

**The impact of multilingualism & language learning experiences on an
immigrant woman's identity: A case study**

by

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ABSTRACT

Following the interpretive qualitative approach, the present study strives to give voice to an immigrant woman by telling her story about the development of her identity as a multilingual learner of English. Using multiple methods of data collection (in-depth interviews, informal observations, documents, artifact, member checks, and peer debriefings), this research attempts to shed light on how an immigrant woman makes sense out of her social world through the languages she uses, their function in her life, the meanings she assigns to each and the role of learning languages on her multilingual identity.

Some SLA investigators have argued that because mainstream SLA theorists have paid little attention to and not adequately addressed such language learning experiences as inequitable power relations between language learners and native speakers, there are major gaps in theory in reference to the relationship between the individual language learner and his/her social surroundings. For the participant in this study, these language learning experiences have been leading factors in the development of her multilingual identity and have been an affective factor for her acquisition of English, leading to subtractive bilingualism. The findings from this study call for educational programs which foster and lay a foundation for additive bilingualism.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

I'm like a salad bowl, you know.... I don't think that I can pick one language that clearly defines me. Cause it's like, they have all contributed to who I am today and how I perform today.... It's a huge advantage [being a salad bowl] because it allows you to invite more people,..., into your life! – Malaika (10/28/03)

....So, it just kinda helps to be like a chameleon, you know, depending on where you are, you kinda have to just adjust to it. I strongly believe in that! – Malaika (10/28/03)

This is how the participant in this study, Malaika¹, described herself when asked to define her multilingual identity. We all know what a *salad bowl* is – a mixture of different ingredients, flavors, forms, and colors. Even though all of these unique substances possess their own peculiar characteristics, they all come together to blend into one extravagant and captivating flavor. For Malaika, being multilingual is being able to communicate with “people from all walks of life” and her *salad bowl* identity allows her to do namely that; she can “pull out” of “the bowl” the languages she needs in the appropriate situation with the particular individuals. These languages which comprise her multilingual identity allow her to serve and benefit people which brings her a unique flavor of satisfaction.

A *chameleon*, on the other hand, is an ectoderm animal, whose temperatures are controlled from outside its body and adapts according to the environment. For Malaika, it is that social environment, her social relations, her social networks and

¹ Pseudonym, chosen by the participant, which, according to her, means *angel* in Swahili; all names and places in the US have been given a pseudonym to protect the privacy of the respondent.

experiences that reflect into the core of her multilingual identity. Through the impact of her social experiences she had encountered, Malaika has grown accustomed to adapting to her social environment by reacting to it through her use of different languages.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research: Identity & the social world

There seems to be a growing interest in SLA in researching immigrant identity and their social world. Much of this research has been conducted by SLA investigators following the critical and poststructuralist epistemologies (Day, 2002; Duff, Wong, & Early, 2000; Ibrahim 1999; Norton, 2000; Wang, 1999), many of whom have questioned much of SLA's theory in regards to language learning and identity.

Most twentieth-century linguistics and mainstream SLA research has been influenced by the Cartesian assumption of separateness of mind and body, as well as self and other (Day, 2002, p. 8). In addition, Saussure's studies on language and assumptions that the *langue*, which is a rule-governed system of signs, should be studied apart from the *parole*, which implies language as social practice, have also been leading suppositions in this field (Day, 2002; Dunn & Lantolf, 1998; Wardhaugh, 2002). Similarly, Chomsky has made the distinction between

competence (the language knowledge characterizing the idealized native speaker) and *performance* (use of language in context). In the 1980's, the interactionists saw the importance and began to investigate how language experiences contribute to language learning, the notions of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) and negotiation of meaning (Ellis, 1990; Long & Porter, 1985; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987).

More recently, the argument of several contemporary scholars in SLA (e.g., Norton, 1995, 1997, 2000; Day, 2002) has been that the relationship between language and identity should be seriously taken by L2 teachers and theorists, even though, many theoretically-oriented linguists, such as Noam Chomsky, may assume that questions of identity are not central to theories of language. In addition, Norton (2000) argues that because SLA theorists have paid little attention to and not adequately addressed such language learning experiences as inequitable power relations between language learners and native speakers, there are major gaps in theory in reference to the relationship between the individual language learner and his/her social surroundings. For my participant, these language learning experiences have been leading factors in the development of her multilingual identity and have been an affective factor for her acquisition of English.

Purpose of the study

This study focuses on giving voice to an immigrant woman by telling her story about the development of her identity as a multilingual learner of English. The purpose of the study is to attempt to shed light on how an immigrant woman makes sense out of her social world through the languages she uses, their function in her life, the meanings she assigns to each and the role of learning languages on her multilingual identity.

Background of the study

This study was driven by my interests in understanding the challenges involved with the acquisition of English because of my own background in learning languages. In addition, I became engaged in conducting this research to be able to better understand the challenges involved with learning English, that my mother, who has recently immigrated to the US, is experiencing now. This topic became the focus of a qualitative methods class project which I took during Fall 2003, thinking it would be just a pilot study for my thesis. I devoted the entire semester to collecting and trying to make sense out of the exhaustive amount of data which I had gathered

from my fieldwork. This project became not only the object of my course work for the class, but also influenced me personally as well as my work as a student researcher. The amount of data and discoveries were certainly not to be all included in a small scale class project. Therefore, I decided to continue this work as the focus of my thesis.

From the perspective of qualitative research, there is a necessity for the investigator to be reflexive and reveal “her investment and interest in the research” (Day, 2002, p.1). As someone whose identity has been greatly influenced by multilingualism, along with the process of language acquisition, I was intrigued when Malaika suggested the importance of these topics in her own life, and decided to delve more deeply into her experiences.

The researcher: Reflections

Doing this work empowered me not only as a researcher seeking to tell Malaika’s story, but also helped me look into my own “tale” and rediscover and learn about me; who I am as a multilingual immigrant woman, whose identity has eminently been impacted by language learning. This self-rediscovery, I believe, has given me insider’s access and better understanding of Malaika’s story. Without a

doubt, my identity and my role as a mediator have affected my portrayal of Malaika; yet, I hope that they have even more so aided in closer representing how she wanted her narrative to unfold.

* * *

I grew up in Bulgaria while the country was still under communist control. One of the platforms of communism was extensive education, which to a great extent involved substantial training in and acquisition of other languages although multilingualism is not an official policy of the country. As a result, I began learning my second language at the age of 5. It was in kindergarten where I was first introduced to vocabulary in Russian. Then at the age of 10 I began studying German as well. As part of the curriculum at school, students were required to take at least three hours of Russian and three hours of a Western language training per week. So, by the end of high school I had years of language schooling and experience in two languages other than my mother tongue.

During my first year of college, I began learning English. The setting was quite different from my other language experiences. I was exposed to intense instruction, which consisted of five days a week, 6 hours per day language training.

I was immersed in the language for most of each day, even though I was living in Bulgaria. My motivation for acquiring English was very high. The rest of my college education was to be conducted in English; that included all textbooks, all lectures, all class-discussions, all homework. Therefore, if I wanted to be successful, I had to learn the language. Later, when I met my husband and I came to the US to begin my life with him here, my goals became even greater. I knew then that if I was going to live in America and further pursue a higher education, I had to become proficient in the language. This is where my experience and situation begin to cross even more so with that of my participant's.

Even though I did not grow up in a country where multilingualism was an official policy, similarly to Malaika by the time I arrived in the US in 1997, I had a command of three languages other than my mother tongue. Similarly to her experiences, English has become the dominant language in my multilingual identity. Today I use English more than any other language, including my mother tongue. As a result of the new social environment that both Malaika and I live in today, we both have often posed similar goals which have been presupposed by that social context we have entered into and become the new ambience for our identity.

Research stance

This case study follows the theoretical background of the interpretive qualitative approach. This approach lies on the theoretical tradition of social interactionism (Esterberg, 2002). For social interactionists, people act toward things, depending on the meaning it holds for them. Meanings are based on learned behavior; in other words, we assign meaning to things based on social interactions (Merriam, 2002). On the other hand, “meanings are created (and changed) through a process of interpretation” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 15). In my analysis, I have closely followed the interpretive approach and Patton’s belief (1985), that qualitative research:

is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting – what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting. The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (p.1)

Researchers following the interpretive tradition do not go into the field with a preconceived and constructed theory and idea of how the participants’ world works; rather, they try to understand the meaning subjects assign to their social world, and interpret it through an inductive process (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002). It is not in our interest as researchers to “bleach human behavior of the very properties that

interest us before we begin to examine it" (Geertz, 1973, p. 17). Culture is most effective as a system, not symbols in isolation; "whatever, or wherever, symbol systems 'in their own terms' may be, we gain empirical access to them by inspecting events, not by arranging abstracted entities into unified patterns" (Geertz, 1973, p. 17). I took this approach and presented first the report of Malaika's story, what Geertz (1973) refers to as *inscriptio*, or *thick description*, followed by the interpretation. I followed this research framework in order to understand how my subject makes sense out of her social world and identity.

Research questions

As I first began my fieldwork, I was interested in investigating the challenges involved with adult language acquisition. More specifically, I was hoping to determine the linguistic difficulties that the participant had experienced while learning English. As I began my work the focus of the study was shifted by my interactions with the respondent. Because she learned the language almost 15 years ago, it was nearly impossible for her to remember details about the linguistic difficulties she encountered. Rather, her narratives kept leading to revelations about her multilingual identity and the influence her English language learning

experiences have had on its development over time and space. Therefore, I repositioned my questions and focused on investigating:

- 1) How do Maliaka's languages frame her identity?
 - What languages does she speak?
 - What are the contexts in which she uses each of her languages?
 - What meanings does she assign to each of her languages?
- 2) How have her English language learning experiences in the monolingual environment impacted the development of her multilingual identity?

Summary

In this chapter I presented a brief introduction and background of the topic of this research, history of SLA research views on identity and the social world, the researcher's reflections, background and research stance, as well as the research questions of this study. In the following chapter, I present literature in the fields of SLA and sociolinguistics, which relates to the topic of my research and the research questions I have posed.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the chapter

In this chapter I present some of the literature and concepts that are relative to this study. I begin with a discussion on language as a marker of repertoire of social identities. Next, I present an overview of the relationship between multilingualism and identity. Finally, I look at how the social world relates to, first, language learning, and, then, to identity.

Language: Marker for repertoire of social identities

The notion of repertoire of social identities, or multiple identities, is a topic often discussed in sociolinguistics (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001; McNamara, 1997; Sridhar, 1996; Wardhaugh, 2002). This repertoire includes context-bound identities, such as family, profession, class, gender, sexuality, age, etc. In addition, these multiple identities are constructed and negotiated namely through language, and are often signaled and acknowledged in specific interactions; therefore, they need to be explained (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001; Ochs, 1993). Similarly, in the case of my

respondent, I have attempted to explain her context-bound, multiple identities, which are signaled by the use of her different languages in specific interactions. In other words, I have reported the different meanings she assigns to each one of her languages, based on the contexts and people she uses them with, and the way in which they frame her multilingual identity.

Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) synthesize the connection between language and identity:

While sociopsychological approaches view identities as stable and unchangeable, poststructuralist scholarship theorizes identities as multiple, dynamic, and subject to change, and the relationship between language and identity as mutually constitutive: On the one hand, languages supply the terms and other linguistic means by which identities are expressed, and, on the other, the linguistic resources individuals use serve to index their identities. (p. 249)

It is the language a person uses in a given situation that reveals that person's identity. It is the languages we use and the meanings we assign to each that reveal who we are, and who we associate ourselves with. Identity seems to combine the intimate or personal world with the social world and networks (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cane, 1998). One's identities exhibit what one cares about and care for what goes on around them (Holland et al, 1998). For Malaika, it is her multilingual identity that allows her to have "salad bowl" and "chameleon" identities, which

demonstrate who she is and what she cares about in both her intimate and social worlds.

The language choices that we make indicate our social relations which are based on shared or, for that matter, unshared group membership. This, on the other hand, assists in the construction of social identity in a particular context (Hansen & Liu, 1997). According to Hansen and Liu (1997), the interactional sociolinguists including Gumperz and Heller, believe that to a large extent language maintains, and establishes social identity and ethnicity. Returning to the notion of repertoire of social identities, the varieties² within a linguistic repertoire “serve to symbolize the differing social identities which members may assume” (Hansen & Liu, 1997, p. 568). Similarly, Malaika’s different languages represent different nuances of her multilingual identity.

Multilingualism & identity

There are many settings and variations in which multilingualism exists. Very often the terms *bilingualism* and multilingualism are used interchangeably³, referring to “the knowledge or use of more than one language by an individual or a

² *Variety* throughout the study refers to a particular language.

³ This also applies for the use of these two terms throughout this study.

community” (Sridhar, 1996, p. 47). Multilingualism is often studied both as individual and social phenomenon. In the former, the focus is on an individual’s acquisition of two or more languages as a child or later, where as when studying the latter,

one is concerned with its institutional dimensions, that is, with issues such as the status and roles of the languages in a given society, attitudes towards languages, determinants of language choice, the symbolic and practical uses of the languages, and the correlation between language use and social factors such as ethnicity, religion, and class. (Sridhar, 1996, p. 47)

In my study, I use a combination of the two. I look at Malaika’s individual experiences with the acquisition of English and also discuss her multilingual identity as a social phenomenon. In addition, I look at these two aspects of multilingualism and relate them to the notions of *additive* and *subtractive* bilingualism. On the one hand, *additive bilingualism* is maintaining and enhancing of the primary language simultaneously with developing abilities in the new language, including reading and writing skills (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). On the other hand, *subtractive bilingualism* refers to when an individual fully develops in a second language, while losing her/his primary language(s) and eventually shifting toward a total loss of the mother tongue. As a result, language use seems to be a crucial aspect of the on-going construction, negotiation and renegotiation of identity in multilinguals (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001).

Language learning & the social world

Much attention has been paid to investigating language learning success, judging it based on the learners' motivation, personality, attitudes toward the target language and speakers, as well as levels of anxiety . Often it is not considered that such affective factors are socially conditioned and constructed by unequal relations of power which may change over time and space (Norton, 2000, p. 5). It is through language that people negotiate a sense of self within and across different contexts in their social world at different points in time. It is also through language that learners are denied or granted access to powerful social networks that allow for opportunities to speak the target language (Heller, 1987). For my participant, such language learning experiences have been a prominent factor to her success and as a result to the development of her identity over time and space.

Identity & the social world

Researchers in the fields of psychology and linguistics, recognize identity as being reflected by our social relations. SLA researchers following the critical and poststructural frameworks also view identity as socially situated. For them because

language is a social practice which takes place within power-bound relationships, learners should be viewed as complex identities that change over time and space as impacted by such relationships (Day, 2002; Duff et al, 2000; Norton, 1995, 1997, 2000; Wang, 1999). Some researchers have critiqued SLA theorists in their failure to develop a theory of social identity that adequately addresses the language learner and the context of language learning (Norton, 1995). Norton (1995, 1997, 2000) argues that SLA theorists have not sufficiently explored “how inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities L2 learners have to practice the target language outside the classroom” (p. 12).

In this study I have adapted Norton’s (1995, 1997, 2000) definition of identity, which I believe comprises the relationship between the learner and the social sphere in which she/he functions. Norton’s definition states that identity is the way in which people understand how they relate to the world, the development of this relationship extended over time and space, and how people envision their future in terms of opportunities and possibilities.

On the one hand, identity is an ongoing process of self negotiation, where power and belonging are in the center of it (Wenger, 1998); how we identify ourselves by engaging in the practices of a community and how we imagine our place in it. On the other hand, identity relates to desire (Day, 2002; Norton, 1995,

1997, 2000). This desire can be one for recognition, affiliation, and security and safety. In reality all of these desires also directly involve our relations with others. As a result, a connection seems to exist between desires and power. This relationship influences how we view ourselves in relation to the world and what our possibilities for the future are (Norton, 1995, 1997, 2000). Similarly, Malaika's language learning experiences as a result of power relations of her new social world in the US, have influenced the renegotiation of her identity and possibilities for the future over time and space.

Summary

In this chapter I discussed the literature and concepts related to the research questions and topic of this study; namely, how language learning and multilingualism contribute to the learner's identity. More specifically, as it relates to my first research question, I pointed out that some researchers consider language to be a marker of the learner's repertoire of social identities, by signaling each one in different contexts and interactions. These languages that form the learner's multilingual identity and the negotiation of self as influenced by the social experiences may lead to such notions in multilinguals, as *additive* or *subtractive*

bilingualism. In addition, in relation to my second research question, I discussed the relationship between language learning and the learner's social world and how that social environment, with its power relations, impacts the learners negotiation of self over time and space.

In the following chapter I briefly present the participant of the study. In addition, I discuss in detail the methods of data collection and data analysis of this research.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

Overview of the chapter

This chapter contains three main parts. In the first part, I briefly discuss the choice of participant for the study. The second part of this chapter gives a detailed description of the data gathering process used for this study, including an account of the specific methods I have used to collect and transcribe the data. The third part focuses on a discussion of the methods used to analyze the data.

Part I – The participant

In search of a subject for the study, a friend referred me to Malaika, a 26-year old African immigrant woman, born and raised in the former Zaire, now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). My original intent was to find a subject who was a recent immigrant to the US, and was currently taking English instruction. Due to difficulties in finding someone with these attributes, who was willing to participate in my study, I redefined and narrowed down the characteristics for the choice of subject for my study. I was now looking for a participant who was an

immigrant woman, and had not studied English prior to her coming to the US.

Malaika seemed to fit these attributes. After a few telephone conversations, which served to introduce the nature of the study and build trust with Malaika, I met her for the first time at our initial interview in October 2003.

Part II – Data collection

Throughout the span of the data collection, I met with the respondent seven times at her home, a total of 13 contact hours; this does not include e-mails, telephone conversations and informal visits with the participant. Following what qualitative researchers (Merriam, 2002; Norton, 2000; Wolcott, 1994) define as primary methods of data collection in basic interpretive qualitative studies, I collected the data for this study through interviews, informal observations and document analysis, which took place between October of 2003 and February of 2004. In addition, at the end of November of 2003, I conducted one member check session with Malaika in the form of an interview, asking her to comment on my interpretations and confirming questionable data; another, at the end of December of 2003, where she was asked to read the rough draft of some of the analysis and comment on it via e-mail; as well as many telephone conversations between October

of 2003 and the end of the study in April of 2004, that were spent discussing Malaika's representation in the study, my interpretations, and confirming factual data. In November of 2003, I participated also in two peer debriefings with two colleagues, asking them to comment and question my findings – one during the course of the data collection, and the other after the data collection; and one peer debriefing with a fellow colleague from the TESL/Applied Linguistics program at Iowa State University, after I completed the first draft of the research at the beginning of April of 2004. These two secondary methods, along with multiple primary methods of data collection (called triangulation), according to Merriam (2002), are strategies often used “to shore up the internal validity of a study” (p. 25) and “to ensure for consistency and dependability or reliability” (p. 27), which are an essential part of high qualitative research.

In-depth interviews

The majority of the data was collected through semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are conducted around a general list of questions on a predetermined topic; however, the researcher does not closely follow the order or the exact wording of the questions. On the other hand,

unstructured interviews examine a topic area with no specific predetermined questions – begins with open-ended question and follows the lead of the participant's narrations (Esterberg, 2002; Luttrell, 2000; Merriam, 2002). My interviews were a combination of the two. I usually began the interview by following the semi-structured method, and then when appropriate switched to unstructured, when my respondent's narrative would lead me to an important area, which I was not planning on discussing initially; in these instances I posed follow-up questions, drawing on the participant's narration.

Before beginning to collect the data, I developed a list of questions (see Appendix A) that I thought were necessary to explore the topic of challenges involved with second language acquisition. I constructed these questions based on studies which I had read, that dealt with similar topics; particularly, an MA thesis (Lahtela, 1995) which had been one of the inspirations for my pilot study. However, these questions changed as the topic of my study shifted. In the end, I conducted a total of 5 hours of audio-taped in-depth interviews, which were also transcribed (a total of 197 type-written pages – see sample in Appendix B).

Informal observations

During my visits to Malaika's home for the interview sessions, we usually spent between one hour and a half to two hours together; however, typically at each meeting half hour to an hour was spent in chatting (approximately a total of 4 hours throughout the entire study). The informal observations occurred namely during this chatting time before and/or after the taped interviews, and consisted of interactions with her roommate and friends, preparing tea or dinner, and phone conversations, which were usually interruptions during the taped interviews; these interruptions were not recorded, however. These observations were insightful in receiving a better understanding of how the participant interacts in informal situations. Malaika granted me her permission to use the data from and include these informal observations in the analysis of my paper. However, these observations have not been audio-taped.

Documents & artifacts

In addition to interviews and informal observations, I used two forms of what I have classified as private documents and artifacts (Esterberg 2002). Documents can

be written, oral, visual, or cultural artifacts and serve as an unobtrusive form of studying human behavior (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002). I used freewriting and collage construction to examine the participant's views and feelings of language and identity. These two forms were not a main source of data collection and analysis; rather, they have been used for cross-reference or comparison of data, and mainly for establishing rapport and stronger relationship between the researcher and the participant, which is critical in qualitative research.

- *Freewriting*

The first documents collected were two instances of freewriting. This form of writing involves exploring your own subconscious thoughts on an assigned topic by recording whatever comes to your mind on the subject for a set period of time (e.g., 10 minutes) without stopping for anything. It implies that you are to not pay attention to grammar or punctuation, and you should record even thoughts such as, "I can't think of anything," over and over again, until something else comes to your mind. This form of writing is often used in composition instruction as a form of topic exploration and determining what one already knows and feels about an area of interest (Lunsford & Connors, 2001; Connors & Glenn, 1999). Some researchers suggest that this technique allows writers to get in touch with their subconscious

selves, and to elicit subjects to which the conscious mind may not have easy access (Connors & Glenn, 1999). Because freewriting allows for a concentration on writing without worrying what others may think of it, and illustrates the subconscious processing of the mind, I decided to use this method as an alternative form of data collection. My intent was to explore what Malaika's "purest" cognitions on the central topics of the study were, before she had had time to rationalize them in the form of an oral response, where pausing allows time for thinking through an answer.

For the first freewriting (see Appendix C), the participant was assigned to write on her own time before the following interview session, on the topic "Identity;" whereas the second one was done in my presence, writing for 5 minutes on the topic "Language." The second freewriting was performed by me as well, to create solidarity, and thus decrease the possibility of unequal power relations between me, the researcher, (who otherwise could be taken as having the role of a teacher) and the respondent (who could feel as a student). Researchers suggest that "the preservation of distance and hierarchy between interviewer and interviewee makes for poor interviews. How can researchers expect intimacy when they are not willing to reciprocate" (Esterberg, 2002, p. 92)? By simultaneously writing with Malaika, and sharing with her my own freewriting, I wanted to insure her trust and

confidence in sharing her own freewriting with me, and also eliminate the possibility of unequal power relations between the two of us.

- *Collage*

The last method of data collection, creating a collage, was intended for similar reasons. On several occasions she shared that she is a visual learner and it is much easier for her to remember and comprehend matters when she creates an image in her head. For instance, here is how she described the way she learns new vocabulary:

Well, I look at the meaning and try to either create a [visual] device for me to remember, which is just try to use it in a sentence then, just kinda, I don't know, create an image of it so that I know what it means... (10/20/03)

On another occasion, she shared that it is difficult for her to understand directions without seeing a map or creating a visual image of where and how things are situated. When I shared this with two of my peer debriefing colleagues during the process of data collection, they suggested that I should add a visual aspect to my data gathering methods.

I used this as my rationale to incorporate a visual element as a means of data collection. As a result I presented to my participant a variety of old magazines (*National Geographic, Women's World, Ebony, Vogue, The New Yorker, Times*, to name a

few), from which I asked her to select and cut out images and headings, which she thought best represented her and her identity (who she thinks she is) (see Appendix D). I did the same thing about me, simultaneously with her. It took us two meetings and a total of 4 hours to complete this task.

When the collages were finished, I shared my ideas behind my creation and asked Malaika to do the same. I have used her artifact to cross analyze with what she has shared with me during the interviews about her identity. I intended this method more as a cross reference and another way of encouraging my participant to explore her own construction of self and identity. The conversations and descriptions of these meetings were audio-taped; however, later, when I was ready to transcribe them, I discovered that nothing had been recorded. This is the fear of every qualitative researcher, which is why I use other means of recording, such as taking fieldnotes and field journal records. Since I was performing the task simultaneously with the participant, I was unable to take field notes; however, I have recorded her response in my field journal, and I have used the data from these sessions to cross reference to the rest of the data collected. This activity was a great way to establish deeper relationship with my participant and actually sparked some of the more honest and personal conversations. I felt that this was when my respondent opened up the most and had more opportunities to question me about

some of the issues I had asked her to discuss during our interviews. It was then that I felt a stronger relationship between us and ultimately a greater trust was established.

Field journal

I also kept a field journal (see sample in Appendix E). After each meeting I tried to write about my impressions, feelings, observations and initial analytical thoughts about the data, setting and my subject. I kept the journal in the form of a Word document and I continued adding to it as I kept on listening to the tapes and working with the interview transcripts, the documents and artifact. A field journal is a way of both becoming aware of one's own biases and discovering and examining one's feelings and emotional reactions to the fieldwork as a whole (participants, setting, and study). It also allows for an increased awareness of the manner in which biases, feelings and emotional reactions have influenced the analysis of the data. According to Kleinman (1991), "If you do not [keep an account of them], your feelings will still shape the research process, but you will not know how" (p. 184). Keeping an account of them, has helped question the voice I have

used in the report of my research and as a result recognize my tone in the report.

This has assisted me in my attempt to better represent my respondent and her voice.

Member checks & peer debriefings

Member checks and peer debriefings are common strategies used to ensure validity in qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). Member checks can be conducted throughout the course of the study, by the researcher asking the participant to comment on his or her interpretation of the data. When reading the analysis, I assumed that my participant should be able to recognize her experience in my interpretations, and/or suggest some fine tuning to better capture her perspectives (Merriam, 2002). These member checks were invaluable. I saw a different side of Malaika and her willingness to share her story. She was very particular about the way I represent her and was able to suggest what my report was missing of who she was. For example, after reading my first draft of the analysis, Malaika was disappointed that I had not pointed out at the time, that she has now adapted to American culture and the way in which this has impacted her identity. This remark brought a whole new perspective to the analysis of the data. Even though I had

intentionally asked my respondent about her acculturation, I somehow did not consider her comments about it and missed a big part of who she believed she was.

Peer debriefings, on the other hand, are done by a colleague or a fellow student, who is asked to scan the data and based on it make comments and assess whether the interpretations are plausible. I began conducting peer debriefings, as well as member checks, in the early stages of the data collection, which I found to be very useful and important part of my research. I continued using these two strategies throughout the completion of this project. The peer debriefings were conducted in three sessions. During the first two sessions, I met with two colleagues,⁴ once during my data collection, and once immediately following the data collection, and shared with them my experiences, feelings, initial interpretations and ideas about my study. The third session was conducted with another M.A. TESL student, after the completion of the first draft of my thesis. My colleagues were able to point out and question my biases, as well as provide key suggestions for improving my work as a qualitative researcher. For example, it was during the first peer debriefing session, that I shared and was encouraged in my

⁴ Both Ph.D. were students at Iowa State University, one in Higher Education, and the other in Textile and Clothing. As part of a qualitative research method's class we were taking at the time of my data collection, we were required to conduct peer debriefing sessions. I used this time to discuss with them the data collection of my thesis.

hunch to redirect the focus of my study, and follow the lead of the story of my respondent, telling it her way.

Part II – Data analysis

After I completed the data gathering, I transcribed the tapes, conducted the member-checks and peer-revisions. I then cross-referenced the data and identified the common themes. Even though my original attempts were to focus on challenges involved with language learning, the focus of my study was broadened. Because it had been very long since Malaika had studied English, she did not remember many of the details around her acquisition of the language. Instead, her narratives redirecting the topic of the study making the main focus multilingual identity and the influence her English language learning experiences have had on its development over time and space.

I analyzed the data inductively “to identify the recurring patterns or common themes that cut across the data” (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). Qualitative researchers suggest that investigators should immerse themselves into the data and become intimate with it, by first reading it over and over again. The next step is coding. Coffey and Atkinson present three basic procedures of qualitative coding, “(a)

noticing relevant phenomena, (b) collecting examples of those phenomena, and (c) analyzing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures" (1996, p. 29).

The very first step of the analysis took place during the interviews and meetings with my respondent, as well as during the peer debriefing sessions with my colleagues. At this initial stage of analysis, I paid close attention to the lead of Malaika's narratives and developed hunches and ideas about what was going on. Next, I transcribed the taped interviews, the most overwhelming and time-consuming part of the analysis. After the transcription was completed, I began to try to make sense out of the transcribed data, a process known as open coding. During this stage I worked with the data line by line identifying categories and themes which seemed interesting, without solely focusing on what I was intending to investigate (Esterberg, 2002). As I became more familiar with the data, I began to see patterns and commonalities and that was what helped me develop a more defined focus. Then, I moved on to focused coding, which involves going through the data line by line again, but now focusing on the key themes identified during the open coding (Coffey & Atkinson 1996). I continuously cross-referenced the data from the transcribed interviews, journal notes from the collage conversation sessions, the collage itself, and the freewritings. Esterberg (2002) suggests that in

order to ground initial analysis, one should look for negative cases. To do this, when I established an argument and found cases (instances) in Malaika's story, which confirmed my point, I looked for those that disconfirmed it and that helped me reexamine my analysis.

As a result, the report was organized thematically and followed the natural development of Malaika's story. I begin by presenting who she was back in her homeland, her family background, her home country, who she is today, how that is reflected by the languages she speaks, and her language learning experiences with English as a multilingual immigrant woman. Then I looked at these themes as they apply to the unified topic of this study: how multilingualism and learning a language as an immigrant woman contribute to identity.

The voice

My background has allowed me to closely approximate the experiences of my subject; as a result, at times I have had to make some decisions for the appropriate analysis of the data, based on my own experience. However, even though I have tried to remain neutral and keep a non-judgmental stance in the data gathering, this story comes with the limitations of being retold. It is inevitable that the study has been "sifted" through and shaped by my voice and rewording of Malaika's

narratives. For that same reason, in addition to trying to include as many direct quotations from the data as possible and appropriate in order to keep the voice of my subject as authentic as possible, during the process of analysis, I also tried to take an account of my position in the study, and who I am (my lens with its gender, race, and philosophical framework) as a vital part of being the mediator in this research. Throughout the process of the data collection and analysis, I have continuously tried to reevaluate and reconsider how my position and privilege were going to shape the relationship with my subject, her responses, the data collection, and ultimately the analysis of this data. As qualitative researchers (Esterberg 2002; Luttrell, 2000; Merriam 2002; Pillow 2002) remind us, our position as an investigator and how we are going to present ourselves are a big part of the quality of our study.

It seems fitting here to mention the timeframe used in the write-up of the report and conclusions of this study. Making an appropriate decision for tense choice took a series of reconsiderations and multiple drafts of the report of this study. I considered telling Malaika's story exclusively in the past. My rationalizations took into account the fact that this research would be in the past once a reader has dove into it, and "now" and "today" would no longer apply. On the other hand, I believe that if I did indeed broadcast her voice in the past only, my rationalizations above about keeping Malaika's voice as authentic as possible would

vanish. Thus, I decided to follow her narrative and use the past timeframe when she herself referred to the past, but use the present timeframe when the story discloses narratives and interpretations that apply to the time this study was conducted, fall of 2003 and spring of 2004. Thus, the audience should always keep in mind the time of the research. I also have often used the past timeframe when referring back to factual moments during the interviews; for example, to state, "Malaika shared," or "she explained."

Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the choice of participant for the study and the data gathering methods used. In addition I discussed the data analysis methods which occurred during and following the data collection for this study. I also discussed in some detail the voice of the report and choices I had to make to avoid biases. The following chapter focuses on presenting the report as related to the main conclusions of this study.

CHAPTER 4 – THE REPORT

Overview of the chapter

This entire chapter is organized thematically. I have tried to present the report in the naturally developing chronological order of Malaika's story as well as following the lead of my research questions. In part one, I introduce the participant's profile: her home country, who she was back home, her family background, and who she is today. Following her profile are the two major themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis. The first is multilingualism. Here I provide a description of the languages Malaika speaks. The second theme is language learning experiences, here I describe her ESL classroom and the challenges she experienced while acquiring English.

Part I – The participant's profile

The Democratic Republic of Congo

“... you’ve got to know where you come from before you can really move forward. Cuz without knowing your roots, to me you don’t have too much to contribute.” – Malaika (10/20/03)

Malaika was born and lived until the age of 11 in the former Zaire. Located in central Africa, the today called Democratic Republic of Congo is surrounded by Angola to the south-west; Republic of the Congo to the west, Central African Republic and Sudan to the north; Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania to the east; and Zambia to the south-east. Due to the excess mortality caused by AIDS, the country's population has a very low life expectancy, high infant mortality and death rates, and low population and growth rates. The languages spoken in the country are French, the official language; Lingala, a *lingua franca* trade language; Kingwana, a dialect of Kiswahili or Swahili; and Kikongo, Tshiluba and many other varieties of local tribal languages. Since the mid 1990's the country has been under constant civil fighting, which has contributed to major political, economic and social dismay. (<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cg.html>)

The DRC is a clear case of societal multilingualism; a country which not only has more than one languages spoken, but also a variety of dialects which can be both

mutually intelligible and unintelligible (Sridhar, 1996). Often times multilingual communities are viewed as being arranged on a hierarchy, because the different linguistic varieties are assigned different values (Sridhar, 1996). This phenomenon is demonstrated later in the discussion by the way Malaika defines her native languages and their meanings of power.

Family background

"I'm just another person trying to survive..." – Malaika (10/14/03)

Malaika spent her childhood living in Bukavu, one of the largest cities in the DRC, where she grew up with her mother, Zawadi⁵, her older sister, Imani⁶ (four years older), her older brother, Jabari⁷ (two years older), and Mwezi.⁸ Mwezi is a female cousin, two years younger than Malaika, who had lived with the family since the age of two, and was raised by Zawadi as one of her own daughters. When Malaika was two, her mother divorced her father, Joseph⁹. In addition to her

⁵ Zawadi means "gift" in Swahili.

⁶ Imani means "peace" in Swahili.

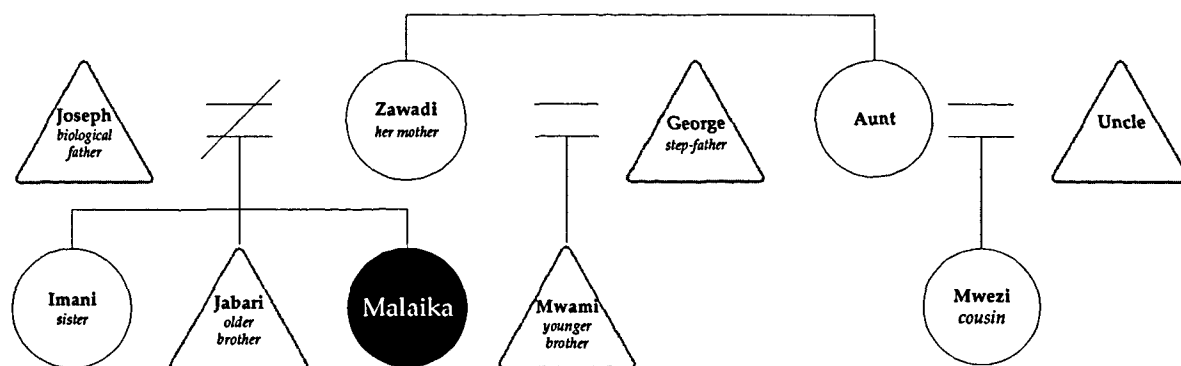
⁷ Jabari means "brave" in Swahili. He passed away when Malaika was 19 years old.

⁸ Mwezi means "moon" in Swahili.

⁹ Pseudonym. It is interesting to point out, that Malaika intentionally chose French names for both her biological father, Joseph, and her step father, George, neither of whom she had lived long with or spent much time with; where as for the rest of the family, she chose Swahili names.

immediate family, Malaika grew up living in the same home with her mother's younger brother and sister¹⁰. When Malaika and her immediate family moved to the US permanently, her mother got remarried to George (a white French man), and bore her youngest child, Mwami¹¹, in 1995. The kinship tree in Figure 1 depicts Malaika's closest family members, which she spoke of during our interviews and I have mentioned in this research.

Figure 1. Kinship diagram of Malaika's immediate family¹².



¹⁰ Even though Malaika's mother has seven siblings, I have only represented one of her younger sisters with her husband, to demonstrate the relationship between Malaika and her cousin Mwezi.

¹¹ Mwami means "king" in Swahili.

¹² The representation of the kinship symbols is described in Appendix F.

* * *

"I've got some pretty solid roots." – Malaika (10/28/03)

After Malaika's parents divorced, her mother fought to gain custody of Imani, Jabari and Malaika. Malaika shared with me that this must have been a very difficult time for her mother. The society she grew up in was patriarchal and if the parents divorced, which was highly uncommon, the father and his side of the family automatically received all rights over the children. Zawadi got very little support from her own family; they were torn between their love for their daughter and grandchildren, and fear of being ridiculed by society for the bravery of their daughter. Malaika explained:

When my mother and my father divorced, my mom was among the first women who contested the ruling of the kids automatically going, you know, to the father's side of the family. She got alienated a lot by the society... It wasn't expected of anybody to contest anything everybody was accustomed to. (10/28/03)

In the end Zawadi received full rights over all of her three children and went on to pursue her higher education and fight for herself as a teacher in a society ruled by men. She attended the French MA program in Bukavu's teachers' college, where she became French language instructor. Malaika suggested that it took a lot of

perseverance for her mother to establish herself as a woman pursuing an educational career. She shared:

A lot of people would try to discourage you, but she kept going. I mean, she was mistreated a lot, because she was a woman trying to pursue her dreams, whatever, and you know, a lot of people called her a slut, a prostitute, cause like, you know, ..., they believed that the only way for you to get ahead is by sleeping through all these men cause otherwise there's no way women should be doing what she's doing, you know. So, it's very challenging, very, but she is a tough cookie. (10/28/03)

The bravery of her mother and her strong will have been the building blocks for Malaika's strong personality and sense of identity. Because Zawadi fought for her ambitions and goals and "didn't let anybody get in her way" (Malaika), Malaika grew up believing that she could achieve anything she set her mind on:

So, that's sorta the mentality that we were kinda trained with. If you want something, you go get it. Don't worry what society thinks of you... (10/28/03)

Malaika holds the position that one should stand up for herself and what she believes in. Her mother's assertiveness and courage seem to have impacted Malaika and emboldened her with confidence. She disclosed that Zawadi's strong personality and lack of fear to pursue and accomplish have helped her keep her strength and spirit while going through the challenges of learning English and have ultimately led to her success.

Off to a new land

*"When we came here, when we found out we were coming to America, I was like, yes!
I get to see Superman!" – Malaika (10/14/03)*

After a short visit to the US in 1983 in search and exploration of a Ph. D. program, Malaika's mother decided to move to the US and pursue graduate school. Leaving all relatives and friends behind, at the age of 11, Malaika, along with her mother and older siblings¹³, left her homeland in the summer of 1988 to move to Couville¹⁴, Tennessee, where Zawadi would enter into a Ph. D. program in French and Linguistics. Zawadi had built a good career by then. Being a college instructor and later working for the *Peace Corps* in Zaire, she had proven herself and had provided a secure and even wealthy life for her children. Sheltering and providing for her own younger brother and sister, Zawadi and her three children enjoyed life in Bukavu with a butler (a relative from Zawadi's home village), a maid, a chauffeur, and a guard. Leaving an already established life in Zaire, the family drove to Tanzania, where they took a flight to Belgium with their final destination the United States of America.

¹³ Mwezi, Malaika's cuisine came to the US, later in 1995, where she remained.

¹⁴ This is a pseudonym, chosen by the participant. This is a big metropolitan city in the state of Tennessee.

Due to an abrupt and sudden leave, the family did not have time to prepare in English, resulting in a total submersion in the culture and language of the United States. Malaika explained:

... with us being from a French-speaking country, English was not important to learn. But we never even knew what was gonna happen till like a few months before my mother decided she was coming, so ... We didn't have time to prepare as far as, you know, learning English or anything like that, so we had to learn English when we came here... At that time the only words that I knew [in English] were 'hi,' 'bye,' and 'thank you.' (10/12/03)

When the family arrived, they were sheltered and taken care of by Zawadi's former colleague, Patrick¹⁵, and his family, fellow compatriots. This sponsoring family had lived in the US for several years and had a good command of English by then; therefore, they were able to welcome the newcomers, provide shelter and help them get situated until Zawadi was in a position to support her family. The sponsors provided strong support for Malaika's family to begin a new life in the US.

Shortly after the arrival, Zawadi's children began school in Tennessee and Maliaka was immediately placed in fifth grade where she was pulled-out of her regular classes throughout the day to attend ESL. Zawadi also attended ESL courses and, as Malaika explains, they were much harder for her than for Malaika, Imani and Jabari:

¹⁵ This pseudonym was given by me, because Malaika felt burned out coming up with pseudonyms for her relatives. The choice of French name is unintentional.

She did [take ESL classes]! And it was so much more difficult for my mother because of her age, you know. As you know, you can learn a lot easier if you're younger. You adapt a lot easier at that stage. (10/12/03)

Malaika explained that the support of Patrick's family, particularly with language at the beginning, was invaluable. It was very important for her mother that she could lean on close friends who spoke her mother tongue, and rely on their support and counsel at all times, in a country so distant and foreign from what she had ever known. Patrick and his family had already experienced adapting to life in the new culture, which was what Malaika's family was about to encounter. Therefore, they immediately opened their home and offered their genuine assistance.

This support system seems to imply how important such ties are for immigrants and newcomers, and how eminent they are for establishing in a foreign country and perhaps ultimately contributing to a success immigrant story. If it were not for their sponsoring family, Malaika disclosed, it would have been extremely difficult to survive as immigrants. Malaika shared with me that it was extremely important for Africans to stay close to each other and help one another in difficult situation. This also explains why her mother sheltered some of her own relatives for nothing in return while back in the DRC.

When Malaika's family first arrived in the US, they were not planning to stay permanently. After her mother received her doctoral degree in French and Linguistics, however, she immediately received a job opportunity in the States. By this time civil wars had broken out in the DRC, and Malaika's mother took the opportunity to shelter her children in safety. Now the family was to a new start – a permanent one.

Yet a new beginning

"I'm just another person trying to survive in this country." – Malaika (10/14/03)

Malaika's family lived in Tennessee for five years, where she had to not only adjust to the new culture and language of the country, but also had to face the even more difficult adjustment of being treated as an immigrant and mistreated as a non-native speaker¹⁶. In 1993, at the age of 15 Malaika, Imani and Jabari had to leave school and friends, and move to Valley¹⁷, Iowa, due to their mother's job transfer. Here Malaika entered what, according to her, was one of the "whitest" schools in this metropolitan area, where she graduated from high school. The transition that

¹⁶ Malaika's language learning experiences in Tennessee are discussed in detail in the last part of this chapter.

¹⁷ A pseudonym chosen by Malaika. This is a large city in Iowa.

Malaika had to make in this period of her life presented yet another difficulty. By 1993, Malaika had learned English and had learned how to survive and stand up for herself in Tennessee. Yet, with their move to Iowa, Malaika was faced now with another kind of adversity which she had to learn to overcome.

As a young child growing up in Zaire, Malaika explained that she was accustomed to diversity. Because Zawadi's occupations in Bukavu, it was not unusual for Malaika to be in daily contact with workers and students from different ethnic groups. However, once she arrived in Iowa her values of diversity were challenged and she experienced culture shock as a result of her being ethnically different. She disclosed:

Talk about major culture shock! I never thought I would experience culture shock in my life, cause, you know, in nature, you know, I've always been somewhat, an open-minded person. In my country, my mother worked for the *Peace Corps*, so we will see Caucasian, you know, even some Asians, we'll see a little bit of everything in my country, we had a lot of Indians living in my country, so that wasn't new to me. (10/14/03)

It was surprising that despite the mistreating that Malaika experienced as an immigrant at school in the south, she did not mention culture shock until she began to share about her move to Iowa. Color seemed to be a very difficult factor of adjustment in the Midwest. Malaika used a great example of one of her first

encounters here in Iowa to demonstrate her culture shock particularly with the ethnic marginalization and hegemony.

This is in 1993. Things have changed A LOT! OK! We went to *HyVee*, and I'll never forget this, I saw the cutest white girl, she was with her mummy. She had to be 2 or 3 years old. I'm, like, "Oh, she's so cute!" I'm just going goo-goo all over the cute little thing, but the minute I approached her, she screamed so loud as if I had done something to her. She just started crying. I was feeling so bad, "oh, my gosh! What's wrong with her, like, I didn't do anything to her!" Her mother comes to me, she's like "oh, she's never seen *colored* folk before!" ... And then I just walked away, cuz it's just like, oh, my god! You know, I lived in the south and there's supposed to be a lot more racism down there, and I'd never experienced anything like that, you know, I mean, "COLORED"! That's like back in slavery days! I'm like, what's wrong with you, using that term, you know? (10/14/03)

As Malaika explained it to me, on the one hand, it was very difficult to adapt as a nonnative speaker of English in the South; on the other hand, however, it was easier than adapting to the Midwest, because of the greater number of other immigrant children in her school in Tennessee.

We moved down to Tennessee. 's like, it's like a melting pot, you know! That's another thing I appreciated about ESL, cuz you got to mingle with these people from like different parts of the world, they like contribute to your pool of knowledge, it's like, you'll learn something knew from everybody... I mean, that was, that was amazing! And then..., then I came here [*laughter*]. (10/14/03)

By the time Malaika moved to Iowa, she had already accepted the fact that she was an immigrant and might always be labeled as such. She still had an accent,

but was able to communicate well in the language. At that time she had adjusted to the culture of the US and as she put it herself, “By the time I was in eighth grade, you could consider me a typical kid.” It was no longer the mockery because of her accent that she experienced, rather it was the ethnic difference that made her feel isolated in yet another way. When I queried her whether in Iowa she was made fun of her accent she replied:

Here, no! Here, no, actually [*didn't make fun of her accent*], which, surprised the heck out of me. I was like, OK, we are surrounded by a whole bunch of white people, which are probably scared to see us, when we just saw this little girl and her mother didn't know any better. Gee, you can't expect the kids to know any better, either, when you go to school. So, I get to school, it was so funny, they only had maybe, I don't know, maybe a hand-full of other black students. The day we get to school, of course, everybody is looking at me, you know, “oh, wow ... we got a new black girl,”... By the next day, everybody knew me as the new black kid. That's how bad it was. By the end of the week everybody knew my name, cuz you know, just another new black face, we all've got to know who the black kids are. No! I'm like what in the world is wrong with this place? (10/14/03)

What was even more fascinating to her was that in the Midwest, in contrast to Tennessee, children were more captivated by her being from Africa and even wanted to make friends with her. She shared that based on her experience people in Iowa in general appear to be nicer to foreigners. She was never discriminated against at school, for being a nonnative speaker of English; rather, it was the hyper-attention that she received because of her being ethnically different.

I mean, yah, it's nice, I didn't have to like, ... , constantly be on the defensive cause... It wasn't like, you know, when I was in Tennessee, where everybody, not everybody, but the majority of the kids were like constantly trying to throw an ... insult at you, not directly, but indirectly too. So, it's like, you know, you kind of had to be ready at all time. It's like, you couldn't easily open up to people, cuz you didn't know what their intentions were. But here, I's like certainly people are really nice, at least to your face anyway. So, I like Iowa! Not to stay, though! (10/14/03)

It is interesting to speculate on how her experience would have been different if she had first come here, to the Midwest not speaking the language. How would Iowans have reacted then? Would she have been alienated because of her limited language abilities in addition to her color?

Malaika graduated from a college in Iowa, where she received a Bachelor's degree in Marketing and a minor in Spanish. She has now lived in the US for almost sixteen years and works as a personal banker at a Midwestern bank. Malaika still lives Iowa, by herself, however, because by now her whole family has returned to Tennessee.

No future back home

It has been more than 15 years since Malaika last has seen her homeland. After her mother completed graduate school in Tennessee, the family decided to

stay here, in the US, where Zawadi remarried and had Malaika's youngest brother in 1995. The family has become established in America and they are all getting close to becoming naturalized American citizens; there seems to be no way back home.

Malaika comments:

... there's nothing at home now. You know, they've been fighting there for years. (10/12/03)

She shared with nostalgia how the on-going war in her country changed her attitude about living in the DRC:

If I go there, it will be like it's totally a foreign country. You know, with the civil war, like all the memories that I have... I have seen pictures from ... 1995, and it's like, everything is gone! ... the buildings, the memories ... (10/12/03)

She dreams about going back and reuniting with her family (for visits only, however). It is her grandparents, aunts and uncles that she misses the most. Gathering around a big dish of fufu¹⁸ with all of her relatives and humbly partaking with hands from the flavors the women have cooked, indulging in her aunt's luscious breads, and grandparents' home grown fruits are what she often longs for about her home. She dares not think about going back to her homeland without her mother or siblings, though. Malaika asserts she has become much "Americanized"

¹⁸ *Fufu* is a staple food in the DRC. Malaika explained that it is a kind of bread made out of cassava flour and it is often eaten with special sauces and/or stews.

and has lost many of her language skills in her native tongues¹⁹, and this would make it difficult for her to fit in the DRC if she were to return for good.

Similarly to what Norton (1997, 2000) suggests in her definition of identity, Malaika's identity underwent a major evolution over time and space; she came as a young girl not able to speak English and fit in the American culture because of it, yet today, ironically enough things have reversed. If she were to return to her homeland in Africa, she would experience these same difficulties fitting in because of limited language proficiency. In the following section I present each of the languages Malaika speaks, her proficiency level at each as she defined it, and when and how much she uses her languages.

Part II – Multilingualism

Verbal repertoire, or the total collection of linguistic varieties (whether languages or dialects) available to an individual, is one of the central notions in multilingualism (Sridhar, 1996). Multilingualism, and as a consequence, the languages Malaika speaks and their impact on her identity, was one of the main topics which immersed in the process of the study. This linguistic phenomenon well defines Malaika as she grew up speaking three languages: French, Lingala, and

¹⁹ Her languages are discussed in detail in chapter 4.

Swahili, and then, when she later came to the US, learned English and Spanish. She insists that the languages she speaks are a big part of who she is today, and reveal her true identity. Wardhaugh's (2002) claim: "Your language choices are part of the social identity you claim for yourself" (p. 95), appeared frequently as an underlying theme throughout our interviews. Malaika expressed a very strong sense of identity as she defined each of the languages she speaks.

Sociolinguists believe that a multilingual individual is not necessarily an ambilingual (an individual with native competency in two or more languages), but rather, she may have acquired the languages at different proficiency levels (Wardhaugh, 2002, p. 95).

The differences in competence in the various languages might range from command of a few lexical items, formulaic expressions such as greetings, and rudimentary conversational skills all the way to excellent command of the grammar and vocabulary and specialized register and styles. (Sridhar, 1996, p. 50)

These definitions of language competency and multilingualism well reflect Malaika's use of languages. Even though the fluency level of each one of the codes she commands is different, it was clear to me that they still play equally important parts of who she is, and serve different roles in her everyday life.

French: The official language

"... of course, that was the language in which I learned my ABCs."- Malaika (10/12/03)

French is the colonial language of the DRC and has still remained the official language of the country; the one in which school work, business, and media are conducted. Before leaving the DRC, Malaika studied until 4th grade in Bukavu in a school where French was the only language allowed to converse in. Even though Malaika would have preferred to use French only at school, her mother made sure that she spoke French at home as well. Zawadi wanted to ensure that her children were well educated and that they were able to well communicate and function in Zaire's official language. Malaika explained that in her country someone who did not speak French was looked down on. In addition, being a single mother in a patriarchal society, fighting to get education and equal opportunities as men in the educational arena in the former Zaire, Zawadi understood how important a good command of French was. Because French is such a substantial indicator of education and respect in the DRC, having forgotten much of this language at the time of the study seemed to be most agonizing for my respondent. The next instances demonstrate Malaika's frustration with losing her language skills in French.

* * *

“My French is terrible! I can not speak French!” – Malaika (10/12/03)

Although she grew up speaking and learning French, and was fluent in it by the time she arrived in the US, throughout our interviews Malaika expressed her dissatisfaction with her French skills today. She claims that she can not speak the language, and has lost much of the pronunciation and grammar in French. She defines her skills in this language as being able to understand what people say, but can speak it only to the extent of functioning in basic situations. This claim, however, seems to me to be more exaggerated and a sign of self-consciousness rather than actual fact. She often shared with me that, because her mother is a French professor, she feels a huge pressure to perform better in this language. Since I do not speak French I am not able to attest; however, Malaika shared with me that her roommate, a native speaker of French, was surprised that Malaika’s French was much better than she gave herself credit for. I also had the opportunity to observe Malaika in a couple of instances, where she spoke French seemingly with ease, which again made me question her claims of not being able to communicate well in it.

During one of our interviews, Malaika's roommate came home to introduce me to two of his French friends. While we were discussing an upcoming university international event, one of the French girls seemed to have a problem following the conversation. To clarify a point, Malaika switched to French, which caught my attention. What was even more fascinating was that she was the first one to initiate the code-switching, or more precisely the situational code-switching, reversing from one language to another as a change in the situation had occurred that made the switch necessary (Sridhar, 1996; Wardhaugh, 2002). Based on my own experience in learning and speaking other languages, German particularly, and observing speakers of other languages, whether Bulgarian, English, or German, I can attest that it can be rather threatening to spark a conversation with a native speaker of that language, or, for that matter, code-switch to a language that one does not feel confident in at all. This seems to imply that she feels more comfortable speaking this language than she perhaps acknowledges.

On another occasion, during one of our interviews, someone called her home, looking for her French roommate. Malaika was unable to understand who was calling and what message she should deliver, because of the "thick" accent of the person on the other end of the line. Again, she initiated code-switching to French and was able to take down the person's name, phone number and message. This

intrigued me because, as a multilingual, I am well aware that telephone conversations are one of the most difficult means of conducting conversations to master. Even very fluent speakers of other languages have great difficulties conversing on the phone in their second/other language, due to the lack of proximity, the lack of non-verbal cues and the presence of self-consciousness of whether the person on the other end would be able to understand their accent or not. Subsequently, even though I consider myself fluent in English, I still sometimes find myself jotting down notes of what I am to say before calling someone I have not met before.

These two instances led me to believe that Malaika's French was much better than she gave herself credit for. On the one hand, I was puzzled why she felt so insecure with her French skills. On the other hand, I could understand the high-expectations which Malaila forced on herself due to her strong French background, which had lead to reluctance and low self-confidence in using the language. She shared that in the past French used to be her strongest language, and that often her siblings would even accuse her of being favored by Zawadi because of that. Malaika admitted it herself, that when she tries speaking in French with her roommate, and takes phone messages for him:

... what I notice is I do still know French. I'm just not confident with myself. And that's my problem. A lot of times, I don't make as many errors as I'm

thinking I'm going to make, so he's like, "you can speak French. What's wrong with you?" I was like, "Well it's the pronunciation. I am not too sure of what I'm saying." (10/14/03)

As a consequence, my original speculations that her insecurity in speaking French comes from her mother being a professor in French in addition to understanding the social power this language carries, seemed to confirm. Malaika explained that in order for her to be respected in her African society, she needs to speak French:

...if you've got class you need to be speaking French. That's the language you need to be speaking in. Cause, a lot of people that weren't educated did not speak French. Simply, because they didn't have the ability to pick up the language. So if you were lower class people you didn't ... [speak French]. (10/12/03)

On several occasions, Malaika confessed that her mother would encourage her to keep up with French so that she would not embarrass her or herself when they go back to visit in the DRC.

Swahili: The mother tongue

"I guess that was more of an intimate language that I spoke with my family". – Malaika (10/14/03)

According to Malaika many tribes and villages in the DRC have their own variety of a language which can be either mutually intelligible or unintelligible.

What Malaika considers to be her native language or her mother tongue is a dialect of Swahili, or what is also called Kingwana. She explained that Swahili is predominantly spoken in East Africa, but a dialect of the language is used in the DRC. Even though she learned it simultaneously with French, she considers Swahili to be her natural language, the variety she used not only at home at family meals, with friends and relatives back in the DRC, but also to express her feelings and emotions, after she came to the US.

We spoke Swahili to my aunts and uncles and all these people. We could speak in French and Swahili at the same time. Even today when I am talking to my family, I start in English, if I get mad, it may come out in Swahili.
(10/12/03)

She explained that when she first came to the US and had difficulty expressing herself in English, she would naturally switch to Swahili, not French, the former being her intimate language.

But, like, the only time my Swahili would come out was when I was mad at someone. And if I couldn't, you know, yell at you in English, which a lot of times I couldn't, I would cuss you out in Swahili. You wouldn't know what I was saying, but I would feel good after I was done. Then I would just walk away. It's like, okay, you wanna make fun of me, I'll make fun of you in my language. (10/14/03)

This language too is not one of her strongest codes, but she still sometimes uses it with friends and family. Her mother made sure to encourage Malaika, Imani

and Jabari to communicate in their mother tongue; she wanted them to remember who they were so that they would be able to keep in touch with family and friends back in her homeland. On several occasions, and particularly, when Malaika was in eighth grade (at that point they had already been in the US for four years), she recalls her mother going through periods of time in which she would refuse to answer to her children in English and forced them to speak French and Swahili back to her. Zawadi would still leave messages on Malaika's answering machine in Swahili (or sometimes French) presumably to make sure that Malaika keeps up with the language. Despite of her mother's effort for Malaika to retain her Swahili, Malaika's skills in the language have decreased as a result of her acculturating to her new home.

Lingala: The social language

"...it's just like the "cool" language, per se. ... it's the language used for entertainment, but still it's not considered that high class ..." – Malaika (10/12/03)

Another language Malaika had began to acquire while still in Zaire was Lingala, a *lingua franca*, or a common language used as a language for commerce among people with different linguistic backgrounds (Sridhar, 1996; Wardhaugh, 2002). Malaika explained that this was one of the most widely spoken languages in

the capital, along with French, and that for some tribes this was their mother tongue. Malaika called it the “cool language” and “social language.” According to her, “all the ‘cool’ and popular people spoke Lingala” and where she came from this language was learnt as teenagers went through adulthood. “It’s the language used for entertainment” (TV and music) and parties, she asserted.

Lingala seemed to carry lesser value and as my respondent shared, children were not allowed to speak Lingala in the schools; often they would get in trouble if they were heard conversing in it. She expressed the notion of people being even less enamored with Lingala today:

But it’s like nowadays, which is really depressing [...], a lot of people look down on Lingala. I came up to some other people, who wouldn’t even speak the language, for them it’s like, that’s beneath their level, you know, just...it’s complicated... (10/12/03)

This phenomenon is also known as asymmetric principle of multilingualism and as Sridhar (1996) describes, “all the languages in the repertoire of a multilingual community are not equally distributed in terms of power, prestige, vitality, or attitude” (p. 52). It seems from Malaika’s descriptions of her native languages, that Lingala is of least value.

Because Malaika left home when only 11, she was unable to fully acquire Lingala, which may explain why it has been difficult to retain it and why this

language is her least proficient variety. She said that she learned much of Lingala from her sister while still in the DRC. When her sister would return home from boarding school on the weekends, she would share it with Malaika.

English: The dominant language

"I would honestly say that I live my life in English." - Malaika (10/20/03)

English is the language of Malaika's new home. As already discussed in the profile of the respondent, after Malaika came to the US, she immediately began learning English. During our interviews, she disclosed that English is now the language in which she feels most comfortable. She speaks it almost 100% of the time and she considers herself to be fluent in it. When asked to define *fluency*, Malaika responded:

..to me you're fluent in a language when you can communicate with that language in any aspect, any situation you find yourself in. I don't know...Yea. Being able to communicate in the language without struggling. (R: *Does that include accent? Pronunciation?*) No. Oh no. I mean, people are going to have accents no matter what. To me, not speaking with an accent that doesn't tell me you can speak a language fluently. You know, it just means that you have learned how, like journalists for instance, they train them how to speak without an accent. I can't do that. I mean I, nobody has taught me how to speak without an accent. Sometimes people say I don't have an accent. Sometimes you hear it. So I don't know. To me an accent doesn't determine

fluency. It's just being able to communicate in the language without having any problems. (10/20/03)

Based on her definition of fluency, she would not consider herself fluent in her native languages; that is: French, Swahili, and Lingala. English is the language in which she converses most comfortably.

Spanish: The language of choice

"It is such an exotic language! Spanish is sexy! It is so different from my other languages!" – Malaika

(04/18/04)

Malaika learned Spanish in high school and received a minor in it from college. Today, she is able to use it almost every other day, because her bank has many Spanish speaking clients. This has allowed her to master the language and she considers herself to be fluent in Spanish. Malaika shared that she first became intrigued by Spanish while in fifth grade. One of her ESL classmates was a Mexican girl, whom Malaika was quickly drawn to her; she could somehow easily relate to this Mexican girl. Malaika shared that the girl would show the same kind of respect as Malaika herself was brought up with: deep reverence for elders and others.

According to Malaika, the mixture of the familiar cultural behaviors and, what she

described as, “exotic” sounds of Spanish, increased her curiosity and generated a desire in her to learn the language. As a result, Malaika chose Spanish in high school and found this language very easy to learn.

I also noticed her fascination with Spanish-speaking cultures during some of my informal observations. When I would visit Malaika for the interviews, I would often find her watching Mexican channels. On a similar account, while we were constructing our collages, Malaika decided to turn on a Mexican music program on TV in the background. While working, she continuously commented on her fascination with the movements of the Latino-dancers and the magnetic sounds of the music that made her want to dance. In addition, one of Malaika’s favorite activities is salsa-dancing. As a result of her fascination with the Spanish language and culture, she expressed that one of her dreams was to one day visit South America.

Spanish in addition to English, had become one of Malaika’s more fluent languages. As a result of her immigrating to the US and demand to learn English, Malaika began to lose her native languages.

Part III – English language learning experiences

The second main theme is focuses on examining Malaika's English language learning experiences. This topic is closely related to the effect learning English had on Malaika's repertoire of social identities. It also depicts a close portrayal of what it means to be a multilingual in a monolingual environment.

As discussed, Malaika came to the US when she was only 11 years old and already spoke three languages. She had not studied any English prior to her arrival; however, she had been exposed to the language and the American culture as it was presented by the media. Misrepresentation of American culture via the media had a major impact on Malaika's suppositions of the US. She reported that she used to listen to American music and watch American films while still back in Zaire. For example, she mentioned to me:

We had Michael Jackson in my country, so we used to listen to "Beat It" all the time. We didn't know what the heck they were singing. So we were like "peat it, peat it." Then one day [here in the US] we were listening to the radio. It's like "beat it, beat it." We were like oh that's what he's been saying all this time. (10/14/03)

She also shared with me that she often watched the movie *Superman*, and in fact, her dream as a child about America was to come and meet Superman. Her media-driven expectations about the US were that she would come to a wonderful

and magical land, where there were no poverty and crime, and where everyone was nice and friendly. Everyone would be rich and equally well-off. She inserted, that as often depicted in *Superman*, even if there were any evil it would be conquered. These preconceived expectations were interrupted once she arrived and began going to school. That was when her challenges with language learning as a social experience began and she truly encountered what it was to be a multilingual trapped in a monolingual world.

ESL learning background

When her family arrived in Tennessee in the Summer of 1988, Malaika and her siblings immediately enrolled in school that same academic year; “and we did NOT speak English, ” she inserted. As part of the curriculum for international students, Malaika was simultaneously taking the regular fifth grade classes and ESL. These ESL classes along with *Sesame Street* were the only two structured forms of language instruction. Other forms of practicing the language included watching other TV programs, engaging with other children at the playground, labeling objects throughout the house with post-it notes, trying to study for her academic content courses, and interacting daily with her family’s sponsor Patrick and his family.

I remember science, sociology, my whole fifth grade, cuz when we came, I was in the fifth grade, I have no idea how I was able to pass my classes, I mean, we would go home and our sponsor would come over and help us out and explain things to us so that we could do our homework, so I mean, we made an effort, but...I know that like, if he hadn't done that (translate) for us, we just would have been passing on from grade to grade just because that's what the system was required to do. And I know there's a lot of kids that were just passed, just, you know because they needed to move on and make room for the new kids coming in. (10/14/03)

Their sponsors paid daily visits to Malaika's family, when she and her siblings would come back from school, so that Patrick and his family could help Malaika, Imani and Jabari with their homework and language practice. According to Malaika, these daily visits were invaluable. Having someone to rely on and who could reveal the mysteries of the unknown language lessened the frustrations with school that Malaika and her siblings experienced daily, while during the first few months in the country.

* * *

"I love Sesame Street! I'll watch Sesame Street till the day I die." – Malaika (10/14/03)

The sponsors recommended watching *Sesame Street* and this proved important in her acculturating to the US life-style. It allowed her to experience what growing up as an American child was all about.

...words, culture, games, like you know all these games that kids can relate to, you know, all these kid's songs that, you know, start singing that song, and everybody's like, "Oh, yah! I used to sing that when I was a kid!" All those things, so it's like, ..., we kind of got a chance to know what growing up in America as a kid was all about. To me that's what, ..., *Sesame Street* is. Like, shows what being a kid is all about, having fun and just learning, and like, ..and also they tell people to respect each other, cuz like, they would throw a Spanish word here. Like today, they would have the word of the day 'agua.' 'Agua' is water in Spanish, you know, things like that. So at the same time not only was I learning English, I was also learning Spanish. Like, talk about major fascination right there, you know. So, I was getting like, you know, two birds with just one stone. "Hey, I'll take it!" And also, I mean, it just helped me with the vocabulary for the most, and then, they would do the little family tree, so, you know, mother, father, brother, sister, cousin and, you know, just kind of helped with the grammar. (10/14/03)

Malaika shared with me that *Sesame Street*, in addition to her ESL classes, was a great asset to her mastering of the English language as well.

The ESL classroom

"... I had people I could relate to, so it is a lot easier..." – Malaika (10/14/03)

Malaika loved her ESL classes and ESL teachers, who gave her much respect and support. She described the ESL program at school as:

We took ESL for I think, it was from, like, two or three hours a day, just, you know, learning English, and then we take the basic science, ... sociology, math, reading, all the basic subjects that, you know, you take in elementary school. But, for us so-called "international students", ESL was like our main

focus, we had more ESL courses than you know, any other courses, so we're a bit behind on like, the curriculum but, we needed to learn English, so...they focused on that. (10/14/03)

Based on this depiction of her ESL classes, I can assume that she was in what is called a *pull-out* English language development program. The majority of the instruction for the English learners in these programs is received in the regular classroom with their monolingual English speaking peers. Throughout the day, the English language learners are "pulled out" of their regular subjects, for ESL classes, where in addition to engaging with English language development activities, they receive help with reinforcement of subject matter being taught in the regular classroom. The goal of this kind of ESL program is to help students get by in their academically oriented subjects, while they are in the process of becoming proficient in their English language skills (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). Very often these ESL classes consist of children that are at different language levels and at different ages.

As much as Malaika enjoyed ESL, the fact that at age eleven she was taught from little children's books seemed odd to her, and it seemed even stranger to go from the fun and colorful little elementary books to taking fifth grade tests.

... they [teachers in the ESL class] kind of started us as babies. They, they taught us like at a...I don't know, like at a very low level, you know, it's like, then you start doing tests, which is, I guess they had to do that, simply because a lot of us did not know a single word in English, so they had to do whatever it took, and I mean it was very helpful. (10/14/03)

Nevertheless, ESL was very successful in helping her acquire the language, and, what was even more important, in providing a shelter for her to escape from the constant marginalization in the regular classroom.

The fact that I wasn't the only one struggling, the fact that there were other people in my same situation, that, I mean, I had people I could relate to, so it is a lot easier, when you are in environments, you know, with a lot of similarities... Had I been the only kid in class sitting in and not speak any English in my classes, that would've been terrible. Because, you know, luckily there were a few people that didn't speak English in all my classes, so I was never alone per se, you know. (10/14/03)

This not only helped her go through the struggles of being a foreigner, a child who didn't speak the dominant language in the country, but also motivated her to even be more diligent in learning English. Another important part of the ESL classroom were the teachers:

And also, not only that but like, our teacher, just the dedication that they had, you know, it's like, they went out of their ways to make sure that we understood stuff. Like, you know, us foreigners have accent's issues, it's like, ... we'll go crying to our teacher, ..., such and such is making fun of us because of our accent, which kids will do stuff like that, you know. So he'll go, "it's OK you're smarter than they are," you know, just little comforting things like that. (10/14/03)

Being able to relate to her ESL classmates and lean on the support of her ESL teachers, while going through this hard time, left a great impression on Malaika's life. She was able to gain confidence and continue her education in America.

However, in contrast to the ESL classes, the real struggles and challenges with learning a new language began in the regular classroom with the native speakers and the required subjects.

Alienation in the regular classroom

"If you can't communicate, no one respects you"- Malaika (10/20/03)

As a result of her not being able to communicate fluently enough in the regular classroom during the first couple of years, or not at all during the first few weeks and months, Malaika did not feel as if she could fully participate in the classroom culture and activities, and often felt isolated by her monolingual English speaking peers and teachers. She shared a sense of the alienation she felt:

you know, the teacher will be going through some of the material and if, you know, he or she tells a joke and everybody starts laughing. We [the foreign students] were like, "What's so funny?" We wanna laugh too, but it's like you couldn't cause you didn't get the joke or anything. So, oh, yah, I mean, you do feel isolated, it's, oh, it's terrible. (10/14/03)

When I asked her during our member-checks' session, to confirm her teachers' reaction to her in the regular classes, and how she was treated by them, she shared that many of these teachers avoided her. Many times teachers in her non-ESL classes would not even acknowledge the fact she had raised her hand, let alone give

her a chance to answer a question. She felt as if they either didn't think she was very smart because she didn't get a classroom joke or was reluctant to participate in class, or were afraid to try to communicate with her because she wouldn't understand them. This made Malaika even more alienated in her academically oriented classes.

The non-ESL classroom brought yet another struggle for Malaika: the cruelty of her monolingual peers. Malaika's situation as a foreigner made her classmates' mean jokes and comments even more frequent. Her not knowing English accentuated the fact that she was different. Her peers not only made fun of her accent, but also of her heritage and cultural background:

...I hated kids, they were just so horrible! Oh, my god! Parents need to teach their kids some manners, like when they're little. Like, you know, they would make fun of us, because we won't pronounce the words right. You know, we would try, and of course as kids, you know, you try to fit in with everybody else. Imagine being a foreigner, not being able to communicate and then, you know, look totally different, like for my brother, sister and I. In my country, girls were not allowed to wear long hair, so, we all looked like little boys, like my hair was, like, literally, this short [*shows less than about an inch*]. So, like, they would call me a little boy. I mean, they just, oh my god, they would make fun of... just on purpose. They knew I was a girl, but, you know, with my hair being short, they were like, "man! You are a dude! You're no girl! Bla-bla-bla!" Just loud enough, I just, I would've liked to slap the heck out of all these kids... (10/14/03)

In addition, as a result of her English fluency (or "dis-fluency") during her first couple of years in the US), her classmates often would not talk or even speak to her, but just laugh:

... they'd just make fun of us, they'd look at us and just start laughing. You know, just like, 'Oh, look at her, she needs to go back to Africa!' I mean they used to say all kinds of hurtful stuff, you know... (10/14/03)

Not being able to verbally defend herself, Malaika became even more traumatized by these experiences. Many of her American classmates' assumptions were triggered by the media's misrepresentation of Africa and African culture and had often led to her being mistreatment by them. Not being able to talk back to her tormentors or be understood, she felt, created a barrier and ultimately impeded her ability to fit in with the American children.

they'd make fun of our names, you know, Malaiga, Maluiga, Mahiga [name here has been changed for the protection of the participant], and then the funniest is like, they'd ask us the dumbest questions, "Do you guys wear clothes in Africa?" I'm looking at them, I'm like "Hm!?" I couldn't answer at first, you know, it's like at first they'd look at us and just, you know, make fun at us, because we are from Africa. They'd make jokes like monkeys, you know, cuz that's all they see on TV. Tarzan, ... , slung across vines, ... , to get from point A to point B. It's like, "what ever!" So the year like , you know, sixth grade is when I could like start making sense out of things, cuz it took a while for me to start putting things together, you know. (10/14/03)

Later, in sixth grade, once her language skills began to increase, she started to defend herself and stand up for her culture, and even "play" with the children herself.

When that happened and they'd come to me and ask me the same questions, "Do you all wear clothes in Africa?" I'm like, "uh-uh [no], we don't wear

clothes, we like to walk around butt-naked!" They are like "What?" I'm like "Well, yah, sure, it's hot in Africa, why do you need to wear clothes for?" "You mean everyone walked naked, even your mummy and daddy?" "Well, yah, of course! No need to wear clothes, you know!" Just kind of played with them. (10/14/03)

"Did you guys live in trees?" that was the funniest! I used to tell everybody, "man, we live in the biggest tree in the village, everybody used to come over and hang out at my tree, because, you know, we've got so-o-o-o many branches! Oh, my gosh! So they are like, "Really?" They, of course, took it serious "Oh, my gosh she actually lived in a tree!" I was like, "Yah, whatever!" (10/14/03)

That was when she began to express herself and allow herself to be a child.

That was when all of a sudden the stage turned around and she was the one performing – "making fun of the kids," as she claimed. This demonstrates how powerful and essential language is to effectively function in the social world. How vital it is to be able to communicate, in order to fit in. We can exercise our individual voice and challenge the world we encounter by using language creatively (Hall, 1993). Malaika was not able to do so at her beginning language level. As she put it herself, "If you can't communicate, no one respects you." For her, not knowing the language was not being respected nor accepted by her American classmates. Not being able to express herself was also very emotional:

There were a lot of heart-aches, you know, cause of kids. And I'll go crying everyday... "Mummy, they were just making fun of us, cause we couldn't speak, making fun of our accent..." ...It was tough, it was very tough! It's, like, we'd go home and just, like, my sister and I would get home and just

cry. My brother used to laugh at everything, you know, my older brother! To him everything was funny. He's like, "Man, these guys are stupid!" You know *[laughter]*. Why? They are laughing at us because we couldn't speak the language. So, we'd try to rationalize everything, but girls are more sensitive. I was like, "They are mean! They said I was this, I was that!" (10/14/03)

It seems important to note Malaika's remark about the difference in dealing with these challenges between her brother Jabari, and Malaika and her sister, Imani. She seems to imply that generally males handle these situations differently than females do, by inserting that "girls are more sensitive." She shared that her brother struggled with learning the language just as much as Malaika and her sister did, but would not let the jokes and teasing of the other children get to him. "I guess he wasn't as sensitive as we were," she implied.

While constant laughs and jokes made by Malaika's peers about her accent and not knowing English brought Malaika and her sister to tears, her mother and her ESL teacher's encouragements kept motivating Malaika and allowing her to focus on what was to come.

Well, kids are terrible! ... She's [the mother] like, "It's OK! You guys are just smarter than them. They are jealous, you know." And then she kept telling us, "See, when you learn English, you'll be able to sit there and talk to them and you can even talk about them in a different language and they won't even know what you are saying, you see!" We're, like, "Oh, yea!" (10/14/03)

Eventually, this did happen. During our last interview, Malaika shared that once she became able to express herself well in English and participate in classroom

discussions all of a sudden she felt the resentment of her American peers. They had grown jealous of her knowledge and diligence in learning.

Summary

All five languages that Malaika speaks reflect her multilingual identity. Characterized by different use, context and proficiency level, each of these languages marks a different aspect of her repertoire of social identities, which has evolved through time and space. Malaika came to the US fluent in French and Swahili and with a somewhat good command of Lingala, but with no skills in English or Spanish. Today, this situation has reversed and Malaika is now fluent in English and Spanish, but has lost much of her proficiency in French and Swahili, and almost all of her Lingala. Much of what has happened to her multilingual identity was a result of her language learning experiences once she came to the US, and the demand to learn English in order to be able to effectively function in the American society.

Once in the US, Malaika had experienced both positive and negative accounts. On the one hand, her sponsoring family's support, her ESL teachers and ESL classes provided a guide and a way for her to acculturate and learn English. On

the other hand, her struggles with being alienated in her regular classroom by her other teachers and monolingual classmates, made this adjustment to her new way of life very difficult and traumatizing. Yet, it seems that the persistence and strong personality which she had acquired through her mother's examples and counseling had assisted Malaika in her overcoming the frustrations with her negative experiences and had led to even greater motivation to learn English, but for the price of losing her fluency in her native languages.

In the following chapter I discuss some of the interpretations and conclusions of the themes in this report as they relate to the research questions of the study. I also present some of the more important implications of this research.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview of the chapter

This final chapter is divided into two main parts. First I present a discussion of the report, focusing on interpretations of the data as it relates to the focal point of this study. I have organized this section thematically and following the lead of my research questions. The second part presents the more significant implications of the study.

Part I – Conclusions

I began this study by posing two primary research questions. These research questions were intended to reveal the impact of multilingualism and language learning experiences on an immigrant's identity. First, I was interested in finding out how Maliaka's languages framed her identity by examining each one of the languages she spoke, the contexts in which she used each one of them, and the meanings she assigned to each. Then, I was interested in finding out how her multilingual identity had developed over time and space through examining her

English language learning experiences as influenced by the monolingual environment she had entered into as an immigrant.

Language & identity

In order to find out how Malaika's identity was framed by the languages she spoke, I examined her narratives about each language. Some researchers (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001; McNamara, 1997; Sridhar, 1996; Wardhaugh, 2002) have pointed out that people possess a repertoire of social identities, and these identities are signaled by the variety they speak. On the other hand, each one of these multiple identities is context bound, or reserved for specific interactions. As a result, we assign different meanings to each language depending on what we associate it with. Therefore, by attempting to understand the languages Malaika speaks, how she uses them, and the meanings she assigns to each, I had hoped to learn how they impacted her identity.

The use of more than one language frames Malaika as a multilingual (Sridhar, 1996; Wardhaugh, 2002). One sociolinguistic argument is that multilinguals develop competence in the varieties they speak, often only to the extent to which they need these languages and for the contexts in which each variety is used (Sridhar, 1996;

Wardhaugh, 2002). This is precisely the case with my respondent. The following table summarizes Malaika's languages, their definition, contexts in which she used each one of them, her self-estimated fluency and the personal meanings she assigned to each at the time of the study.

Table 1. Profile of Malaika's current languages.

Language & definition	Context of use	Self-estimated Fluency	Personal Meaning
<i>French</i> – official language of the DRC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> family (with mother mostly) African friends French roommate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not fluent can understand others communicates in basic situations low command of grammar & pronunciation low confidence in using it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> language of class & prestige
<i>Swahili</i> – mother tongue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> most relatives African friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not fluent low confidence in using it can understand others 	"intimate language" (<i>Maliaka</i>)
<i>Lingala</i> – social language; lingua franca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> family African friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not fluent can understand a little can not speak at all 	"Language for entertainment" (<i>Maliaka</i>) "looked down on" (<i>Maliaka</i>)
<i>English</i> – dominant language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> everyday 100-90% of the time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% fluent in all four skills 	"English is my way of life" (<i>Maliaka</i>)
<i>Spanish</i> – language of choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> almost daily with customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fluent in all four skills 	"It is such an exotic language! Spanish is sexy! It is so different from my other languages!" (<i>Maliaka</i>)

Malaika explained that, besides being the official language of the DRC, French was the language of class in her homeland; if you were well educated or wanted to be successful, you had to speak French. Uneducated people or those of lower class did not have the opportunity to learn French. Therefore, as she defined it herself, in order to be respected and fit into her African culture, one must be fluent in that code. Today, Malaika hardly uses this variety, but if her mother would initiate a conversation in French, she would almost feel obliged to reply in that code. It has been the deep respect and admiration she feels for her mother, that seems to contextualize her use of French today, even thousands of miles away from home.

For Malaika, Swahili was her mother tongue; the language which she associates with home and intimacy. Regardless of her lack of confidence in her ability to speak Swahili well, she continues using it with her friends and family. On the other hand, she almost never uses Lingala anymore. As mentioned earlier, this was the “cool language,” or the “language of entertainment.” Malaika explained that a lot of DRC’s music and TV programs were in Lingala. However, regardless of its context, Malaika shared, Lingala was not a language of prestige amongst Africans; therefore, even though she could understand much of it because of the

French²⁰ and Swahili words in it, she sees little point in using the language or even retain it. She stated, "...Lingala, I don't even try" (11/10/03).

On the other hand, Malaika identifies herself as being 100% fluent in English, and based on her definition of fluency, English and Spanish are the only varieties she believes to be fluent in today. Living in the US, she uses English 90% of the time. When I asked her to describe her typical day, all of the activities she mentioned involved English (speaking, listening, reading and writing). She would start her day watching *The Today Show* in the morning, go off to work and spend her day speaking English with co-workers and customers. Then she would come back home and watch American television, or read English books or magazines. Occasionally, she would watch programs in Spanish. She occasionally uses her other languages if she would have a customer at work who spoke one of them, which might happen every other day or so, or if she spoke to her African friends and family. The latter does not happen daily, however, because all of her family and most of her friends and relatives have moved out of Iowa.

Occasionally, Malaika would speak with a non-English speaking customer (as mentioned, she estimated that this might happen every other working day, which would approximate to twice or three times per week). Most of her foreign

²⁰ There are actually more Portuguese words in Lingala than French; however, since both Portuguese and French are Latin-based, this is probably why Malaika thinks she hears French in Lingala.

customers are Spanish-speaking, as oppose to French- and Swahili-speaking ones (she did not mention Lingala here). This context thus demands greater knowledge in Spanish, which might explain why she considered herself to be fluent in Spanish. As she puts it herself, "Practice makes perfect!" (10/28/03).

It is clear that she uses all of these languages in different contexts and for different purposes. Going back to the notion that language choice is in itself part of our social identity we claim for ourselves (Wardhaugh, 2002), it appears that the meanings that Malaika assigns to each of the languages she speaks, result from and are a reflection of the different roles that these languages play in her life and in the formation of her multilingual identity. On the one hand, today, French, Swahili, and Lingala are the languages reserved for her African friends and family, which represent her heritage – where she came from and who she was. Knowing her own background, which is shaped by her native languages, is what Malaika considers to have helped her "become someone":

... I'm a believer, you know, you've got to know where you come from before you can really move forward. Cause without knowing your roots, to me you don't have too much to contribute ... (10/20/03)

For Malaika, her African roots are an important part of her identity. "I am African," she proudly states. These three languages are a constant reminder to her of her origin. In addition, "origin" was an attribute she listed as being part of

identity, when I asked her to freewrite on the topic *Identity* (see Appendix C).

“Origin” came up in her collage description as well (see Appendix D). She included a zebra print, which she explained, reminded her of her origin, where she came from, and showed her “wild side”: Africa. The collage that she created clearly illustrates the limited use of her native languages at present. The zebra cutout, a picture of ethnic dancers, and a shot of wilderness were the only images she picked to identify herself with her African roots.

On the other hand, English, and to a certain extent, Spanish, has become now her dominant language. As she claimed, 90% of her communication was conducted in English. This variety has taken over her everyday use of languages and has become her most fluent means of interaction. In a similar fashion to the decrease of her skills in her native languages, and the increase in her skills in her new language, she has adapted to American culture more and has forgotten much of her culture in the DRC. The majority of the images in her collage are parts of her new American identity. Even though I made sure to introduce her to issues of the *National Geographic*, which dealt with topics about Africa, she avoided the magazine and picked images representing American culture; that is who she is today.

Multilingual identity & language learning experiences

The report of Malaika's story demonstrated the alienations which she encountered in the regular classroom. She was not only ignored by her monolingual peers, but also often ridiculed for her origin and limited English proficiency. Malaika was also often mistreated and ignored even by her teachers in her academically oriented subjects. These traumatizing experiences left a deep emotional impact on Malaika at the time. As a result, her mother and ESL teachers would often advise her not to take her peers' jokes seriously; that they were just jealous of her speaking other languages. On the other hand, these challenges regarding her struggles to fit in and be part of the social world at that time, seem to have had a direct influence on the development of her personality and identity over time. She shared with me that these experiences have made her stronger. They motivated her even more to learn English. She shared with me:

... after what we went through, you know, in elementary school, that just made us stronger. (10/14/03)

Social identity is "how a person understands his or her relationship to the social world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2000, p. 5). For

Malaika, her relationship to the social world was being able (or more so at the time, “unable”) to communicate and function in the language she was immersed. She demonstrated her understanding of her possibilities for the future by motivating herself even more to learn English and achieve skill level at which she would be able to communicate in her social environment and stand up for herself.

It seems that the alienating experiences that Malaika encountered as fostered by the monolingual environment had resulted in limited language opportunities, which seem to be crucial for learning a language (Heller, 1987). As a consequence, the demand for mastering English increased not only as a premise to function in the social world, but also to be accepted and granted access to it. In order to be able to do this, there seems to be a price to pay. The limited access to opportunities to practice English demanded and even motivated Malaika’s efforts in mastering English in an exchange of gradual loss of her native languages. These findings seems to align with Norton’s (2000) argument that SLA theorists need to pay more attention to and adequately address such language learning experiences as inequitable power relations between language learners and native speakers, which seem to be leading factors in the development of identity and language acquisition.

Development of Malaika's multilingual identity

The comparison between her native and foreign languages and her “old” and new cultures shows how language fluency is immediacy-driven. Malaika is now “Americanized” (11/10/03), as she reported her mother often telling her, and today she needs English more than her native languages. This language has become the central and more dominant part of her identity. Although, she says she is not going to forget her heritage, she is now more “American.” As she told me during one of our interviews, she does not think she could return to Africa to live. She has become accustomed to the American life-style and that also involves the loss of her native languages. This phenomenon is well explained by Day (2002), “Moving toward full participation in practice involves becoming part of the community and developing a sense of identity as a master practitioner. This ... entails changes in cultural identity and social relations” (p. 16). As a consequence, when language is prominent marker of group membership an immigrant may face linguistic adaptations, which often results in subtractive bilingualism (Hansen & Liu, 1997).

This phenomenon, subtractive bilingualism, or loss (or initiation of loss) of the first language(s) in immigrants (Hansen & Liu, 1997), seems to have impacted Malaika's development of her multilingual identity as a result of the monolingual

environment she lives in. Peregoy & Boyle (2001) explain that subtractive bilingualism can be observed particularly in situations where school programs do not foster bilingualism, but rather are primarily concerned with English language proficiency development, as Malaika's school-related experiences demonstrate. This situation may be worsened if the parents of the ESL children do not consider home language maintenance to be beneficial. Malaika's mother did try to encourage her children to maintain skills in their native languages which may explain why Malaika has managed to retain certain proficiency level in French and Swahili particularly. However, this attempt of her mother may not be enough to enhance the further maintenance or survival of her native languages in the future.

Part II – Implications

Disadvantages of the educational system & relevant implications

I believe there is an important moral lesson we, as educators and participants in society, could learn from Malaika's story. Besides the support she received in the ESL classroom, Malaika was very articulate at pointing, based on her own experience, some of the disadvantages of the educational system when it came to

accommodating ESL students. Not only was it difficult to make a transition from the elementary-like English instruction in her ESL classes and fifth grade science, per se, but also what was even more puzzling to her was how she even passed from one grade to the next, particularly during the first couple of years (fifth and sixth grade) in the US.

Yes, we were taking other subjects, which I have no idea how we passed, cuz I think some of those classes they just automatically passed us because here, you're placed in a grade based on your age, which is a big disadvantage to a lot of kids here. That's why you go to college and find some kids who are like, as dumb as a rock. I mean, literally, you know, like, they just let you skip a class just because you're supposed to be here, which is totally huge disadvantage to the kids. (10/14/03)

She shared how difficult it was to go on with her regular classes, and it would have been even worse, had she not received the support of her sponsoring family. Being pulled out of her regular classes for ESL instruction seems to have put Malaika at a disadvantage. On the one hand, the environment required increasing of her language skills, which she needed in order to perform well in her other classes, but, on the other hand, she would fall behind in her regular subjects, because she was in that language acquisition process. The fact that she did not receive much support from the teachers or peers complicated matters even more.

During our last interview, Malaika shared with me that in her school in Tennessee, ESL students even had their own "special" bus.

You know how they make jokes about, “you must have rode the short bus to school,” whatever, and that’s to make fun of the special-aid people. But all the international students, we had our own bus. We did not ride the same buses as any other kids. (11/10/03)

This was one of the most disturbing experiences Malaika shared with me. Feeling as if she was, as she puts it, “not normal” riding the “short bus” made her feel even more alienated from the rest of her peers. This was one of the reasons why most of her friends were foreign children. She shared that she had almost no opportunities to become friends with American children. This, for her, illustrates how the whole society here functions:

See, it’s cause, that’s how the whole system is set up like. And then you wonder why... you know, maybe that’s one of the reasons ... why a lot of foreigners don’t have the chance to learn the language, because they are never immersed, I mean, they are immersed in the culture, but they are never accepted by Americans. (11/10/03)

Norton (2000) states, that “it is only by acknowledging the complexity of identity that we can gain greater insight into the myriad challenges and possibilities of language learning and language teaching” (p. 154). I believe that Malaika’s development of her multilingual identity as a result of her language learning experiences seems to call for more educational programs which aim for implementing and creating foundations for additive bilingualism. Such educational programs while enhancing the new language should not add to the loss of the

mother tongue, but rather encourage and foster literacy in the home language simultaneously (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001).

The difficulties that ESL learners experience in integrating in the social environment, as Malaika's experiences demonstrate, could to some extent be minimized. It is important that teachers in the mainstream classrooms implement well-established curriculum that requires understanding of the learning situations and the needs of ESL students, and strives for providing an environment which would adequately integrate these students into the regular classroom activities and interactions. Integrating ESL students in the mainstream classes would provide opportunities for practicing the language and ultimately lead to better results in performance (Platt, 2003). That is not to say that low level ESL students should be exclusively integrated into the mainstream classroom with no specialized ESL services. As Malaika's positive experiences with ESL suggest, programs such as *pullout* are a successful means of support, acculturation and language acquisition and they should work together with integration. In addition, studies such as this, could provide a deeper sense of awareness for educators to better understand the needs of multilingual learners of English.

The story with its own implications & limitations

"...It helped me discover who I am." – Malaika (12/20/03, e-mail)

Throughout the data collection and analysis, I kept asking myself, "Why is this worth writing about? Why should anyone care about reading it? What would the sociological implications be?" I am telling the story of just one person. Why is this important? Then I remembered my participant's reaction during our first meeting, and how she tried to convince me that she is a "boring" person, someone who has nothing to offer. Then, towards the end of the data collection, she e-mailed me and wrote, "This has been a wonderful experience for me, it helped me discover who I am" (Malaika, 12/20/03). This statement in itself convinced me as a researcher that this work was worth writing about. It became clear to me that to convince someone that her story is indeed significant, that she has a lot to contribute to society through her own personal experiences, through who she is, is sociologically significant.

As a result, I hoped that a big part of the implications of this study would be to give voice to this multilingual immigrant woman living in a monolingual world. In addition, recognizing that subjects "are the true experts on their own lives" (Esterberg, 2002, p. 70), I agree with Clifford Geertz (1973) who states that we as

researchers can never truly capture the viewpoints of our respondents. As a researcher, I presented what I thought my participant wanted me to share about her story. I know that because her tale was told through my voice, the insights might be limited.

It is true that this study is just one person's story, that of Malaika; however, this story can give us, teachers, an insider's view of what a multilingual immigrant identity is and how it can be impacted by language learning experiences. By looking into Malaika's story we can look deeper into our own ESL classrooms and gain a better understanding of the faces of multilingualism. I know that there are many stories similar to that of Malaika's, yet all of these stories are unique and valuable in a way that is beyond compare; thus, my proposal for further research is to find these faces of multilingualism and give voice to their uniquely developed tales for us to learn from and create better opportunities for generations of multilingual ESL learners to come.

In addition, I believe that this study and, ultimately, Malaika's story would be incomplete, if I were to end this report without sharing Malaika's insights about the benefits of multilingualism. This would take us back to the introductory opening of this research, where Malaika likened multilingual identity to *salad bowl* and *chameleon*.

The “salad bowl” & “chameleon” identities: Benefits of multilingualism

Malaika shared that being able to speak several different languages, even though at different proficiency levels, has helped her form her identity, and constantly reminds her of who she is, that is, a “salad bowl” – a mixture of different languages for different uses. Multilingualism has benefited Malaika, not only because it allows her to communicate with people from many cultures, but also because it gives her the opportunity to be in service to others. Recognizing, through experience, how important it is to be able to communicate in order to receive respect and be granted access to participate in the social environment, Malaika’s multilingual identity permits her to help others in situations where they can not communicate. It allows her to give the kind of support she received from her own sponsoring family when she herself was not able to converse in English.

On the other hand, through multilingualism, Malaika sees herself as having the identity of a “chameleon.” For her, this is someone who can easily adapt and display reverence to different cultures and life-styles. In addition, she believes that this side of her multilingual identity has also brought her credibility. On the one hand, her ability to easily adjust and communicate as a multilingual today often fosters expressions of admiration in monolinguals. On the other hand, they,

according to Malaika, seem sometimes threatened by that ability. She states that people sometimes have expressed feelings of envy for her being able to communicate with individuals “from all kinds of walks of life” (Malaika, 10/20/03). This revelation of how she feels others perceive her multilingual identity, well adheres to what Wardhaugh (2002) observes about peoples’ reactions to this linguistic phenomenon, “we often have mixed feelings when we discover that someone we meet is fluent in several languages: perhaps a mixture of admiration and envy” (p. 95).

In addition, Malaika explained that multilingualism has also impacted her identity by enhancing her own values and beliefs through broadening her views of tolerating and respecting others. Multilingualism has helped her develop a sense of self-satisfaction and increase of internal realization of valuing and understanding people and other cultures. Malaika believes, “That’s a gift!” (10/20/03).

APPENDIX A – INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- When were you first in an English speaking country? Where? Why were you there?
- When did you begin your new life in the US?
- What were your reasons and goals for coming here?
- What were your impressions of American culture before you came here?
- Were your preconceived ideas about the US true? (What do you think now?)
- What have been some of your frustrations in dealing with living in the American culture?
- What do you feel you have accepted about US culture? What don't you accept?
- How comfortable do you feel about the culture?
- How do you feel you have been accepted into the US culture by Americans?
How do you feel you haven't?
- In what situations? By whom?
- How does this affect your language learning? Negative and Positive!
- Describe your typical days?
- How much of what you have just described involves communication in English? This may include: speaking, listening, reading, writing.
- How does your everyday life create an need for you to learn English more?
- How has your everyday life changed since coming in the US?
- How does this affect your motivation to learn English?
- How many languages have you studied before? What are they?
- Do you think they have helped you in anyway in your learning English?
- How much do you use your first language now? (Motivation)

- Can you tell me in what situations? (Reading, writing, speaking to friend and family...)
- Where did you first start learning English? Why?
- What level of English would you define yourself at?
- Do you consider yourself as being “fluent”?
- What does it mean to be “fluent” in a language?
- Has language ever made you feel as lower? A full?
- How would you define a good language learner?
- What is the best way of learning a language?
- How do you learn best? Tell me about your experiences?
- What learning strategies do you use when studying? For example, how do you learn new vocabulary?
- Tell me about yourself when you were back in your country? What did you do?
- Tell me about your educational background? What and how long did you study?
- Did you ever communicate (in any way) in a different language when you were in your country? Was it easy? Why?
- How comfortable are you with your English? Why?
- Do you think you can communicate any thing and everything the same way you would in your own language? Why? To what degree?
- What is most difficult about learning a language in a different culture?
- What is easy and helpful about it?
- How would you define a successful language learner?

APPENDIX B – TRANSCRIPT SAMPLE

Lines 477 – 521²¹

R:²² So, did they make fun of you for your accent? Did you feel isolated because of that?

S:²³ Here, no! Here, no, actually [didn't make fun of her accent]²⁴, which, surprised the heck out of me. I was like, OK, we are surrounded by a whole bunch of white people, which are probably scared to see us, when we just saw this little girl and her mother didn't know any better. Gee, you can't expect the kids to know any better, either, when you go to school. So, I get to school, it was so funny, they only had maybe, I don't know, maybe a hand-full of other black students. The day we get to school, of course, everybody is looking me, you know, "oh, wow, you know, we got a new black girl," you know. By the next day, everybody knew me as the new black kid. That's how bad it was. By the end of the week everybody knew my name, cuz you know, just another new black face, we all've got to know who the black kids are. No! I'm like what in the world is wrong with this place?

R: So, do you think you stuck out more as a black person or more as a foreigner?

²¹ The original transcript is set so that each line is numbered.

²² R stands for *researcher*.

²³ S stands for *subject*.

²⁴ Clarifying comments are inserted in brackets.

S: First, a black person, and then the minute I opened my mouth, they knew immediately I was from Africa. Of course, that became like ten times more fascinating to them, you know. It's like, everybody, will like try, you know, come and talk to me, befriending me and everything. I'm just like, "OK! It's like, I'll talk to you, but don't come talk to me just because I'm black, you know! And I, and, I'm kind of mouthy, so, I will tell them, I am a nonchalant person by nature, it's like, if you are being stupid I will just come out and tell you. I, now that I've gone older I can be a little more diplomatic, but back in highschool, I didn't care. If you're gonna be stupid, I'll correct you and put you in your place, you know! It's like, everybody's like, "Hi, [Malaika]! Hi, [Malaika]!" I'm like, "Who are you?" it's like, god! You know? Just because I was the new black face EVERYBODY knew me! It's just like "Wow!" I was like, I went home, I'm like, "Mom, again, please, why did you choose this place?" She's like, "Oh, my god!" But the thing is like, you know, everybody was really nice at school, so...We didn't really have any major problems, like, you know, a few years later there were some racial tensions that were going on, you know, within the school, whatever, like for me, personally, no one ever did anything discriminative or racist towards me personally, you know what I mean? So, I mean, for the most I could say, I didn't have a problem when I was in high school. I mean, I, my mother raised us to be strong, my other people, you know, and

so, it's like we didn't let anybody get us down or anything. I mean after what we went through, you know, in elementary school, that just made us stronger. It's just like, you know what, you can't let people get you down. You can't! so, it's like, I was like, "Ok! You wanna challenge me, bring it on!" I was ready! I mean, yah, it's nice, I didn't have to like, you know, constantly be on the defensive cause, you know, it wasn't like, you know, when I was in Tennessee, where everybody, not everybody, but the majority of the kids were like constantly trying to throw an insult at you, not directly, but indirectly too. So, it's like, you know, you kind of had to be ready at all time. It's like, you couldn't easily open up to people, cuz you didn't know what their intentions were. But here, I's like certainly people are really nice, at least to your face anyway. So, I like Iowa! Not to stay, though! ...

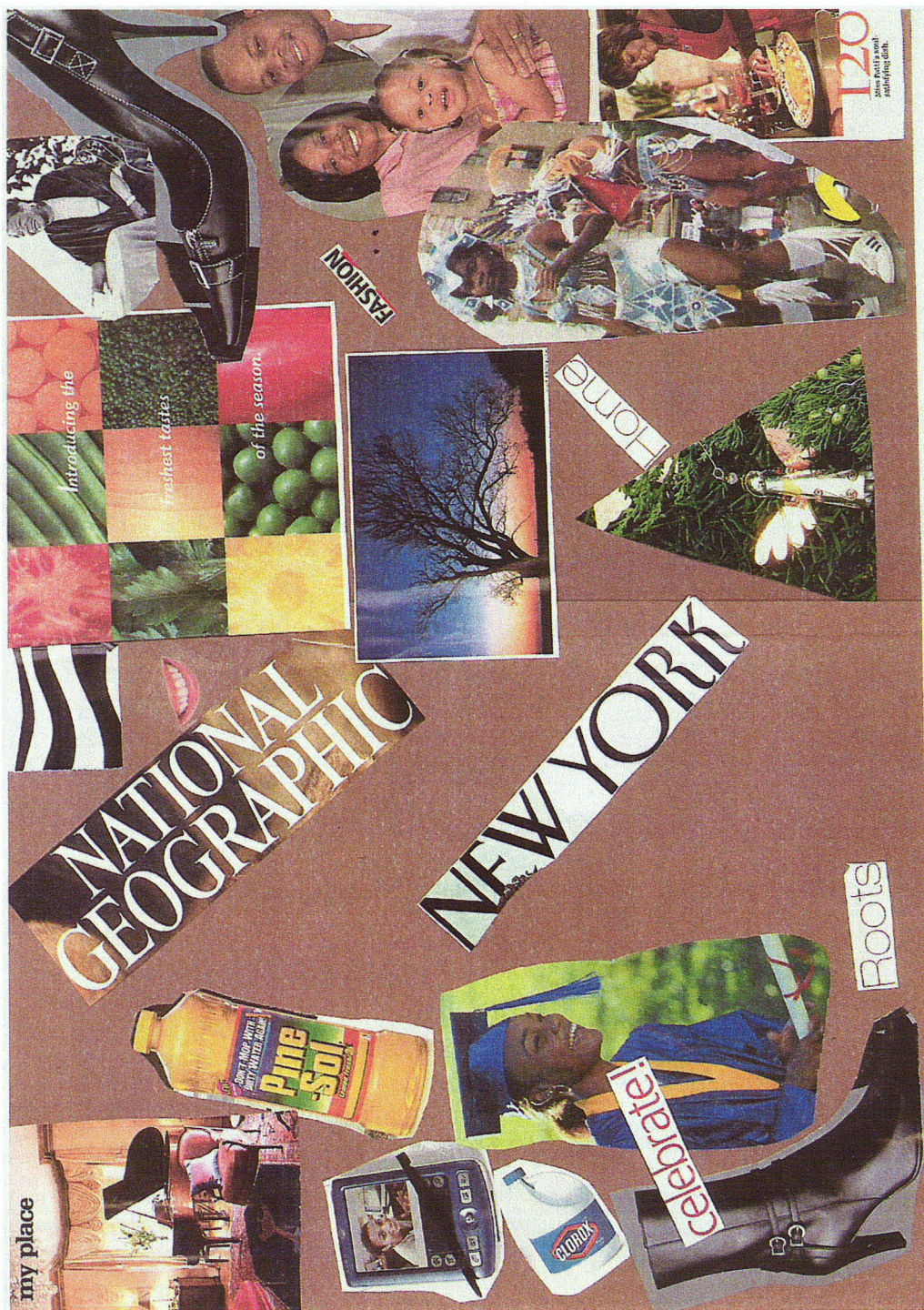
R: ...more diversity.

APPENDIX C - FREEWRITING

Identity:

Name, Race, age, sex, Origin, marital status, children or no children. When I think of the word identity, the first thing that comes to my mind is the name of the person. I think of all the physical attributes that one possesses. If I get to know the person, I ^{start} ~~begin~~ to associate them with activities that they may be involve with, their personalities, as well as their character as part of their identity.

APPENDIX D – MALAIKA'S COLLAGE



APPENDX E – FIELD JOURNAL SAMPLE²⁵

10/12/03

Due to my “bad luck” of finding a subject so far, I was full of anxiety and feelings of the type: What if she refuses to do this? Is she going to fit my attributes for choosing a subject? What if she thinks my topic is stupid? This must have been the fever before the rush!

...

I arrived at Malaika’s house at 1:15. The first thing I noticed was the neighborhood. Not the best part of town – near X University. You can immediately tell it is a part of town where a lot of students live and most of the property is rental. As I entered, the front door was open, and immediately led me into a very small hallway. I knocked on the first door I saw and as I leaned to it to knock I immediately noticed a poster of Bob Marley opposite the door. Hm! Go music taste! This I think set the mood for me. I think I expected an “Island” girl! I don’t know why? I don’t know why, but I thought “Oh, she must be educated to listen to Bob Marley” or “Could she be Rastafarian?” Yah, I don’t know why? I must admit all of these presuppositions come from my Bulgarian background. Only a certain circle of people listen to him. (Wow, that’s a lot of rationalizations from just seeing a poster and not even meeting the girl).

A gorgeous black woman answered the door (I was truly stunned by her beauty) and energetically invited me into her home. That same “island” mood followed me into the living room. After we exchanged greetings, I complemented her on her beautiful home, to which she answered “Oh, thanks, but nothing in here is mine.” The room was dark, decorated with African masks, pictures, candles in

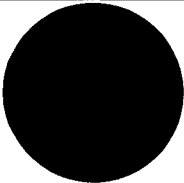
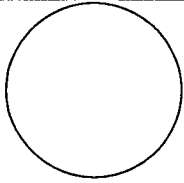


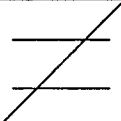


²⁵ This is an excerpt from my first journal entry (the entire entry is 6 pages long).

iron candleholders, potted plants. It was furnished with big, light brown, comfortable sofa and easy-chair (is that a word?), a fairly large coffee table, which was in front of the sofas, and a TV station across the table. Behind the big comfy chair was a dining-room set, and to the right of it was the entrance to the kitchen. The bedrooms were on the second floor (she went up the stairs to get the phone).

Malaika offered me a seat and something to drink. I took a glass of water. I thought, "This is great! Nice way to try to get comfortable." (Yikes! Bad way of saying this. Doesn't sound very good!) First, I went over the information in the Informed Consent Form and asked her to keep it and call me when she decides to sign it, to which she answered "Oh, no! Let's get this show started!", as she was already signing the form. I couldn't help it but have mixed feelings about this. Did she feel pressured to do it (because her friend asked her to), and wanted to finish as soon as possible? Or was she actually interested? She said she wanted to participate in my study, but her concern was that she would be too boring as a subject. She said her life is not interesting and she is no longer "smart" because she is not in school anymore. She said that her mom would be a better fit for me because she is a very interesting person.

Before we even met, we had already established a common ground. We had decided to meet after church on Sunday, so that was our opening conversation. I asked her what church she attended and found out that we belong to the same denomination. So I think that that really brought us closer and shortened the distance between us. We immediately exchanged brief background of our beliefs and noticed some definite similarities in the paths in which we followed to get to our religious beliefs. So, I would say this was a success or a positive way of establishing rapport.

APPENDIX F – KINSHIP SYMBOLS

Symbol	Representation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Female ego (Malaika), whose kin are being shown
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Female
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Male
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connection representing marriage.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connections representing diverse.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Represents descendents from.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connects siblings.

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