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### **Plurilingual Competence and Construction of Linguistic Identity: A Study on Sri Lankan Students Following French Studies in University of Kelaniya**

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The study of identity is pertinent to Language Sciences since language shapes the individual's perception of the world and his relationship to his social network. A linguistic repertoire containing multiple languages could lead to a complex and linguistically kaleidoscopic identity. Hence, a plurilingual individual (the anticipated outcome of the recommendations of the Common European Framework for Languages) becomes an object worthy of study. The present study examines the linguistic identity of plurilingual students following French studies in the University of Kelaniya. Its main objective is to understand the ways in which different language learning experiences, both academic and non-academic, could enrich or complexify students' language practices and representations. It also attempts to identify the nature of the students' linguistic identity. Being a pre-project of an extended future research, the study focused on four third-year students following the Special Degree in French Studies. The data was collected through written language biographies; a reflexive practice used to record students' personal language learning history. An in class discussion on 'plurilingual competence' preceded the writing of language biographies. A thematic analysis of the collected language biographies was then conducted in order to determine students' language practices, linguistic representations and the nature of their linguistic identity. The results uncovered conscious plurilingual practices and complex but dynamic plurilingual identities evolving over time and space and engaged in constant self-negotiation. It was also observed that these plurilingual identities with vague linguistic frontiers continued to maintain the concept of alterity (otherness) and interpreted language learning as a means of decoding it. It could be concluded that both academic and non-academic language learning experiences shape an individual's linguistic identity and their attitudes towards language learning. Language teachers are thus recommended to propose activities in order to present 'plurilingual competence' as functional and asymmetric. Such activities could facilitate language acquisition and constructive negotiation of linguistic identity.

**Key words:** Alterity, Language biographies, Language learning, Plurilingualism, Plurilingual identities