Introduction

The construction of ancestral language and cultural identities for the children of migrants is intricately embedded in their lived experiences and discursive positions in the host society. The level of identification with their heritage language(s) and culture varies depending on how minority ethnic youth participate in the social networks available to them and is influenced by other identity inscriptions, such as gender, ethnicity and social class. In this chapter, I present the case of two young British-Bangladeshi women in London, who are representative of educated middle-class Bangladeshis. By British-Bangladeshi, I refer to young people of Bangladeshi origin who have lived in Britain for a considerable period and attained British citizenship. I argue that identification with heritage language for the young British-Bangladeshi women in this case is significantly shaped by their gendered identity. By heritage language I mean ‘nonsocietal’ and ‘nonmajority’ languages which are spoken by linguistic minority communities, including migrant communities (Valdés 2005: 411). Cultural identity, on the other hand, is more socio-politically loaded in that social class and religious positioning, along with their gender roles in the family, play important roles. Social class as an identity construct is complex and relevant in the context of globalisation, increased migration and the neoliberal political economy (see Block 2014, this volume). Gender identity in relation to language has increasingly been viewed ‘performatively’ (Butler 1990), meaning how we perform our gender, rather than deterministically, meaning male or female attributes as a result of biology or socialisation (see Cameron 2005; Jones, this volume). I argue in this chapter that there is a need to deconstruct elements of ancestral culture and examine cultural difference within the family to understand the intersection of gender with culture in South Asian culture. Before I present the case study, I provide some general comments on the Bangladeshi community and discourses of multilingualism and multiculturalism in Britain as a means to orient readers with the context.
Heritage language and cultural identities

The Bangladeshi community in Britain is the fastest-growing and third-largest immigrant group from South Asia (Gardner 2009). Fifty-five per cent live in London, with half of these London-based Bangladeshis living in Tower Hamlets (Piggott 2004). Ninety per cent of the total Bangladeshi population in Britain have their origin in the Sylhet region of Bangladesh. Despite the large size of this community in the UK, it struggles with poverty, unemployment, unskilled job experience, lack of formal education and poor housing and health conditions (Eade and Garbin 2006). A large number of the Bangladeshis are known to work in the clothing industry and in restaurants (Lawson and Sachdev 2004).

The two heritage languages spoken in the Bangladeshi community are Bangla and Sylheti. As Bangla, the official language of Bangladesh, played an important part in the political history of Bangladesh (Thompson 2007), it is deeply integrated with building the secular, national and cultural identities of the people of Bangladesh. Sylheti is arguably a regional variety of Bangla or a separate language which is spoken in the north-eastern Sylhet region of Bangladesh (Lawson and Sachdev 2004). In the case study presented in this chapter, Bangla is the two participants’ heritage language in the sense that it is the language of their parents and their grandparents (Ovando et al. 2005), while Sylheti is the heritage language spoken by the Sylhet-originated British-Bangladeshi community.

As the majority of the population is Muslim, Bangladesh follows many Islamic traditions and rituals. Simultaneously, the country also has a long history of fighting against Muslim invaders that has contributed to the development of a cultural spirit that is secular in nature (Riaz 2003). Therefore, in the cultural space of the Bangladeshis, both in Bangladesh and also in Britain, there is an underlying tension between secular nationalist and Islamic culture (Eade and Garbin 2006).

To date, applied linguistics research into the Bangladeshi community in Britain has mostly been limited to the working-class Bangladeshi communities situated in East London. The case study presented in this chapter makes an effort to shed light on educated professional Bangladeshis who have largely been under-represented in research. To understand how the two participants discussed in this chapter identify and perform ancestral language and cultural identities, it is important to take account of the context of multilingualism and cultural diversity in Britain. Multilingualism, even though a reality in Britain, challenges the country’s national ideological discourse of a monolingual and homogeneous Britain (Moyer and Martin Rojo 2007). Bilingual communities have been seen as a threat to the ‘cultural unification’ of Britain, and the spread of multilingualism has been viewed with suspicion (Blackledge and Creese 2010). In comparison to multilingualism, multiculturalism in Britain was the ‘scene of passive, even complacent, satisfaction’ (Wood et al. 2006: 2). The scene started to change at the beginning of the twenty-first century with the rise of the power of the European Union and the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States. As Modood (2005) asserts, the 7/7 bomb attacks in London in 2005 by four British Muslim youths made the Muslim community, including those of Bangladeshi origin, an ‘undesirable Other’ to British mainstream society even in the time of a pluralist society. The changed multicultural context of Britain connects with the case study presented in the chapter to understand the dynamics between Bangladeshi cultural identity and Islam.

After setting the scene by providing some background, I now move on to the theorisation of language and cultural identity in this chapter. This done, I discuss the methodological framework undertaken for doing this research. I then present the findings of the research and discuss the findings in light of the adapted theoretical framework. Finally, the chapter identifies some issues of interest for applied linguistics regarding the heritage language and cultural identities of the children of South Asian migrants.
Overview

Poststructuralism: identity, discourse and positioning

The study is theoretically framed by the poststructuralist view of identity that regards identity as fluid, multiple and dynamic rather than fixed and essential (Bhabha 1986; Hall 1990). Poststructuralism argues that the relationships of individuals with groups are not neat and constant, but rather situated and shifting (Brah et al. 1999; also see Baxter, this volume). This ambivalence of human relationships with group affiliations foregrounds the multidimensionality of social categories and creates scope for exercising individual agency within the macro structures. Closely intertwined with the poststructuralist approaches to identity and also relevant in this chapter are the notions of discourse and positioning. Paul du Gay (1996: 43) considers discourse as the linguistic manifestation of a ‘particular kind of knowledge about a topic’ that also institutionalises such knowledge in social settings and practices. ‘Positioning’ has been perceived by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) as a ‘perpetual tension’ between how discursive practices position us and how we want to position ourselves. Weedon (1997: 3) sees this perpetual tension as ‘negotiation’ of ‘ways of being an individual’, which she calls ‘subject position’. Having given a brief overview of a poststructuralist framework of identity, I now turn to the two main dimensions of identity for this chapter: culture and language.

Cultural identity

Culture can be perceived from ‘essentialised’ and ‘unitary’ views that consider culture as an ancestrally shared finished product (Baumann 1999). A ‘processual’ view, in contrast to an essentialised view, perceives culture ‘to exist in the act of being performed’, which ‘can never stand still or repeat itself without changing its meaning’ (ibid.: 26). Culture, according to this view, is not neatly divided in terms of nationality or religion; it is rather dynamic, fluid and emergent (Holliday 2009). Hall similarly takes on board the fluidity of culture and says this about cultural identity:

[…] as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’. […] Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’.

(Hall 1990: 225)

Drawing on Hall, cultural identity is the juxtaposition of an imagined unitary ancestral heritage and the adoption of different subject positions in the discourses available to migrants. In this case study, cultural identity refers to ways in which culture is performed in lifestyle, dress, food, festivals, relationships, etc. (Adaskou et al. 1990), and also takes into account ways in which culture intersects with other dimensions of identity such as ethnicity, nationality, gender, social class and religion in a more holistic sense (Ferdman and Horenczyk 2000; Mathews 2000).

Language identity

Poststructuralist theory perceives language to be reciprocally connected with subjectivity as it helps one to construct and negotiate the self across a diverse range of space and time (Norton and Toohey 2011). Language identity, if seen through the lens of hereditary endowment or
by belonging to a particular community only, is restricting in scope as it undermines the possibility of choice or agency in shaping one’s language identity. Rampton’s (1990) formulation of language identity as ‘language expertise’, ‘language inheritance’ and ‘language affiliation’ is useful in this regard to take account of choice-driven possibilities. Language expertise suggests the level of proficiency that a person has obtained; expertise can be seen through the prism of objective measures. Importantly, expertise in a language is always developed (i.e. it is not inherited) and, as Rampton (1990) argues, someone can be expert in a language without feeling close to it. Language inheritance relates to the language(s) that are passed on to children by virtue of their family’s heritage. Finally, language affiliation refers to our ‘sense of attachment’ or bonding to any language. As Rampton (1990) argues, we cannot assume that just because a language is inherited that there is a strong affiliation to it. Additionally, language affiliation is influenced by social contexts and by societal and governmental discourses about heritage languages. Taking the theoretical insight of language and cultural identity, I now contextualise the discussion to migrant youths.

Language and cultural identity of the migrant youth

The relationship between heritage languages and the cultural identity of minority ethnic youth has been widely taken up in applied linguistics in the context of education (e.g. Lambert 1975; Cummins 2000). Four decades ago, Wallace Lambert (1975), in the Canadian educational context, proposed four possible modes of how immigrant children accommodate to the dominant society: the children of migrants may become completely anomic and forsake the ancestral language and culture; they may disregard the language and culture of the dominant society; they may show indifference to both societies; and, finally, they may show balance by becoming bilingual and bicultural. Lambert’s formulation of heritage language and cultural identity adjustments of the children of immigrants, even though it was offered a long time ago, is probably still useful to draw upon to explain the identity constructions of the two young British-Bangladeshis in this chapter, particularly in relation to their degree of participation in the host society. Heritage language and cultural identity constructions among young South Asian minorities can be influenced by their membership in the social categories of gender and social class among other factors. Young South Asian British Muslim women’s diasporic cultural identities have been documented as being shaped by their gender roles in the family and in the community (Dwyer 2000; Talbani and Hasanali 2000). In research conducted among young Mirpuri Pakistanis in the UK, Dwyer (2000) shows that young Muslim women are expected to be the custodians of cultural and religious honour and are held responsible for transferring cultural heritage, Islamic values and heritage language from the mother to the daughter. Talbani and Hasanali (2000), in their research on young South Asian immigrants in Canada, similarly show that ancestral religion-culture inspired a male-dominated gendered hierarchy that influences the socialisation and identity of young women in the family. Gender continues to be a significant factor in the maintenance of heritage language and the construction of cultural and language identity among South Asians (Mills 2004; Preece 2008). Preece (2008) shows with the case of Sita, a young British Sri Lankan Tamil woman, that the intersection of gender and language identity can be influenced by the political as well as the cultural contexts of migrants. While Sita has less competence in Tamil, her heritage language, than English, she shows high affiliation with Tamil, relating her responsibility to maintain the heritage language of the Tamil diaspora in the UK to the political instability of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka and her role as a future imagined wife and mother. Construction of heritage language identities is in some cases linked with the social class
of the minority individuals. In Ogbu’s (1999) study, his participants’ responses manifest the close link between higher social class and linguistic assimilation (i.e. integration to the other language even though risking own language). Having fairly discussed the theoretical foundation of language and cultural identity and some research studies on heritage language and cultural identities of minority youth, I now turn to the research framework of this study.

Methodology

The case study that I present in this chapter comes from my MA dissertation project at a London-based British university (Chowdhury 2010). The project researched British-Bangladeshis in London with the aim of examining how they identified with Bangla language and Bangladeshi culture. Six participants took part in the study, who I contacted based on my networks and acquaintances with Bangladeshis in London. In this chapter, I present a case study of two of my British-Bangladeshi participants: Nitu and Saima (pseudonyms) (see Table 30.1). These two participants were young (aged 19 and 22 respectively), female and middle class. The fact that I ascribe a middle-class positioning to these participants is broadly based on the social status of their families with regard to income, education and occupation (see Block 2014, this volume). Moreover, during the research process, I became familiar with the classed positioning of the families through commonly referred indicators of social class such as neighbourhood, mobility, taste and symbolic behaviour. I will also draw on data from Renu, Saima’s mother, another participant in my study.

The overall questions that guided the research to build the case study were:

1. Where do the young British-Bangladeshis stand in terms of their identification with Bangla language and culture?
2. What are the different factors that influence their identifications?

The data for this research was collected in two phases. The first phase comprised audio-recorded semi-structured interviews (Gray 2009), where the participants were asked questions concerning their identification with Bangla language and Bangladeshiess. These interviews were primarily carried out in Bangla, with Nitu’s interview lasting for 58 minutes and Saima’s for 94 minutes. The second phase had two stages, starting with short follow-up interviews to clarify some of the interview responses of the participants. Following this, in order to supplement the self-reported identity positions, participants were engaged in audio-recorded conversations with their family members in the absence of the researcher. I supplied the participants with a number of photographs that represented Bangladeshi culture (e.g. photos of Bangla new year, Eid festival); Bangla language (e.g. photo of the national language martyr monument in Bangladesh); Britishness (e.g. photo of Westminster); and the Bangladeshi community in London (e.g. photo of Brick Lane in London, known for Bangladeshi curry restaurants). I asked the participants to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Linguistic repertoire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nitu</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate student</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Bangla, English, Hindi, Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saima</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Bangla, English, German</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Heritage language and cultural identities

pick two photos on the basis of their affiliation to the themes in the photos and talk about those to the interlocutors. My purpose was to see how the participants positioned themselves in connection to culture and language during their interaction.

Given the nature of the research and the participants involved, it is important to talk about the relationship between the researcher and the participants and the role of this relationship on the research process. I was fairly familiar to Nitu as I had met her twice in community events, but I was unknown to Saima as we had never met before. To ensure that the two young women participants felt comfortable in the presence of a male researcher, the research process was carried out at the residences of the participants. My status of being a Bangla-speaking Bangladeshi academic doing an MA in the UK had two possible positional dimensions. First, it gave me a certain degree of authority and legitimacy, with the possible effect of increasing the seriousness of the research process for the participants. Second, it accorded me the status of ‘insider’ on the grounds of education, social class and the ethnolinguistic background of the participants. However, this was offset by the fact that I was also a young male researcher who was not familiar with the lives of young female children of migrants in the UK, in particular their everyday experiences, concerns and ways of living and doing things in present-day Britain. This mixed status of mine influenced the questions that I asked, the responses that the interviewees gave and the interpretations that I have made of the data.

Good ethical practice has been maintained throughout the research process, which included among other measures using a consent form to obtain permission from the participants and identifying the participants with pseudonyms. The family group discussions were transcribed based on the transcription conventions devised by Coates (2003) (see Appendix). For a nuanced understanding of participants’ positions across the interaction, the family interactional data were transcribed showing conversational features, such as overlapping, false starts, variation in volume of the participants, etc. As the data includes the use of Bangla, the extracts that have been used in this chapter have been translated into English with an effort to keep the translation as close as possible to the original. English words used by the interviewees have been kept unchanged. To make a clear distinction between English in the original data and my translation, all the English in the original data have been bold faced in the excerpts. However, since the interview data were primarily analysed in terms of its semantic content, they have been presented with standardised grammar and punctuation. The data were then analysed for the themes of language and cultural identity, drawing on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of ‘community of practice’. Lave and Wenger argue that social relations are constructed, reconstructed and further developed through participation in the practices of different communities. It is through participation that we become active in the ‘practices of social communities’ and ‘construct identities in relation to these communities’ (Wenger 1998: 3). This notion shaped the way that I analysed how the participants construct Bangla language and Bangladeshi cultural identity, in that I looked at their participation in different communities, predominantly their family and their peer groups. In the following section, I present the findings.

The data

Nitu

Nitu was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in a Bangla-speaking Bangladeshi family. The family migrated to London in 1999 as Nitu’s father was transferred to the London office of his company. Nitu’s father, Belal, is an electrical engineer who works at a leading multinational tobacco...
company in London, and her mother, Shaila, is a practising gynaecologist. When Nitu was interviewed, she was doing a Bachelor’s degree in Graphic Design and New Media in a university specialising in creative arts. The professional occupations of Nitu’s parents and the trend of mobility in the family, as evidenced by Nitu’s undergraduate study, are indicative of the family’s middle-class positioning (Block 2014).

**Bangladeshi cultural identity**

In Extract 1, Nitu and I are discussing what she likes wearing. The extract indicates a strong sense of identification with Bangladeshi culture in that she likes wearing Bangladeshi dress. However, performance of the Bangladeshi cultural identity, in her case, seems to be guided by her perceived appropriateness of the expectations and norms of the Bangladeshi community in Britain and the community of friends and classmates located at the British university that she attends. This is illustrated in what she says about wearing salwar-kameez, a common Bangladeshi dress.

**Extract 1 Part of my identity**

When I go to a Bangladeshi party, I wear salwar-kameez or fotua. When I go to university, I wear skirt–tops–pants ... personally I like the thing salwar-kameez so much. I think ... part of my identity. When I wear salwar-kameez, I feel at home.

*(Nitu, Interview 1)*

Dress is often considered to be the strongest marker of cultural identity for young South Asian women (Dwyer 2000). Nitu, by wearing salwar-kameez at the Bangladeshi parties, makes herself culturally intelligible (Butler 1990) as a traditional Bangladeshi girl with her Bangladeshi relatives and friends. On the other hand, her choice of Western attire at university can be interpreted as an attempt to conform to the dressing pattern norms of young women in British higher education institutes. Nitu, by wearing salwar-kameez at the Bangladeshi parties and skirts–tops–pants at the university, is probably trying to make her a ‘legitimate participant’ in the community of practice of Bangladeshi friends and relatives and the British academic institution-based peer group community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991).

**Bangla language identity**

Nitu’s relationship with Bangla appears to intersect with gender and her family emotions. She reported speaking in Bangla with her father on topics such as daily activities, the weekend plan or household matters. However, when they talk about sports, politics or academic subjects, they switch to English. Despite the fact that she reported the practice of ‘separate bilingualism’ with her father, determined by topic (Holmes 2013), there is scope to view this sceptically. It seems plausible that evidence of English–Bangla code-switching would be found if their interaction was audio-recorded over a period of time. What Nitu reported about her language choice with her father is probably suggestive, among other possible explanations, of the perceived impurity of mixing two languages. In addition, there may be an idealised home diglossic situation in that Nitu and her father preserve the ‘prestige’ variety English for higher-level topics and functions, while they allocate Bangla for mundane domestic matters. However, such assumptions do not greatly problematise the possible fact that English–Bangla flexibility is likely to help
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Nitu perform the subject position of an everyday traditional British–Bangladeshi daughter to her father. Extract 2 illustrates what Nitu reported about the language choice with her mother.

Extract 2 It is physically impossible to speak in English with ma

I just can’t speak in English with ma … if I want to speak in English with ma, I would translate Bangla into English (laughing). It is physically impossible to speak in English with ma. I just CAN’T do it.

(Nitu, Interview 1)

Nitu presents her use of Bangla with her mother as effortless and ‘natural’, claiming that translating to English would require conscious effort. The seeming automaticity of using Bangla with her mother and her perceived absurdity of translating Bangla into English in interactions with her mother is highly suggestive of a gender-mediated heritage language identity. Speaking Bangla with her mother enables her to nurture a spontaneous and intimate mother–daughter relationship (Preece 2008). The laughter in Extract 2 probably is indicative of the merriness and playfulness of this relationship, and the raised volume of ‘can’t’ suggests that English would provide a different type of relationship with her mother.

Thus far, I have presented data related to Nitu. In the next part of this section, we turn to Saima.

Saima
Saima came to the UK when she was four years old; she is the youngest child of a Bangla-speaking Bangladeshi family. Saima’s father is an electrical engineer and her mother is a homemaker. Saima’s father came to the UK in 1973 to pursue higher study. Saima’s mother is a history graduate from a prestigious Bangladeshi university. When she was interviewed, Saima had just finished her undergraduate degree in English Literature from a British university and was working as a support teacher in a school. The family status of Saima is exemplified by her academic capital and decent occupational start; the academic refinement of her mother and her father’s professional career in a lucrative engineering profession after he had earned a British higher degree qualifies the family as occupying a middle-class status.

Bangladeshi cultural identity
Saima positions herself as having less emotional affiliation to the Bangladeshi community than Nitu. The position that she adopts in the interviews about the Bangladeshi community appears shaped by the class identity of her parents, as Saima’s mother, in a separate interview, reported that she and her husband had carefully distanced the children from Bangladeshi culture by living in a white British neighbourhood so that the children could ‘concentrate’ on their education and compete with the ‘Whites’. As can be seen in Extract 3, her reading about Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi community in London while she was growing up also seemed to have contributed to some negative stereotypes of Bangladeshiess.

Extract 3 Everything seems to be tabloid news

Actually while I was growing up, I used to think of the negatives of being brought up in the Asian community. Everything seems to be tabloid news
and [you are] more vulnerable to picking up the bad as well as the good from fellow Asians … there's a possibility that there may be Bengalis who can have bad influence on you.

(Saima, Interview 1)

By using ‘Bengali’ in Extract 3 (and also in the rest of the interview) instead of the more common ‘Bangladeshi’ or ‘Bangali’ to refer to the people of Bangladesh, Saima appears to alienate herself from the Bangladeshis. ‘Bengali’ here works to distance Saima from the local working-class-dominated Bangladeshi community that she does not admire. Saima’s mention of the Asians making ‘tabloid news’ of ‘everything’ prompts her to essentialise the South Asians as shallow and gossip lovers.

Saima distances herself from a Bangladeshi identity and also rejects a possible British identity on religious grounds. The identity position that she embraces is her religious identity as a practising Muslim, despite her mother’s secular view of religion. Extract 4, which consists of a conversation between Saima and her mother Renu regarding the Eid festival, sheds light on the intersection of Saima’s cultural and religious identities.

Extract 4 Practising Muslim

Saima = S; Renu = R

1 S: Eid I was saying to her that <laughing>/ I erm we started to celebrate Eid from 2005/ from the day (.) erm (.) I have become (1) you know practising Muslim/ before that (.) I just had heard slightly about Eid/ I did not know or understand much about Eid (xxxx)/ when I went to university, I noticed that <low voice> this is a community event/ specially the one that comes after the fasting is the most meaningful to me/ moreover (.) you have given me broader perspective on religion/ I could somewhat (1) discuss-judge with you/ I could evaluate with you the other Eid/ the Eid ul Adha/ the one where animals are sacrificed/

2 R: Eid ul Adha/

3 S: that=

4 R: =that is called sacrificing Eid/

5 S: yes sacrificing/ then I thought (2) ok how right is this to slaughter erm sacrifice an animal=

6 R: =on the excuse of sacrifice=

7 S: =as part of a celebration? something did not ring right about that/ but because of you I could evaluate that/ because you have taught me (.) to ask questions regarding religion-anything/ well not anything but specially religion/

8 R: but but the funny thing is that this sacrifice is also in Hindu religion/ I could never accept this/ (.) the kurbaani (.) never (.) from my childhood (.) from childhood this is the most cruel thing I have seen/ on the excuse of religion- from there jealousy and CRUELTY develop in human/ because of this human beings kill another human/ they don’t care/ because (.) they already have the practice/

9 S: that is in the context of religion/ [but also

10 R: [I don’t know=

11 S: =there is good side=

12 R: =good side (.) well

(Saima and Renu, Family conversation)

In Extract 4 Saima and her mother Renu discuss their perceptions of Eid. In turn 1, Saima starts the conversation by saying that she had not celebrated the Eid festival before she started to practise
Heritage language and cultural identities

Islam. When Saima says that she has become a practising Muslim (turn 1), she takes a pause, hesitates and also uses hedging like ‘you know’. Saima’s hesitation and use of hedging here may indicate that she is trying to maintain a good relationship with her mother, who has a secular orientation to religion, given that hedging is frequently used when interlocutors want to be ‘sensitive’ to ‘topics which are controversial in some way’ (Coates 1996: 162). In the interview data, Saima reported that she does not disclose that she is a Muslim to people, as saying to people that she is a Muslim may result in a ‘new sense of insecurity’. Saima’s hesitation about her religious positioning is indicative that she is aware of the social and political discourses about Islam in the post 9/11 context of Britain. Saima then says that she finds the Eid which comes after fasting (turn 1) ‘most meaningful’, while she questions the ritual of animal sacrifice on Eid-ul-Adha (turn 1). Tension arises when Renu sees the ritual of animal sacrifice as an ‘excuse’ for brutality, claiming an extreme standpoint that it creates cruelty, jealousy and homicide in society (turn 8). This is the point when Saima disagrees with Renu and tries to restrict the conversation to the context of religion. She also wants her mother to see the good side of such a ritual. The mother’s subsequent use of hedging in turns 10 and 12, especially the use of ‘well’, suggests that what she would say on the issue is in conflict with her daughter (Schiffrin 1987). This conversation suggests two important things about the intersection of Saima’s cultural and religious identities. One, she is trying to achieve a Muslim identity by balancing it with the secular viewpoints of her mother in the context of post 9/11 and 7/7 discourses of Islam in Britain. Two, she identifies with Bangladeshi Muslim culture as it also conforms to her religious identity, but distances herself from a secular Bangladeshi culture, as represented by her mother, when it is in conflict with her Muslim identity.

Bangla language identity

In the community of practice of her family, Saima speaks Bangla only with her mother, and her mother is the only one in the family who speaks Bangla with her. Saima’s mother says that, when she and her husband brought up the children, they always spoke English with them to help them have enough exposure to English. It is Saima’s mother who later considered it her responsibility to teach the children Bangla. Mills’s (2004) study of Pakistani mothers in Britain shows that, while emphasising the role of English in their children’s lives as the means of becoming successful in UK society, they also consider it their responsibility to transmit the heritage language to their children. Saima in this way learned Bangla from her mother. Extract 5 shows how Saima’s relationship with Bangla is primarily through her mother.

Extract 5 I speak a lot with my mum

I do listen to song but not by myself … through by my mum. I don’t listen to Bangladeshi music by myself. My mum tells me to read. I learned how to read but I don’t always understand a lot. I can read the things that my mum writes to bring down.

(Saima, Interview 1)

Saima’s main experience of Bangla as her heritage language is mediated by her mother. Although there is a risk of overgeneralisation concerning gender, Coates’s (1996) argument that talk helps to establish rapport among women may be salient here. Saima’s repetitive use of ‘my mum’ indicates her intimacy and affection with her mother and, by speaking a lot of Bangla with her mother, Saima fosters this affectionate relationship. Saima’s case here resonates with Nitu in
this study and the Tamil participant of Preece’s (2008) study, both of whom identify heritage language with intimacy with their mothers. In the next section I discuss the findings and then highlight some key issues for applied linguistics.

Discussion

The research shows that identification with heritage language and Bangladeshi culture for the two young British-Bangladeshi women is closely interlinked with the identity inscriptions of gender and religion in their lives with some influence of their classed upbringings. Construction of what cultural identity is for Saima is not based on her social experience of coming across the community first hand, but rather from her reading and from the negative and safe-distanced representation of the Bangladeshi community through her middle-class-educated parents. Blommaert (1999) explains that if the cultural identity of a group is perceived negatively in society, members of the group are also likely to perceive their cultural identity negatively. In the case of Saima, cultural and social capital-based essentialism received via her parents about Bangladeshis in the UK shapes her reading of Bangladeshiness in British newspapers and magazines, particularly the negative discourses about the East London-based British-Bangladeshis. Despite this alienation from Bangladeshiness based on her social class, we see a possible mother-mediated avenue of identification with less social class-conflicting forms of Bangladeshi culture such as listening to Bangla songs, for example Rabindranath Tagore’s song, as she reported elsewhere in the interview, and reading popular Bangla literature. However, such a possible identification is not easily constructed as we can see in Extract 4, where Saima’s Muslim identity is contested by her mother’s counter-narrative about the ritual of animal sacrifice in Islam. Saima, however, appears to keep her Muslim identity safe and humble by not risking her intimate relationship with her mother. The care with which she positions her Muslim identity is also indicative of her awareness of the negative discourses of South Asian Muslim identity in present-day Britain (Modood 2005).

Nitu’s identification with Bangladeshiness is mediated by how she makes sense of performing her gender in line with the expected practices of the communities of practice she encounters in her life. Nitu’s choice of salwar-kameez in the communities of British-Bangladeshis and her family can be interpreted, along with her feminine comfort, as a reproduction of the discourses of gender roles and expectations of South Asian immigrant communities (Dwyer 2000). Her choice of Western dress in British academic institution-based communities of practice probably can be interpreted as an attempt to conform to the unified cultural expectations of minorities in present-day Britain.

This research shows that gender, as a dimension of identity, intersects with language identity for British-Bangladeshis such as Nitu and Saima. Even though Nitu and Saima have varying expertise in Bangla (Rampton 1990), both of them associate their use of Bangla with an affectionate relationship with their mother. This research shows that even though motivation among middle-class South Asian parents to enable their children to achieve success in British society may result in limited use of heritage language in the family (Ogbu 1999), the language is still transferred as part of the gendered role of the mother (Mills 2004; Preece 2008). Finally, speaking the language is necessitated by the filial roles of Nitu and Saima, as both of them use the language to maintain a unique and intimate relationship with their mother.

Finally, where do these cases stand in terms of Lambert’s (1975) four modes of language and cultural identification among minority children? Saima’s case illustrates Lambert’s mode of minority children having anomic distance from both communities. In Saima’s case, she does not
feel close to the Bangladeshi culture based on her negative perception about Bangladeshiness effectuated by her classed upbringing. Moreover, her religious identity is in conflict with the representation of Bangladeshi culture by her mother, who is secular minded. She also appears ambivalent about British cultural identity as she associates Britishness with a free and open life-style which Islam does not favour. Nitu’s case, however, provides support for Lambert’s mode that minority children identify with both cultures. Nitu, partly driven by her gendered identity, attempts to gain legitimacy in both the Bangladeshi and the British society by attending to the cultural norms of these two societies. In addition to positioning minority ethnic children in terms of broad categories as Lambert proposed, this small case study sheds light on the processes of identification by showing how identification with language and culture forms a complex relationship with other social categories.

Issues for applied linguistics

The research provides support for the role of gender in construction of the cultural identity of young South Asian women (Dwyer 2000; Talbani and Hasanali 2000). However, rather than framing national/ethnic culture together with religion to understand South Asian Muslim culture, it is important to deconstruct the elements of ancestral culture, particularly with the case of Bangladeshi culture where there is a mixed element of secularism and Islamism (Eade and Garbin 2006). Moreover, the commonplace mother–daughter transference nature of South Asian immigrant communities can be troubled and questioned if the mother and daughter do not share a common cultural platform, for example, as this research shows in the case of religious viewpoints. This research sheds light on how social class positioning influences the process of identification with the heritage language and heritage culture. Social class–based alienation from the mainstream home-country community by middle-class South Asian parents in pursuit of academic success of the children may result in potential ’othering’ of the community among the children. Depressing discourses that are available about the working-class majority ancestral community in the host country may solidify already negative discursive positioning about the community among ethnic minority children.

The research echoes some previous assumptions that heritage language is maintained in South Asian families mostly as part of maternal responsibility. Male parents in South Asian middle-class families, as it appeared in this study, associate English with upward mobility and high-level thinking in the Anglophone British society and show conservatism in using the heritage language. The mothers, on the other hand, identify with the heritage language to a greater extent and want to transfer it to the female children in the family. As we have seen with both the participants, speaking Bangla fosters gendered affection and a closer bond between the mother and daughter.

Finally, this research shows the emergence of a religious identity trumping both Britishness and Bangladeshiness. However, the making of this identity is in tension with the increasingly strong Islamophobic discourses in Britain and the resulting insecurity within the family about the performance of this identity.

Summary

This chapter provides a snapshot of heritage language and cultural identity constructions of two young middle-class British-Bangladeshi women in Britain. The two participants have their own trajectories and breadth of identification with Bangla language and Bangladeshiness that are
intricately embedded in the structures surrounding them. While they make cases of exercising their agency by trying to negotiate identities, as we saw Saima do in the question of achieving her Muslim identity, their negotiations do not cloud the fact that their identity positioning is also significantly shaped by the structures of family, home and host country communities. The research shows the fluidity and overlapping of social categories of religion, social class and gender in the process of ethnolinguistic and cultural identifications of these young British-Bangladeshis. This research provides support for the roles of gender in constructing South Asian cultural identity. It also raises the need for careful analysis of the dynamics of cultural-religious commonalities and differences between the mother and the daughter to have a nuanced understanding of the gender-mediated transference nature of South Asian culture. Given the emergence of social class as a very important construct in influencing the identity positioning of the participants in this study and the general lack of attention it has received in similar contexts (see Block, this volume), this research raises the need for more identity research into social class and its intersection with culture and language among South Asians. Moreover, the performance of Muslim identity and how this may contest secular discourses in Bangladeshi families, along with negative discourses of Islam in wider society, needs to be examined in greater depth and in diverse contexts. Overall, this research shows the multifaceted intersections of gender, social class and religion in heritage language and cultural identity constructions of the two young Bangladeshis in my study. Moreover, it documents the need for building a macro understanding of ancestral culture; the cultural political dimension of dominant society discourses where minority identities are positioned; and a micro analysis of cultural socialisation within the family to understand the possibilities of South Asian identities.

Related topics
Positioning language and identity: poststructuralist perspectives; Language and ethnic identity; Language and religious identities; Language and gender identities; Class in language and identity research; Language, gender and identities in political life: a case study from Bangladesh; Styling and identity in a second language; Intersectionality in language and identity research; The future of identity research: impact and new developments in sociolinguistics.

Further reading
Eade, J. and Garbin, D. (2006). ‘Competing visions of identity and space: Bangladeshi Muslims in Britain’, Contemporary South Asia, 14(2): 181–193. (This journal article is useful to gain understanding about cultural and religious tension among the Bangladeshi community in Britain.)
Pavlenko, A. and Blackledge, A. (ed.) (2004). Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. (This edited book provides valuable insights about the varied dimensions of multilingual identities in diverse contexts.)

References
Heritage language and cultural identities


Appendix

Transcription conventions

X means an unidentified speaker
A slash – / – shows the end of a chunk of talk
A hyphen – - – illustrates an incomplete word or utterance
A question mark – ? – indicates question intonation
Pauses of less than one second are shown with a full stop inside brackets – (.)
Pauses of one second and longer are timed to the nearest second and the number of seconds is put in brackets – (3)
[square brackets on top of each other indicates the point where [speakers overlap
An equals sign – = – at the end of one utterance and the start of the next speaker’s utterance shows that there was no audible gap between speakers
Double brackets around a word or phrase shows that there is ((doubt about the transcription))
Double brackets around xs – ((xxx)) – shows that the speaker’s utterance is inaudible or can’t be made out
Heritage language and cultural identities

<phrases or words in angled brackets> is an additional comment by the transcriber on what is happening at the time or the way in which something is said

WORDS or Syllables in CAPital letters are spoken with extra emphasis

% words % or phrases enclosed by percentage symbols are spoken very quietly, almost like an aside

: means an elongated vowel (e.g. no:o)

**Bold** means English in original, not translation

(Coates 2003)