Exploring the Way Pre-School Practitioners and Parents from South Asian Diaspora in the UK Perceive and Construct Their Young Children's Identities

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- Academic community has witnessed a growing interest in exploring migrants' experiences of acculturation and the nature of their identities (Drzewiecka and Steyn, 2012; Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, 1996; Schwartz, Kim, and Whitbourne, 2013), and at least some of these studies were conducted with South Asian participants in the UK (Gu and Patkin, 2013; Tummala-Narra *et al.*, 2012; **Tobin *et al.*, 2016).**

- These studies merge to note that racial and ethnic discrimination directed at migrant populations increases acculturative stress and complicates these individuals' negotiation of their identities.

- Still, there appears to be a lack of studies on very young children (preschool age) and very little empirical work on their identities using theoretical models of acculturation.

Research context – social, cultural and political

Personal and professional motivation for the study

- Lack of literature and studies on identity formation of South Asian children
- My personal story – *immigrant child – Social justice advocate - academic*

Research Questions

Central Question: How do children of South Asian migrant parents construe their multiple complex identities, according to the perspectives of their parents and practitioners?

- **Sub-question 1:** What cultural influences within preschool and home settings contribute to or diminish the formation of multiple, multi-layered identities among children of South Asian heritage?

- **Sub-question 2:** How do parents from South Asian diaspora and early years practitioners perceive young children's complex identities and their formation?

- **Sub-question 3**: How can practitioners in early years settings create dialogues with parents from South Asian diaspora as a means of helping children to negotiate their multiple complex identities?

Research design

- Qualitative Research Methodology

- Interpretative and Social Constructivist Paradigms

- Methodological Considerations of Researcher's Subjectivity

- Focus Groups

- Video Ethnography and Fieldwork

- Ethical Considerations

- Data Analysis - Discourse analysis, Bakhtin (1981)

The participants – Parents

Ethnicity	Mothers	Fathers	Extended family	Location	Total No. of focus groups	Professional status
Pakistani Muslim	56	7	2 Aunts 1Grandmother	Birmingham x 4 Bury x1 Peterborough x1 Lewisham x1 Hammersmith x1	8	Taxi Driver Housewife Manual factory worker Domestic workers Restaurant owner Chef Classroom assistant
Punjabi Sikh	39	9	0	Wolverhampton x 2 Birmingham x1 Leicester x 1 Sandwell x1 Hammersmith x 1	6	Legal professionals Housewife Taxi driver Classroom assistant Seamstress/Tailor Teacher Care worker Civil servant
Hindu	20	3	0	Birmingham x2 Hammersmith x 1 Leicester x1	4	Cancer research scientist Housewife Teacher Data analyst Computer programmer Retail assistant

Participants – Practitioners

Ethnicity	Male	Female	Professional position	Type of Setting	Location	No. of focus groups
Pakistani Muslim **White British** **Black Caribbean** **Black African** **Greek**	2	72	Bilingual support worker Classroom assistant Family support worker Centre Manager Headteacher Classroom teacher Nursery Deputy Head SENCO	Children's centres Nursery Schools Primary schools	Birmingham Bury Lewisham Hammersmith Leicester Wolverhampton	8

Thematic mapping
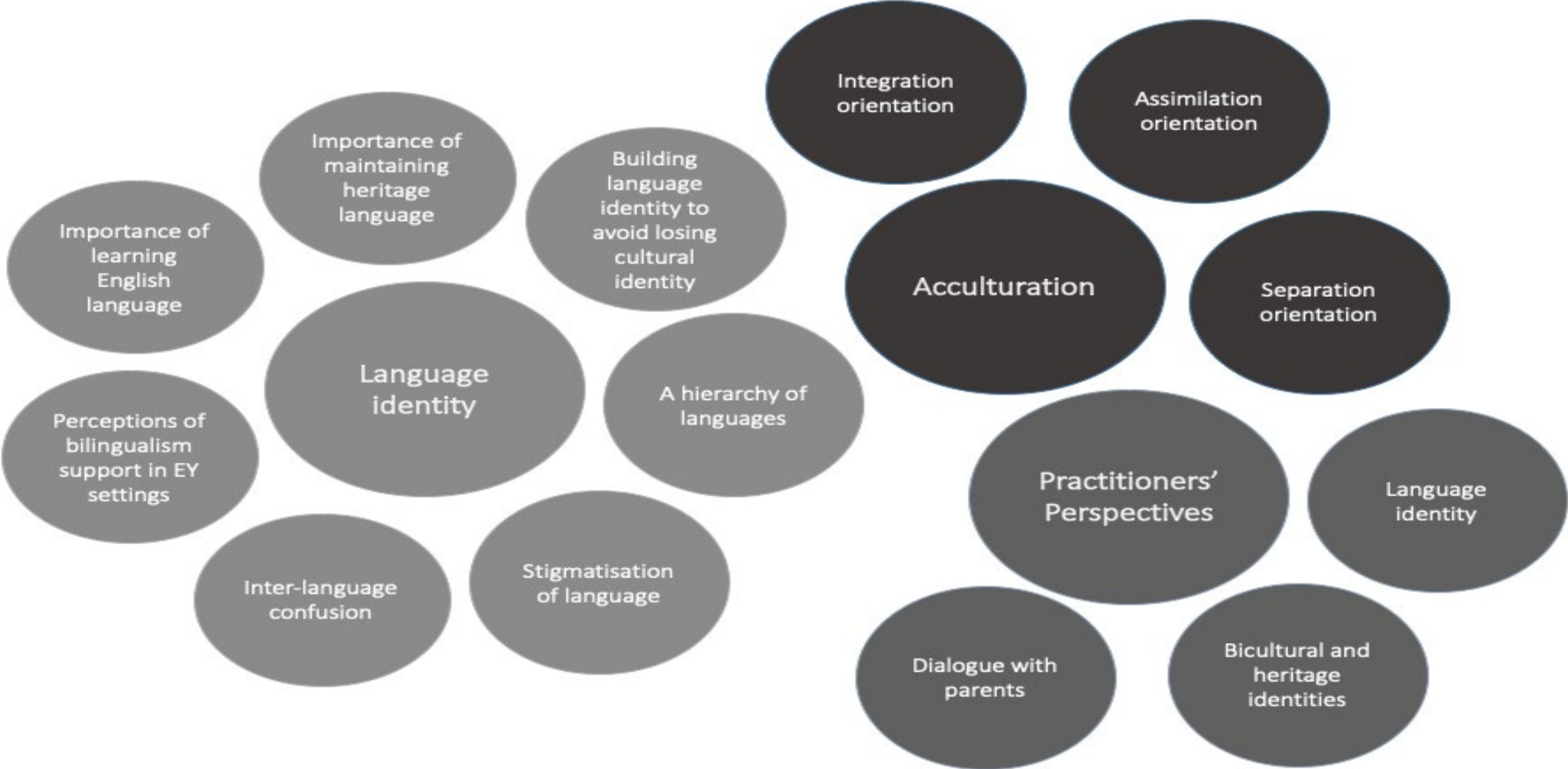
Language identity

Sub themes:

- *Maintaining heritage language*
- *Learning host/dominant national language*
- *Bilingualism/multilingualism*
- *Use of home language in pre-school settings*
- *Inter-language confusion*
- *Stigmatisation of non-western languages*
- *Hierarchy of languages*
- *Language connected cultural identity*
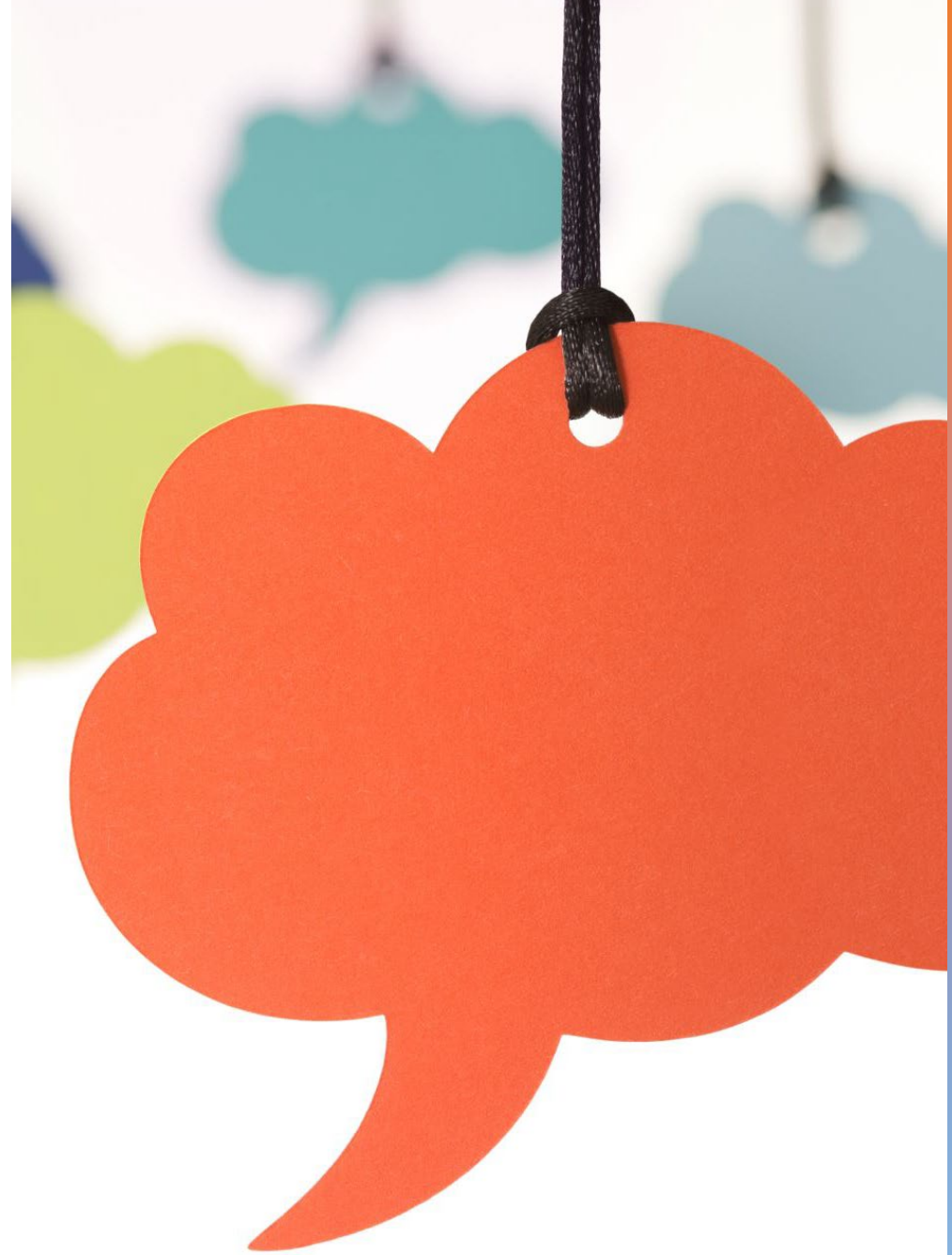- *Language to maintain religious identity*
- *Language brokering*

Example Transcripts

- **Punjabi Sikh Mother**: Language is the bread and butter of our identity (laughs).

- **Pakistani Mother)**: We know we have to learn English in this country to integrate and survive in Britain, but that shouldn't mean losing our identity.

- **Hindu Mother**: The British people don't stop speaking English when they move abroad, you can't talk about identity if you have no language. That's the first thing our parents taught us. Even in India there are many hundreds of languages and that's what makes people in India rich and diverse.

Many parents in this research were also afraid that, if their children speak English on an everyday basis, they will lose their cultural identity, as evident in following comments:

- **Pakistani Mother**: What I've noticed is that my daughter was speaking Urdu every day very well before she started Nursery, but when she started nursery school, she stopped and now she speaks broken Urdu. She wants to speak only English all the time so now. I have to be very strict with her at home to make sure she doesn't lose it completely. How else will she know who she is?

Language and religious identity

- **Pakistani Father:** Children learn Arabic by reading the Koran. Children will learn English for sure at school, but we have to make sure they get Arabic and understand and practice our religion. That's important for their identity as they are growing up outside Pakistan. It is unbelievable how quickly they pick up English. It took me three to four years to start speaking. I don't worry about them speaking English, I worry more about how learning English may stop them from learning Urdu and Arabic.

- **Pakistani Mother:** Urdu language is part of Pakistani language and our religion, that's what makes us different from Muslims from Iraq, Saudi, Somalia etc. We might share the same religion, but the language is very different.

- **Punjabi Sikh Mother:** We teach our religion through our language.

- **Pakistani Mother:** Since my daughter started preschool, she has picked up English so quickly and that's all she wants to speak. Even when I ask her questions in Urdu, she answers in English. That's a problem because both me and my husband don't speak English that good. When we pray she won't understand the language.

- **Hindu mother**: We pray daily in our language, Hindi. We can't teach worship in English
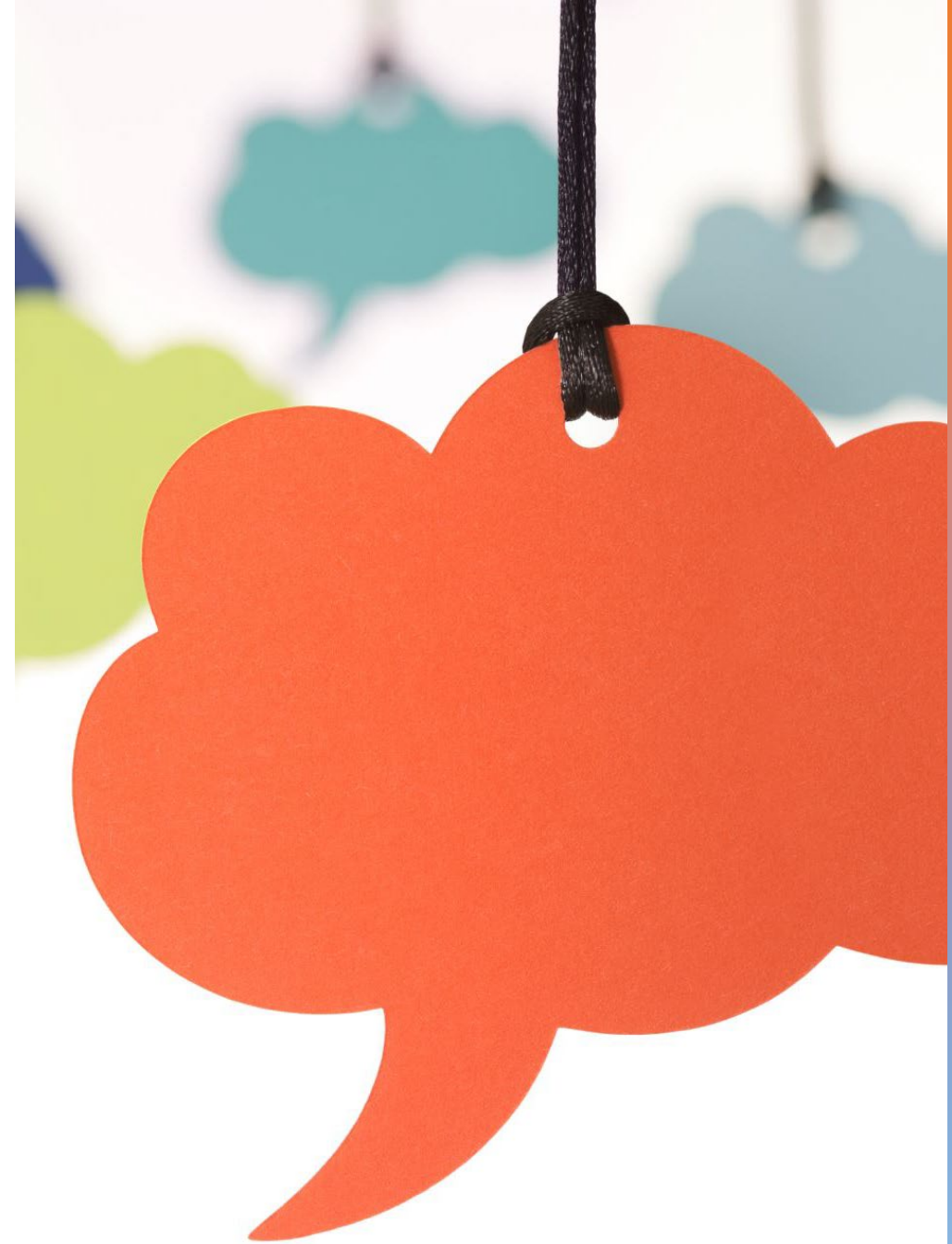
Language brokering

Cognitive development

Linguistic development

Maturity.

Positive relationships with parents

Conceptual models of parenting

- Kangaroo – is based on the metaphor of child protection and perceives parents as the major source of socialization for their children.

- Cuckoo – parenting imitates the behavior of that bird

- Chameleon – Takes its name from this creature's ability to change its colour and to merge into the background

Roer-Strier's (1996)

Cultural mourning

When an immigrant leaves loved ones at home, he or she also leaves the cultural enclosures that have organized and sustained experience. The immigrant simultaneously must come to terms with the loss of family and friends and also cultural forms (food, music, religion, for example) that have given the immigrant's native world a distinct and highly personal character. It is not only the people who are mourned but the culture itself, which is inseparable from the loved ones whom it holds (Ainslie 1998:287)

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