

Introduction: Language is Power

This chapter discusses the themes that have emerged from a cross-case analysis of the interviews, and observations to consider the commonalities and differences of the participants in relation to the theoretical issues and research findings in the field of language learning and identity construction. The purpose of this dissertation was to explore how the competing discourses of family, religion, and language impact the identities of Arab Muslim ESOL students as they immigrate to the U.S. and enter the public education system where they learn. How the sudden change from being the dominant group to becoming a minority group with respect to language, culture and religion in a racialized society affects their selves and beings while interacting with students and teachers in school, and with families and community members.

A case study research methodology with ethnographic sensibilities was used to develop and implement this research project. My role as a researcher was informed by the conceptual framework of “Identity Construction.” This study was characterized as qualitative case study research, multiple data collection sources and methods, and various modes of analyses were applied in order to establish and maintain credibility, reliability, and validity of the research established.
The review of literature in Chapter II indicated that while research on Mexican, Asian and ESOL students from other cultures are available, there is a dearth of literature on Arab Muslim ESOL students’ identity construction. I explored and examined the subject through research and scholarship within the context of the two theoretical frameworks, sociocultural, and postcolonial theories and their relationship with second language learning and learner identity based on the views of Bourdieu (1977, 1991), Weedon (1987), and Gee (1989b, 1992). I regarded language as a source of “social goods (money, power, status)” (Gee, 1992, p. 112) that yields political power to the users of the “legitimate” (Gee & Thompson, 1991) language. Bourdieu (1977) stated that, “Language is not only an instrument of communication of even of knowledge, but also an instrument of power” (p. 648). Schools are sites where power is reproduced. He further asserted, “the dominant language is the language of the dominant class” (p. 652). Hence, the ELL students on entering U.S. schools are challenged by this implicit power of the English language.

To observe the lives of the Arab Muslim ESOL students and hear the voices which are often silenced, I interviewed them, observed them at home with peers and siblings; I visited their homes and interacted with their family members. After transcribing the interviews, reviewing the field notes, I analyzed and categorized the data based upon my initial research question. My research question was: How do the competing discourses of family, religion, and language impact the identities of Arab Muslim adolescent English language learners?

This study was focused on the dynamics of identity construction of ESOL students of Arab Muslim lineage. The findings reveal that the sociocultural identities of the participants are multiple and are constantly changing; at times they are complementary and at times contradictory. Since, identity formation is a continuous process; it is always in the state of
forming and is dependent on the subject position and the context (interaction with classmates, teachers, ethnicity, language, community, family etc.). Within this understanding, identity construction is a complex process for Arab Muslim high school ESOL students not only because of the multiple facets of identity construction but within the socio-political context after 9/11.

The following incident was reported to me on my second day’s interview with Arzab. It shows how the power of language plays out in the school area affecting the social identity of the ESOL speaker. Arzab came from a middle class background from Yemen. Once influential, the family sought political asylum in the U.S. when civil war broke out in Yemen. His father’s investment in business earned them green-card status in this country. He represented the dominant group in his country but in the U.S. his position is that of a minority. His accent and his inability to speak English fluently prevented him from responding to the boys who called him an Arab terrorist and asked him to go back from where he came. Arzab did not know what would be the appropriate words to say in this circumstance but he knew that his words had no “power.”

When I asked Arzab about his life in the U.S. and his interaction with its culture, he replied that,

The culture in Egypt was more like in here. I don’t remember Yemen much… I miss Egypt, I was happy there, the culture… I was one of them. Here I do not have many white friends, they do not come to my home… do not invite me to their home… I was hurt when I was told “Go back to Egypt, go back to Yemen, go back to where you came from…

I asked Arzab how he responded, he observed, “I don’t know what to say! May be it will make them mad…”

This can be called a classic example when language is power and is acting like “social goods (money, power, status)” (Gee, 1992, p. 112) by giving political power to the user of the “legitimate” (Gee & Thompson, 1991) language, the mainstream boy who verbally abuses Arzab. So, under the political situation probably Arzab did the right thing by keeping “silent”
and going back home. As said earlier, teachers also advise ELL students not to respond and to ignore such remarks.

Mehmet suggested a plan of revenge on this boy who abused Arzab. Mehmet suggested that Arzab learn English, like a white man, and then get an MBA degree and then go back and see what that boy was doing. It was interesting to notice that these ESOL boys were aware of whose “language has prestige” and plan to learn the Standard English. He also realizes that education is the only way by attaining which they (Arab Muslims) will be able to gain some social status.

It can be clear from these examples that language is power. It also functions, therefore, as an overarching component in the process of identity development. But other vital factors (i.e., culture, religion, gender) were also at work in this process.

In Chapter IV, I presented the three Arab Muslim ESOL high school students’ interactions with other friends who are their classmates, teachers, family members and community members both in and outside their high school that shaped their identities. I now turn to a more focused analysis drawing themes from the previous chapter that reveal the processes involved in the identity development of these students.

Discussion

The five themes that emerged were (1) silencing, (2) invisibility/ hyper-visibility, (3) Creation of the “Other” through Cultural Deficit Model, (4) Mobility: from periphery to center and (5) hybrid or multiple identities. I present them here, providing analysis through the lens of the theoretical frameworks of this study.
Silencing

The data revealed that the complex process of identity construction and negotiation involves not only the ways in which one views oneself but also on how others perceive him/her. It is through mediation and negotiation within specific contexts that one constructs identities. Within this study, I have observed how ‘silencing’ played an important role in the reconstruction of the ESOL students’ identities.

The only female participant in this study, Faiza, expressed how she was unable to speak and understand English, the only mode of communication in the U.S. schools and ended up feeling “stupid” and “dumb.” Faiza not only explained that she felt “dumb” but also felt that she was hard of hearing and unable to speak as she could not respond, as a result of language. Arzab said that when he was unable to say something correctly the native English speakers laughed and made fun of him. But similar mistakes made by ESL students from Europe, who could easily be mistaken for white American kids, were not only excused but said to be “cute.” There is no doubt that such responses discouraged Faiza and Arzab from speaking. As a result, the voices heard in schools and in the classrooms were that of the majorities while these particular language minority voices remained silent.

Canagarajah (2004) explained this “struggle for voice in relation to the selfhood imposed by macrosocial and extralinguistic constructs” through Foucault’s conflict between instinct and institution. He further added, “‘Institution’ represents established or preordained selves that are historically, socially, and ideologically established. Taking on these selves results, for Foucault, in a form of silencing” (p. 268). Obviously, the ‘voices’ that will be heard will be from the dominant institutions, the native speakers of English. It takes place because of ‘audibility’ (Miller, 1999a, 1999b, 2000), or what the speaker sounds like. The ELL speaker’s sound of voice
needs to be legitimated by the users of the dominant discourse for it to be heard. Given the fear of facing humiliation and the shame for not being like the native speakers, the ELLs hardly respond and even when they do in their hesitant and soft voice, they are often asked to speak louder.

Language is used in a social setting and participants in the discourse need to hear and respond to the other. For a better understanding of the relationship between audibility and silencing, I look at Arzab’s experience. His ESL status did not legitimize his position so he was silenced by being made fun of. However, I also note, the interplay of race and language as the Caucasian ELL’s voice was not only heard, it was accepted. Giroux (1992) argued that this silencing of ELLs or rendering them voiceless in certain contexts can happen as a result of intimidation, real or imagined. He further stated that within the dominant culture of schooling racializing is practiced through silencing voices of subordinate groups, the English language learners whose primary language is not English and whose cultural capital is marginalized or denigrated (p. 203). There is explicit sign of racism – as these particular ELLs are denied to speak and they go unheard not only because their native/first language is not English but also for their skin tone. Given that they participate in an ESL pullout program as opposed to a bilingual program, students from these subordinate groups are even unable to represent themselves or negotiate their identities using their native language in school. As a result, they are stuck with their imposed identities.

Furthermore, according to Lippi-Green (1997), just learning the English language is not enough to participate in the dominant culture. The dominant group claims to speak unaccented and unmarked form of English and children, who lose their native accents and sound like the dominant group, are rewarded socially, personally, and academically. Thus, the “legitimate”
English language skills are symbolic resources that are not equally distributed among everyone, and have immense social values.

Often there is conversation breakdown between a fluent and skilled English speaker and an ELL. Since, conversation is a shared activity and an ELL who speaks non-standard English with an accent would require more effort from the listener to carry on with the conversation, the listener can reject “the communicative burden” (Lippy-Green, 1997, p. 70) by ending the conversation and making an assumption not only about the speaker’s linguistic identity but also regarding his/her social identity. The only way in which ELLs can deal with such circumstances is by finding a voice to negotiate and resist language domination. Because power is also embedded in the negotiation and contestation of dialogic interaction, the result can be observed in language reproduction and/or transformation.

A language learner or a novice in the early stages would reproduce language. It is only by listening and participating in discourse that language acquisition takes place. This discourse or language socialization is a continuous and life-long process because men and women participate and become members of different communities in different phases of their lives. As members of different communities they also construct different identities. As a member of the classroom community, the teacher enjoys the power and so, must teach the ELLs not only the English language but also teach them how to socialize within and outside the classroom with members of different communities through the use of English language considering the fact, that one of the principal aims of the ESL program is to mainstream non-native English speakers. When an ELL is able to change his/her position through negotiating and transforming language, we know the learner has become a competent user of the language.
As ELL, the three participants of this study Faiza, Arzab, and Mehmet realize that they need to acquire competency in English to access higher education. Arzab and Mehmet also have the idea that they need to know the “educated English” version of the language meaning the “standard dominant English.” But they do not grasp the idea of negotiating language to empower themselves. Faiza does not realize these distinctions within the language but she had used English to empower herself by exerting her independence during one of my sessions with her at her home. Faiza’s mother does not speak or understand English but her desire was to keep Faiza under her control during the interview by asking Faiza from time to time, what I was asking her. I noticed that when we were discussing her learning experiences and the ESL program, Faiza would say it to her mother. But when it came to talking about her friends and the cultural differences that she was experiencing while interacting with them, and the ways in which she dealt with them, she held it away from her mother. During these times Faiza would down play them and provide one word answers to her mother’s inquiry. I read it as Faiza’s claiming of her independence by ‘silencing’ her mother through the use of the English language.

To sum up the findings, it can be observed that silencing is a very powerful tool particularly when used to marginalize people. Here, we find it to be used by the school to negate ELL students but is also used by an ELL student to create her own independence.

Invisibility/Hypervisibility

Most often ELLs and particularly people of color complain that they remain invisible to the majority population. In school, teachers argue that in order to remain impartial to their students by not differentiating among them they choose to be ‘color-blind.’ The method they apply to provide equality actually makes them partial and one-sided. The color-blind attitude ignores the ELLs’ ethnicity and culture in teaching practices (Gay, 2000). According to Ladson-
Billings’ (1995) theory of culturally-responsive pedagogy, teachers should consider each student’s cultural background for teachers’ best practices. Often by ignoring the culturally different ELLs, the teacher ignores those students who need some extra assistance to function in a school, which primarily follows the dominant culture, and in the process depriving equal opportunity to the colored language minority children.

The two male Arab Muslim ELL participants had similar experience of remaining invisible most of the time. Arzab was invisible even when he was noticed, as he was identified as a Mexican because of his friends and his soccer playing. Mehmet was invisible because he had white friends and teachers being color-blind did not recognize his ethnicity.

All the Arab Muslim students spoke specifically about one teacher who did not think it worth even to look at them. Teachers like her are not only doing injustice to the minority students but creating disharmony and division within the educational institution. There is dysconscious racism in the colorblind ideology (King, 1991) because it sustains and justifies culture of power. Bonilla-Silva argued that color-blindness is a form of racism that “has emerged to support and reproduce the new racial structure of the United States” (p. 137).

Contrary to the boys’ invisibility, data show that Faiza remained hypervisible because of her hijab. She was known as the “girl with hijab” and had suffered both physically and mentally during anti-Muslim acts against her, discussed in chapter 4. Though such incidents are often ignored as harmless pranks, in many instances they are serious forms of bullying and racist.

Both invisibility and hyper-visibility are forms of discrimination. Veiled Muslim girls are hypervisible and are forced to live with the stress of being identified as Muslims where Islam is equated with terrorism, and binds them into a “simple binary of resistance/subordination”
(Mahmood, 2005, p. 9). Muslim boys on the other hand remain invisible because they do not have any obvious cultural marker to construct them as the “other.”

This difference in dress code between Muslim boys and girls is interpreted by the non-Muslims as “oppression” towards women. Research on immigrants’ social life has reported that immigrants generally have different expectations for daughters and sons. There seems to be pressures on girls to follow the traditional cultural values and “cultural continuity” in and over the bodies of second-generation daughters that are part of intergenerational conflicts (Dion & Dion, 2001; Dasgupta, 1998). Suarez-Orozco and Qin (2006) found this phenomenon across time and nation.

… stricter parental control of immigrant girls has been documented in second-generation Chinese women in San Francisco in the 1920s,…, Italian women in Harlem in the 1930s,…, Mexican girls in the Southwest during the interwar years,…, daughters of Caribbean,…, Asian Indian,…, Hispanic,…, Yemeni,…, Chinese,…, and Hindu, Muslim and Mexican…immigrant girls in the last two decades…Similar findings are also shown among South Asian immigrant groups in Canada…and among Muslim immigrants in France. (p. 171)

Creation of the “Other” through Cultural Deficit Model

The image of the Arabs in the minds of the U.S. citizens is that of oil sheikhs or terrorists mostly due to the media (Said, 1980). After September 11, 2001 the terrorist image became more pronounced as did the religion of Islam. These images further assisted in creating the religion and the culture as inferior, deviant, and “Others” as against the “norm.”

Regarding the political scenario of the Arab countries El-Badawi and Makdisi (2007) reported, “There appears to be a broad consensus among Arab writers, statesmen, academics, journalists and ordinary citizens alike about what the recent UNDP report on Arab human development (2002) described as a fundamental “freedom deficit” in the region.” The authoritarian Arab regimes are fundamentally different from the western democratic form of
government. It has also been argued that lack of democratic form of government in the Arab
countries has led to gender inequality, lack of minority rights and citizen inclusion (Rizzo,
Abdel-Latif & Meyer, 2007). As a result, the Arab countries have been considered as backward,
unprogressive, due to “democratic deficit.”

The Muslim women’s dress code such as the hijab and the jilbab are considered to be
“oppressive” and against women’s rights for independence, hence culturally inferior and
“medieval.” This view of the Muslim culture is quite prevalent among non-Muslims. But there
are different political opinions too regarding the hijab that I was exposed to during a discussion
on minority rights with students at the university consisting of both whites and minorities. Here I
heard most students irrespective of their mainstream or minority status reject the hijab. Though
Faiza said, “I feel safe and know Allah’s taking care of me. I’m following His rules,” most of us
did not believe that young girls really enjoy wearing the head-cover but they do so because of
parental pressure. A graduate student (non-Muslim) looked at the hijab from a different
perspective and commented, “prior to coming to the U.S. they (the Muslims) should have
thought about our (U.S.) culture. If the government makes a policy like France denying the
wearing of hijab, they (the Muslims) will argue that their (the Muslim minorities’) rights have
been violated. What about their creating a division in our culture?” Ameli and Merali (2006) also
encountered similar protests from people belonging to mainstream culture. They believe that the
hijab is the representation of “a desire to separate and segregate from the mainstream, as a
symbol of arrogance and rejection of ‘British’ norms – a symbol of ingratitude to the ‘host’
culture” (p. 32). Ameli and Merali conducted their study in Britain and so they referred to
“British” norms but within the context of the U.S., the ‘British’ norms can be easily replaced by
the U.S. norms. It will also raise questions about gender equality and values such as the U.S.’s secular foundation and the rights to equality.

Like Faiza, most Muslim women claim that they made conscious choice in wearing the hijab. Ameli and Merali (2006) commented it to be “a necessary outcome of years of deliberation about the teaching of Islam” (p. 32). When I questioned Faiza about Muslim women’s wearing the jilbab to cover themselves up, she questioned me in return. She asked, “Didn’t the revealing clothes the girls wore make them look cheap? Weren’t those shameful ways to attract boys?” Faiza’s idea is resonated in a female participant in Ameli & Merali’s (2006) study. She commented on her acceptance of the hijab as “a result of observing the fall of women in western societies and of noticing how disgracefully their bodies are used by the capitalists to maximize their own gains. It is also the women in the west who are being forced by unscrupulous men who use them and then discard them.” She further stated that, “Preserving her honour should be a choice for all women whether in the East or West. God Himself commands it for the safeguarding of women – Judaism & Christianity also encourage women to dress modestly” (p. 32).

It can then be inferred that Muslim women accept the ‘hijab’ as a way to claim their Islamic identity and defy the west’s construct of it as a misogynistic structure of Islam. In analyzing head-covers from a post-colonial perspective, it can be said that all cultural activities and behavior of the colonized society that differed from the colonizers were regarded as “backward,” and/or “oppressive.” Ameli and Merali (2006) stated, “The British colonizers in Egypt enforced an idea of the veil as representative of ‘Muslim backwardness.’” As a protest the “Muslim women claimed the hijab as a symbol of anti-colonialism, where women’s bodies are seen to be a colonial commodity” (p. 33).
Terrorism is regarded as the most deviant among the other differences that exist between Islam and other religions. Islam has become synonymous with terrorism and fear so much that a new word Islam-o-phobia had come into existence. In general, people associate peace and love with religion and in the case of Islam it has suddenly become associated with war and hatred.

All the three participants have been affected by this construction of their religion as the religion of terror. The fear has caused students of other religions to suspect all Muslims as Jihadists fighting the holy war against their religions and also all young men and women to be suicide-bombers. So, non-Muslim students do not hesitate to ask Faiza if she has seen Osama-bin-Laden, inquire if she knows or has connections with terrorists. Arzab has been told by his friends to go back from where he came back. He had been asked whether he possesses a gun or seen a bomb. Mehmet’s friends are polite and do not ask him directly but do not hesitate to discuss Muslims as terrorists and out to destroy the US.

After 9/11 the Arab Muslim students as young as 4th grade to the 12th grade have been facing hateful and hurtful behavior from their fellow students. Faiza has negotiated it through her femininity. In a Muslim community a non-family member of the opposite gender is not supposed to touch a girl after she is 9-10 years old and Faiza said that it was doubly humiliating to her because it was a boy who pulled her hijab. She smiled and kept quiet pretending it was all fun and not serious. She had been able to defuse a situation from escalating into something harsh and grim. She even kept another boy’s teasing her about Osama-bin-Laden as a joke. But what she was able to get away with being a girl and with her demeanor would have been hard for a tough looking girl or a boy. Arzab also acted similarly, he did not show his disapproval by retaliating but eased the situation by keeping quiet and deciding to go home. The physical and verbal
violence do not help in building bridges of understanding and harmony, “they destroy, alienate and reinforce the status quo and offer little room for reconciliation” (Sarroub, 2005, p. 134).

Cultural difference has never been accepted as only being different but has always been judged and evaluated by considering the evaluator’s culture as the “norm.” Historically, western culture was regarded as the norm because of colonialism. Culture has been defined as the values, traditions, and beliefs mediating the behaviors of a particular social group (American Psychological Association, 2003; Parsons, 2003; Solano-Flores & Nelson-Barber, 2001) and plays a vital role in the development of cognitive skills that has been discussed in Chapter II, under the sociocultural foundation laid by Lev Vygotsky. The cultural deficit model portrays minority cultures as deficient and inferior compared to Western or mainstream cultural values and ways of knowing. The mainstream cultural values or individualism refers to one’s disposition toward fundamental autonomy, independence, individual recognition, solitude, and the exclusion of others (Moemeka, 1998; Spence, 1985). The Arab Muslims belong to the collectivistic culture where sharing is promoted because it fosters social inter-connectedness, and discourages self-centeredness and individual greed (Boykin, 1983).

According to Gay (2000), Nieto (1999) and Rogoff (2003) many ethnic minority students’ motivation is reduced when their learning contexts do not represent their cultural values. When the school-based values differ from the home-based values it is termed as “cultural discontinuity” and are believed to affect student outcome and their psychological antecedents.

The cultural deficit model and cultural discontinuity both are reasons for causing low self-esteem. Research has shown that when teachers have high expectations of their ELL students and they are challenged in class their performance improves (Wong, & Grant, 2007). By setting high expectations for ELL students, teachers are fighting the “deficit” model of education
that blames students’ cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors as reasons for failure. The policy of systematic exclusion of people of color, language and culture denies ELLs have any access to a good and robust curriculum. Language minority kids are often deprived of quality education and held responsible for their poor performance.

The cultural deficit model can also be related to colonialism. Whenever a European colony was established there was the justification of the colonized inferior and savage culture and cultural values and it was “the white man’s burden” (Kipling, 1899) to educate them and relieve them of their ignorance. Pennycook (1994) argued that the “long term conjunction between English and colonial discourses has produced a range of linguistic-discursive connections between English and colonialism (p. 4). The colonized were forced to accept English as the language of official and educational communication and some colonizers thought that by adopting the colonizer’s language they would be able to escape racism. Pennycook has provided the most amazing statement in these lines: “English is both the language that will apparently bestow civilization, knowledge and wealth on people and at the same time is the language in which they are racially defined” (p.4). He made sure to mention the word “apparently” which I interpret as giving or providing the language and culture and knowledge associated with English but by destroying the already existing and maybe one of the most amazing civilization and culture. In the words of Chris Searle (1983) on English in the world, “…the English language has been a monumental force and institution of oppression and rabid exploitation throughout 400 years of imperialist history” (p. 68). In this vein, English-only policies in the U.S. might be seen as an extension of colonialism that takes away the language and culture of immigrants by depriving them of their own ways of knowing.
The construction of the “Other” robs the ELLs from having real or true communication with the mainstream population. There is a stigma attached to being in the ESL class and the Arab Muslim students attend the ESL program in the school, so, they have fewer mainstream students as their friends. In school, those who do not speak English are treated as aliens and also substandard because their silence is thought as the result of their being less intelligent and cognitively challenged which has its roots in the cultural deficit model.

Here is an example from my experience while working as an ESL teacher. An Arabic girl started acting out in school, she refused to do anything and even have lunch. Teachers thought she had learning disability and attention deficit. They decided to talk to me before meeting the ESL specialist. I was also having difficulties with the same girl in my ESL class but due to privacy issues I did not question her. But when other teachers showed concern, I asked her and found out that her father was arrested and they were having problems in the family and she was trying to talk to someone about it. Her brother was in the same class but he did not show any reaction so teachers did not suspect any family problems. If she could speak in English probably she would have been able to get some emotional support from her teachers and there would not be any misunderstanding.

The difference in cultural patterns of the minority groups are viewed as less than mainstream norms. The cultures of nondominant groups are viewed as “lacking in the social and cognitive resources” needed for school success (Lam, p. 215). Mainstream students also view ESL students as “weird” and do not want to have close association with the ESL students. As a result true communication never takes place between the mainstream students and their Arab Muslim ELL classmates.
The Arab Muslim ELLs, who did not receive elementary school education in the U.S., had no exposure to the U.S. culture will obviously lack literacy skills in English and have difficulty coping with school. They would not only need to develop English language literacy skills but also need acculturation and socialization with people from the dominant culture (Haynes, 2005) because literacy is

intimately bound up with particular sociocultural contexts, institutions, and social relationships. As a socially situated practice, literacy appears in multiple forms that have political and ideological significance hence it is more appropriate to refer to literacies in multiple manifestations that bear no universal consequences. (Lam, 2000, p.458-459)

Literacy viewed from this perspective has all cognitive and rhetorical skills including interpretive strategies of reading and writing rooted in and influenced by prevailing beliefs, practices, within particular institutional setting or sociocultural group (Heath, 1983; Ivanic, 1998). In order for the Arab Muslim adolescents to achieve literacy skills they need acculturation into their host country’s culture and it is possible only through Discourses as suggested by Gee (2000). Discourses according to Gee (2000) referred to many socially specific practices of literacy in society, which include oral and written language along with other symbolic systems, such as thinking, valuing, interpreting, dressing, gesturing, and using tools and technology. Without Discourses with mainstream population it will not be easy for the Arab Muslim ELL students to gain English language literacy because of the vast cultural differences.

Acculturation happens with new language acquisition but assimilation usually takes place under coercion. The English-Only policies where assimilation is prescribed can be an instance of colonialism. As an example I cite the following incident. Arzab’s uncle was called and specifically told by one of his teachers that the family members should only speak to Arzab in English because that is the language he needs to know in this country and school. Acculturation on the other hand would lead to hybrid identities and any bilingual/trilingual person will become
acculturated in the cultures of the languages they acquire but will also be able to retain their L1/native culture. First language literacy has its roots in the L1 culture and a person with L1 literacy is able to scaffold his/her second language literacy (Boyle & Peregoy, 1990) by the L1 literacy.

I have personally understood that while working with Faiza on her reading. She was taking an online reading practice while I sat next to her trying to identify her problem areas. I found that she did not comprehend the reading and only interpreted it literally leaving out the cultural part, which is embedded and implicit. I put forth an example from a reading that she was practicing online. A line in the passage was: Predators without peer, owls are splendidly adapted to life in the darkness. I had a difficult time to make her understand that here “peer” does not mean “friend” but some other night creature having the same ability; the owl’s skill as a predator is unparallel. Most amusingly, she doubted my interpretation and questioned me: how did I know the American language better than her, as we both arrived in the U.S. around the same time? It was difficult for me to convince her, as I felt I might sound superior and belittle her if I talked about the academic part, so I spoke about my social activities.

In many ways Gee’s, discourse becomes part and parcel of cultural capital. Lack of true communication between the ELLs and native speakers belonging to the dominant culture deprives the ELLs from acquiring the “cultural capital.” Delpit (1988) argued that the cultural power in the U.S. schools is comprised of white middle class/upper-middle class students. Usually students from this category perform better in school because they are already exposed to and operate within this cultural value. They know the discourse patterns and values of the U.S. educational system as they possess the “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1979/1987). Bourdieu and Passeron (1979/1964) stated that “cultural habits and …dispositions inherited from” the family is
the essential factors leading to school success. Bourdieu further stated that these cultural “habits and dispositions” are used as resource to generate “profits”; and monopolized by individuals and groups which are then transmitted from one generation to the other (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). The ESOL students lack the “cultural capital” much needed to succeed in U.S. schools so they struggle to learn the new language codes along with the cultural value systems, many of which are implicit. As Delpit (1988) argued, “When implicit codes are attempted across cultures communication frequently breaks down. Each cultural group is left saying, “Why don’t those people say what they mean? As well as, “What’s wrong with them, why don’t they understand?” (p. 283).

The confusion arising from cultural differences leading to communication breakdowns have often silenced the ESOLs. Faiza said that she kept quiet in class for more than one reason. Firstly, she was learning English and it was difficult for her to follow the dialogue between teachers and students who were native speakers and then respond to them. Secondly, she was busy trying to understand and learn from the discourse which may be the ‘silent period,’ the time when most new English language learners are unable or unwilling to communicate orally in the new language. This silent behavior does not mean that students are not learning; however, it may be that they are not ready to speak (Krashen, 1985).

**Mobility: From Periphery to Center**

I started my dissertation with a question asked by Sabina, one of my ELL students: “*How did you know that Arabic is read that way? Do you think it is weird and backward?*” I did not know then, that Sabina was Arzab and Mehmet’s younger sister. It seems now, that my answer to her questions had no effect and she really accepted the superiority of the English language by rejecting her native tongue, Arabic. Sabina has started losing her Arabic conversational skills and
at home her siblings are making exceptions by speaking in English to accommodate her in the conversation. The saddest part is that none of the parents speak English and she is not retaining her native tongue; so what would be the medium of communication between Sabina and her parents? I wonder what kind of relationship will develop and continue between them?

Another girl Faiza, responded “nothing” to my question “what do you like most about the Arabic language?” Faiza’s answer shocked me immensely. The questions that immediately formed in my mind were: Does it mean that she is ashamed of her language and culture and has started hating it? Is she showing her resentment towards her native language as she is unable to defy her culture? Is it because she feels that she has missed something for not belonging to the English speaking culture and Arabic has not helped her in it? The Arab Muslim girls Sabina (sister of Arzab and Mehmet) and Faiza are not very supportive of the Arabic language and they have expressed it through their words and deeds.

While teaching Sabina as an ESL teacher, I found her to be extremely intelligent and receptive. Faiza has her dreams to go to college and become a nurse but she has yet to acquire her English language competency to be able to do that. Both these girls seem to have realized that knowledge of the Arabic language will not help them to achieve their goals in the U.S., a message that the schools and teachers send out loud and clear and perhaps the cause of their rejection of their native language. Both in school and outside the school community The Arab Muslim adolescents continuously experience the unimportance of their native language. The intimate and inseparable relationship existing between language and culture makes them feel rejected by the mainstream population in and out of school because of their (the ELLs) inferior cultures as opposed to the western cultures.
During the interview, I questioned the participants as to whether or not learning English had changed them in any way. Initially all the participants said they had not changed. I probed a little more and asked if being in the U.S. and going to school made them think and see things differently. That was the time when all the three of them expressed that their coming to the United States and learning English have made them change their behavior and also made them look at things differently. They provided a detailed description of the ways in which they changed after coming to the United States.

Faiza compared living conditions in Yemen to that of the U.S. She mentioned that the cities and the living conditions are different. The roads back in Yemen were crowded with unruly traffic as opposed to that in the United States. Both Faiza and her mother had praises for everything in the U.S. Faiza said that she could drive and that made her feel empowered. She seemed to be very excited when describing all that she was doing.

Arzab said that he felt that he does not belong here which he never felt while in Egypt and he did not remember his life in Yemen. “I feel like an outsider like in the U.S., you know… the way you feel if you go somewhere to vacation, not your home…like that…” Mehmet pretends to be more practical and does not approve of the American life-style of his friends to him they are “not serious about life.” He wants to learn English to get higher education and become successful “have a good job, good money.” But in doing so, Mehmet must also negotiate the identities that have been imposed on him. In order to negotiate one’s identities skillfully, language learning should occur in a social environment. Since, language learning involves learning the language and using it appropriately in a given situation.

Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) call this “language socialization” which consists of two parts – “acquisition of the appropriate uses of language as part of acquiring social competence,” and
understanding “how language is a medium or tool in the socialization process” (p. 167). They have identified that both these processes are intertwined and do not exist separately. Hence, the language socialization process would require the learner to use the language with an expert to gain “the knowledge, orientations, and practices that enable him or her to participate effectively and appropriately in the social life of a particular community” (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002, p. 339). The process of socialization is not unidirectional but bidirectional because it involves negotiation on the parts of both the “learner” and the “expert.” According to Garrett & Baquedano-López (2002) language is “the primary symbolic medium through which cultural knowledge is communicated and instantiated, negotiated and contested, reproduced and transformed” (p. 339). Within the scope of transformation, in certain contexts the position of the ‘novice’ and ‘expert’ can be interchanged because these categories or identities are not fixed, but rather fluid, and shift depending on the dialogic interaction.

The knowledge of English has influenced their lives. During the interviews, two of the participants declared their cultural identities as Arabic while the other participant said “half-half; I’m half Arab and half American.” What appeared to be most interesting is that the girl identified herself as “Arab-American” while the two boys said that they were culturally Arabic though they might in the future become American citizens. However, all the three of them expressed that their coming to the United States and learning English have made them change their behavior and also made them look at things differently. They provided a detailed description of the ways in which they changed after coming to the United States. They mentioned that the cities and the living conditions are different. The roads back in Yemen were crowded with unruly traffic as opposed to that in the United States. They mentioned that their school experiences were also not the same and it made them see the world in a new light. Here teachers sometimes do not give the
answers but ask the students to think and respond. They think here in the US students have more liberty and power than in Yemen or Egypt.

Faiza, Arzab and Mehmet mentioned that their school experiences in Yemen and Egypt were not the same. Schooling in the U.S. had changed them, changed their minds and it made them see the world in comparative perspective. For example, Faiza pointed out, “Here (U.S.) teachers will not tell you all the answers but ask you to think. In Yemen teachers gave you answers and you had to learn them and write the answers during taking test. School is hard over here.” In similar comparative form, Arzab observed,

You know, my religion say you can know everything by reading the Qu’ran because nothing is new, everything is in Qu’ran. Here we have debate, some will say this is good, some will say that is good and we will have to say why it is good…so it is different from studying in Arabic school in Egypt.

Learning English has made them read and know more about the world, even more about their own culture. Their ability to communicate in English has made them have more self-sufficient, self-independent because they can move around and do what they wanted. When they did not know to speak in English they were afraid to go out so learning English is like a “power” and “a gift.” Even so, they complained that the requirement for learning English and the time they have to dedicate towards it has taken away their Arabic language skills particularly the writing and reading of it.

Similar dissonance is found in other participants and their lives. For example, Faiza admits that her mother does not want her to talk about all the new things she is learning from reading magazines and from her friends ‘because sometimes I argue with my mom. She wants me to learn English to go to college and work so that I have a good life. She does not want me to become ‘American girl.’”
Arzab and Mehmet both say that there are many things they are now exposed to which goes totally against their religion and religious belief. So, they would not want their younger brothers and sisters to read and see those books that may confuse them (the siblings). With maturity their siblings would be able to know and make right choices for themselves.

To sum up, it can be said that acquisition of English opens up new ways of looking at things. It gives the opportunity for an alternative language with which to have access to the world. It also helps in understanding the host country’s culture and cultural values. Thus, access to the English language will provide them mobility to move from the peripheral or novice position to center or expert position. However, it also creates familial, linguistic, cultural and religious dissonance, necessitating multiple identities.

Multiple Identities

According to Holland (1998), the demise of the privileged concept of bounded, discrete, coherent cultures have made room for the recognition that people are exposed to competing and differentially powerful and authoritative discourses and practices of the self. The findings of this study show that when immigrants enter a host country where the language and culture is totally different from their native language and cultures they are required to interact in the new society in many complex situations by conscious or unconscious ways of making oneself fit into the context. For instance, when Faiza is with her entire family she speaks in Arabic and behaves in ways that her parents approve of. But once she is with her American friends not only does she change her language, she also speaks and acts differently to become a part of the group. If she is in a friend’s house, she takes off her hijab and also dances to Indian music – things that her parents would not approve of. She joins her friends when they talk about their boyfriends, a topic which is totally prohibited in her home. Similarly, she says that she has adopted ways to behave
in the school, which is different from the ways she had to follow in Yemen. In Yemen, as a girl she was totally secluded from the boys, here she attends classes with other boys and can also speak to them which she could not in Yemen.

Arzab also said how he was a different person when he was at home with his family and when he was in school. At home he is a very affectionate brother to his younger siblings. He plays and laughs with them. I was amazed to see a fifteen year old so close and caring to the two youngest sisters. But in school and to his friends he was the “tough soccer player.” He said that he even talked differently with his close friends in the soccer field from his other friends at school.

It is imperative from the findings that identities portrayed here are by no means to be considered as static or permanent. “Identity is fluid, partly situational, and thus constantly under construction, negotiation, and modification” (Singer, 2000, p. 311). Since, the positions and the power relations of the students in their social world are constantly changing their identities are also in the process of “being.”

Implications

This study intends to inform the ways in which language and religious minorities such as the Arab Muslim adolescents experience the entire process of learning English and American culture leading to formation of their ‘selves’ to succeed in their host culture. They need cultural and linguistic negotiations in order to help them make the necessary transitions from “the world of the home to the one at school” (Fillmore and Snow, 2000. p.12). It would provide a framework for teachers to understand the cultural and religious background of the Arab Muslim adolescents in order to include them in the mainstream classroom while providing special projects as teaching and learning tools for the Arab-Muslim ESOL students. In addition, the
study could help mainstream teachers to effectively educate these minority students. Fillmore and Snow (2000) have commented, “Too few teachers share or know about their students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds, or understand the challenges inherent in learning to speak and read Standard English” (p.3).

The commonly held idea of the monolingual mainstream teachers in US classrooms is to mainstream language minority ELL students through English only policy and enculturation. Teachers holding this view often ask parents to stop conversing in their native language at home and change to English so that children do not have exposure to their L1 and are forced to learn English. From the discussion part of this chapter, it can be observed that the educators’ assumptions and the students’ ideas are in contradiction giving rise to tensions as ESOL students negotiate their identities in their home and school lives. The teachers and the ELLs have opposing ideas regarding the meaning of literacy in the dominant discourse. Teachers pressurize the language minority ESOL students to lose their native language and their ethnic identity and become enculturated or assimilated in the dominant culture and students resist this pressure and seek to achieve literacy in the dominant discourse in their own terms. It would probably be a good idea for educators to reassess their views with regards to immigrant identities and assimilation with reference to ESL education and to explore alternative ways in which to offer literacy in the dominant discourse.

With reference to the arguments made in Chapters I and II on the relationships between language, culture and identity the study supports the importance of valuing the ESOL students’ native languages. In the case of the Arab Muslims their language, culture and religious identities are intricately tied. Speaking Arabic is a marker of Arabic identity and establishes relationships with family, community, and culture. All the three participants in this study are learning English
and living in the U.S., which they acknowledged have made an impact in their lives. Yet, they claim to be Arab Americans reflecting that both Arabic and English hold critical places within the discourse.

All the three students are invested in learning English, the Arabic language remained important to the boys but it was not valued by the girl as she had replied that there was nothing she liked about the Arabic language. In Chapter II, it has been discussed that maintenance of the students’ native language benefits the students cognitively and also helps in constructing positive self-identity, which is a prerequisite for successful learning. But the high school, which is attended by these participants, has an English only approach to ESL education and as an Arab Muslim they feel that their culture and religion are devalued. Arabic language, which is read and written from right to left, is further treated as strange and deviant and thus, poses as a problem (Ruiz, 1984, 1988).

As Gee argued that language learning which is learning the discourse cannot be learned without participation. It is by following and participating in discourse that ELLs will be able to acquire competency in the English language. Within this understanding ESL programs should be created as “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) where ELLs will participate with teachers and students who are native speakers of English or those who are experts in the field. The ELL students who are recognized as “legitimate peripheral participants” in the dominant discourse will slowly become mainstreamed through increased participation. This also supports the theory of “scaffolding” that the novice requires from the expert to achieve higher level of attainment.
Recommendation

Educators and policy-makers should strive for “dual language education” program in schools, as research (Collier & Thomas, 2004) indicates that dual language education is effective for all. Implementation of dual language program in the schools will not only help in removing the stigma from language minority students in the ESL program but would create an environment where other languages and cultures would be appreciated. Teachers and students would both benefit from true bilingualism and it would also be profitable in the present condition of globalization.

This idea of Dual Language Education, I would argue is also compatible with the United State’s Diversity Immigrant Visa Policy, which is as follows:

The Congressionally mandated Diversity Immigrant Visa Program makes available 50,000 diversity visas (DV) annually, drawn from random selection among all entries to persons who meet strict eligibility requirements from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States.

As a result, every year at least 50,000 people from diverse linguistic and cultural background enter the US legally which becomes challenging for schools and communities to cope with. A bilingual or dual language program could be a worthy solution.

Recommendation for Further Studies

Research in the field of identity construction on high school students is rare. There are even fewer studies conducted on Arab Muslim students and their identity construction in high school. Sarroub (2005) has conducted her research on high school Yemeni Muslim girls but has excluded the boys. She has done a longitudinal research showing their struggles and frustrations in trying to remain the ideal Yemeni Muslim women as expected by their families and community and at the same time earning higher grades in school. She has not provided the details on how these adolescent girls negotiate between the two worlds.
Secondly, a difference in perspectives in ethnic identity construction is observed on the basis of gender. Since this research was conducted with only three students, one girl and two boys, further studies involving a greater number of students of both genders would bring a greater support to identity construction as more gender specific.

Similar research needs to be conducted in high school to have more in-depth study that would produce more valuable information in the field of SLA and identity construction which could impact the ESL policy in schools. It could also provide a framework for teachers to create new curricula or integrate special projects as teaching and learning tools for the Arab-Muslim ESOL students.

For my future research plan, I would like to use the postcolonial and sociocultural theoretical frameworks in studying identity construction in high school students in the postcolonial setting of India.

Limitations of the Study

The present research used participant observation, and interviews on a limited number of students, thus the findings must be understood within a specific boundary. In order to have a more generalized understanding of the Arab Muslim ESOL students’ identity negotiation research must involve a larger number of participants of the same religio-ethnic group.

Summary

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine the research question through the stories of three Arab Muslim high school students in the ESL program. It was to explore and give meanings to their experiences of being Arabs and Muslims in the ESL program and their identity construction through negotiating and mediating familial and educational contexts. Operating from a poststructuralist view of identity rather than an essentialist view, a review of literature
was conducted through socioculturalist and postcolonialist theoretical frameworks. Theoretical disciplines associated with ethnicity, identities, literacy, language and culture and the relationships shared among these factors of human lives. It also reviewed the intersections of race, gender and socioeconomic factors in identity construction. The dissertation included a qualitative case study methodology. Several sampling techniques and data sources, modes of analysis, and triangulation strategies, were used to establish and maintain credibility, reliability and validity of the research. Analysis produced six embedded themes. Finally, a discussion of the findings of the research study in relation to the research question and the implications of these findings for future research and scholarship in the field of Second Language Acquisition and educational field were provided.
REFERENCES


176


