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**A-Photo-Narrative-of-the-Sociolinguistic-and-Sociocultural-Identities-of-a-Refugee-Adolescent\_-Through-His-Eyes.pdf**

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# Opening Up Education for Inclusivity Across Digital Economies and Societies

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## Chapter 12

# A Photo–Narrative of the Sociolinguistic and Sociocultural Identities of a Refugee Adolescent: Through His Eyes

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### **ABSTRACT**

*One’s linguistic discourse is directly linked to his or her identity construction. The author conducted a qualitative study that investigated the sociolinguistic and sociocultural identities, both current and imagined, of a newly arrived adolescent of refugee status, named Yerodin, through a photo-narrative approach. Yerodin was unique in that he was 11 years old when he arrived to the United States but did not have any prior formalized schooling. Therefore, he was illiterate in both his first language of Swahili and second language of English. This study took place during a summer school program that sought to develop Yerodin and his siblings’ literacy skills before the upcoming school year. Findings illustrated Yerodin’s current identity as one who appreciated his experiences in the refugee camp prior to resettlement and as an English learner. Furthermore, Yerodin realized that English, his second language, and academics were key to accessing his desired communities of identity, including aspects of American culture and friendships with “American peers.”*

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR; 2017a), the total number of persons of concern increased by 5.4 percent from 2016, worldwide. It should be noted that UNHCR has also referred to *persons of concern* as forcibly displaced from their homes due to “persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations” (UNHCR, 2016b, p. 2). The International

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Committee of the Red Cross (2010) considered a person who has been displaced as having left their home(s) due to violence or life threatening conditions but who, however, may still reside in their home country. Thus, the total population of persons of concern increased from 67.7 million in January 2017 to 71.44 million in December 2017 (UNHCR, 2017a). Of this figure, 19,941,347 individuals were considered to be refugees (UNHCR, 2017b). Even though the majority of refugees receive support from their new host country, a small portion of refugees will resettle to a third country (U.S. Department of State, 2015a). The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Article 1A(2)) defined a refugee as having:

*A well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2016).*

Since 1975, more than 3 million refugees have resettled amongst all 50 states throughout the United States (U.S. Department of State, 2014). In May 2016, UNHCR (2016a) reported that 274,088 individuals held refugee status in the United States. In a published report by the U.S. Department of State (2017), the United States admitted 84,994 individuals with refugee status during the fiscal year of 2016. However, since the Trump administration took office, immigration to the United States saw an overall decline. This declination extended to individuals with refugee status at 53,716 during fiscal year of 2017 (U.S. Department of State, 2018).

## **Educating Grade School Students From Refugee Backgrounds**

Refugee minors, those who are under the age of 18 years old, increased from 41 percent in 2009 to 51 percent in 2015, worldwide (UNHCR, 2016a). Of the 84,994 individuals admitted to the United States in 2016, 44.37 percent, or 37,712 individuals, were minors (U.S. Department of State, 2017). Of those who were minors, 12,295 individuals were of school-age (i.e., between 5-17 years old; U.S. Department of State, 2017). In the U.S. Department of States' (2018) most current report, those who were classified as minors and school-aged children were not reported for the fiscal year of 2017.

Upon resettlement, school-aged children and adolescents from refugee backgrounds are required to adapt to significantly different ways of living while simultaneously experiencing physical and psychological changes that are crucial to their developmental growth (Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010). In addition to these developmental changes, these students are burdened with the tasks of understanding their purposes in life while adapting to a foreign environment, including its language and behavioral norms (Mosselson, 2006). For these reasons, Guerrero and Tinkler (2010) suggested that children and adolescents from refugee backgrounds, as with all displaced children, are a "particularly vulnerable population" (p. 55). Furthermore, Mosselson (2006) regarded this demographic of adolescents as the population "most at risk with respect to school performance and general well-being" (p. 21).

Despite these potential challenges, the majority of adolescents with refugee status in the United States find that the schools in which they are enrolled upon resettlement become the first and most significant

places where they engage in “institutional and social discourses and develop their identities” (Bal, 2014, p. 271). Existing literature regarding the identity construction of students with refugee status treats this phenomenon as dichotomous by taking either an anthropological or a psychological perspective (Mosselson, 2006; Oikonomidou, 2010). Ethnographic studies have neglected the processes that are significant to the students’ cognitive and physical development while hand-picking specific experiences to highlight while excluding others; whereas, psychological studies have disregarded the students’ culture altogether (Mosselson, 2006). Oikonomidou (2010) posited that existing studies look at either students’ social identities or the identities they create when learning a second language (L2); however, the majority of studies do not look at both within the same study and how they affect the students’ whole-school identities. Therefore, research on identity regarding these students’ “new social and cultural realities, over the span of a[n] L2 learning trajectory” (Oikonomidou, 2010, p. 302) is still needed (Giroir, 2014).

At the 1998 Protection of Children and Adolescents in Complex Emergencies, children and adolescents from refugee backgrounds were recognized as *invisible groups* and were highly susceptible to a wide range of humanitarian crimes against children, including becoming child soldiers and victims of child-sex trafficking (Cooper, 2005). In addition to the invisibility, residence in a refugee camp creates “passive, dependent, mendacious, and unquestioning young people” (Cooper, 2005, p. 464). Persons from refugee backgrounds, as Waters and LeBlanc (2005) described, become stateless individuals due to searching for a new identity. This search for identity ultimately affects the children of refugee families. As a result, parents may face difficult decisions and pressure as to which society, ethnic group, and/or culture to socialize their children (Waters & LeBlanc, 2005). Consequently, the host country may legally withhold certain rights and privileges from both parents and children with refugee status that are still afforded to the host country’s citizens, including education (Waters & LeBlanc, 2005).

However, education is still “widely regarded as an important development strategy for young people in emergencies and post-conflict settings” (Cooper, 2005, p. 464). Educating students with refugee status who come from cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and/or religious backgrounds that may differ from the host country is often viewed by the host society as controversial (Bourgonje, 2010). These diversities, along with an unknown history regarding the students’ educational background and experiences, create various challenges for both the students and their teachers (Bourgonje, 2010). Consequently, students are likely to experience challenges when adjusting to public school for a variety of reasons, including emotional trauma, stress, and difficulties learning the host country’s official or dominant language (Bourgonje, 2010; Roxas & Roy, 2012). Additionally, some students have received little to no formal education prior to resettling to the host country (Bourgonje, 2010; Hirano, 2015; Roxas, 2011). As a result, these students may lack the basic academic skills needed for schooling as well as the social and procedural norms required for successfully navigating one’s way throughout the school day (Brock & Raphael, 2005; Oikonomidou, 2010; Roxas, 2011). In addition, the approach that most educational systems take is one of assimilation as it completely disregards these students’ experiences as refugees.

Research regarding identity in second language acquisition (SLA) environments employs a wide range of qualitative data collection methods, including observations, interviews, and narratives to answer a particular study’s research questions (Norton, 2013). Although traditionally utilized in anthropological work (Collier & Collier, 1986), the use of photography and visual images in SLA have gained significant momentum to capture L2 learners’, particularly English learners’ (ELs), identity constructions as they relate to their sociolinguistic experiences in language learning. Mosselson (2006) and Oikonomidou (2010) suggested that educators, both teachers and administrators, fail to recognize the experiences that

grade school students with refugee status face. Rather, school adaptations and experiences for these students are assumed. As a result, these assumptions likely lead to significant repercussions regarding the students' overall schooling experiences (Mosselson, 2006).

The purpose of the current paper is to describe the sociolinguistic and sociocultural identities of a newly arrived adolescent with refugee status named Yerodin, as told through an ethnographic lens. In addition, employing the use of photographs captured significant moments, people, and other factors that contributed to his English language acquisition and cultural adjustment to the United States. Yerodin's narrative of identity construction was informed through an 8-week summer school program that I developed and taught with the purpose of preparing him to formally attend school for the first time in his life. As such, I asked the following research questions to guide the parameters of this ethnographic study in order to explore Yerodin's sociolinguistic and sociocultural constructions of identity:

1. What role(s) did learning English, Yerodin's L2, play in constructing each of Yerodin's identities, both current and imagined?
2. What role(s) did the overall summer school experience play in constructing each of Yerodin's identities, both current and imagined?

### **Brief Theoretical Background of Study**

Before discussing the specifics of the study and Yerodin's identity constructs, it is important to first discuss the frameworks that guided this work. Poststructuralist perspectives have acknowledged identity to be complex, multi-faceted, and even contradictory (Block, 2007; Cummins, 1996; Norton, 2013; Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Weedon, 1987/1997). Bucholtz (2011) suggested that identities are the result of individuals' socialization. Ochs (1993) indicated that identity is "a range of social personae, including social statuses, roles, positions, relationships, and institutional and other relevant community identities one may attempt to claim or assign" (p. 288). As such, individuals construct their identities by negotiating and navigating through various identifiable categories (e.g. ethnicity, class, language) in order to position themselves within a given social context (Bucholtz, 2011; Norton, 2013).

### **Identity in the Field of SLA**

In the field of sociolinguistics, a sub-field that falls under the umbrella of SLA, researchers have linked one's linguistic discourse to his or her identity construction (Bucholtz, 2011; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; McCrocklin & Link, 2016). It was not until the emergence of culture and the concept of 'self' that studies conducted within the field of SLA began to include the sociocultural aspects of language (Cohen, 2012; Norton, 2013). As a result, identity studies have increased within the field of SLA. Weedon (1997) suggested that language is the cause for various forms of social interactions to occur. Research regarding identity and language learning view language as a "social practice, through which relationships are defined, negotiated, and resisted" (McKinney & Norton, 2010, p. 193). Language plays a significant role in how individuals' sense of self is constructed (Weedon, 1997). Individuals negotiate their sense of self through different spaces and points in time through language (Heller, 1987). Further, language is what allows individuals access to specific social networks and acquisitional opportunities (Heller, 1987). When L2 learners exercise their L2 (e.g., reading, writing, or speaking), they are simultaneously engag-

ing into conversation and linguistic practice while “organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the world[;] as such, they are engaged in identity construction and negotiation” (Norton, 2013, p. 4). As a result, in language learning environments, identity bridges L2 learners to their immediate, social worlds (Norton, 2013).

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study: Imagined Community and Identity**

It should be highlighted that identity is not a linear concept as traditional and past literature in SLA have suggested (Bucholtz, 2011; Davies & Harré, 1990; Heller, 1987; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Norton Peirce, 1995; Weedon, 2004). Poststructural perspectives view identity as being complex with many different facets, including social behaviors, linguistic structures, and culture (Block, 2007; Davies & Harré, 1990; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Weedon, 2004). Anderson (1991) first used the term *imagined community* to refer to individuals connecting themselves, through imagination, with citizens from desired communities and nations from which they wished to gain access and membership. In doing so, these individuals are connected and networked with other members from within the desired community or nation despite not knowing one another personally (Anderson, 1991). According to Anderson (1991), “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communication” (p. 6). Wenger (1998) corroborated Anderson’s (1991) view on imagined community membership and the connectedness it brings to those who seek one. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of communities of practice suggested that the majority of learning occurs as a result of the individual’s engagement and participation in communities that are immediately available to the individual. Wenger (1998), however, later proposed that community access and membership is achieved by not only direct involvement and engagement, but also by the simple imagination and desire to become a part of that particular community, both spatially and temporally.

Although first termed and discussed by Anderson (1991), it was Norton (2001) who is credited to bringing the concept of an imagined community and identity to the field of SLA. In trying to explain the bridge that could account for the multi-faceted and complex layers that L2 learners demonstrated when constructing their identities as language learners, Norton Peirce (1995) proposed the construct of L2 investment. According to Norton Peirce (1995), “investment rather than motivation more accurately signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of the [L2 language learners] to the target language [TL] and their *sometimes* ambivalent desire to learn and practice it” (p. 17). The concept of investment draws upon Bourdieu’s (1977) and Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) concept of cultural capital “to reference the knowledge, credentials, and modes of thought that characterize different classes and groups in relation to specific sets of social forms” (Norton, 2013, p. 6). The value of cultural capital is dependent upon the particular social context from which one is situated, and as the cultural capital in one context increases, so does the learner’s sense of self and future aspirations (Norton, 2013). Cummins (2006) identified the concept of investment as a “significant explanatory construct” (p. 59). Thus, L2 investment can account for the following questions, as proposed by Norton (2013): (a) to what extent is the learner motivated to learn the TL? and (b) what is the learner’s investment in the language practices with regards to learning in a classroom or community setting? Thus, the answers to these questions lead to an individual’s L2 imagined identity.



## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participant Vignette**

The current study investigated the identity constructions from the lived experiences of a newly arrived refugee adolescent named Yerodin, whose first language (L1) was not English, through his completion of an 8-week summer school program. Thus, the study drew upon a convenience and purposive sampling method (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Yerodin was of particular interest to the current study because, at the time of the study, he met the following criteria in order to participate in the study: (a) was an adolescent between the ages of 10-15 years old, (b) was an EL in which English was not his L1, and (c) was considered to be a newly arrived refugee to the United States. More specifically, at the time of the study, Yerodin was eleven years old and had been resettled to the United States for three months after arriving from a Tanzanian refugee camp. His family's resettlement sponsors informed me that Yerodin had not received any type of formal education and lacked literacy and numeracy skills in both his L1 of Swahili and English.

Despite being born and raised in a refugee camp, Yerodin was considered to be a Congolese refugee due to his parents fleeing from the Democratic Republic of Congo to a Tanzanian camp before his birth. Yerodin's family resettled to Central Florida, USA at the beginning of March 2016 after being granted refugee status and admission to the United States. Upon arrival, Yerodin and his siblings underwent home schooling which was set up by the local church who sponsored their resettlement to the United States. At the time of the study, Yerodin should have been enrolled into the sixth grade at a middle school based on his age (i.e., eleven years old). It was, however, decided by the team of instructors from the summer school program that Yerodin was not academically ready for middle school and would find better success enrolling into an elementary school as a fifth grader. At the time of the study's commencement, Yerodin's parents indicated that he had some form of education prior to resettlement; however, they described it as informal. Both his parents and his older siblings, who also attended this informal schooling, explained that this type of education resembled a daycare setting with educational activities sewn throughout.

### **Summer School Program**

I was first introduced to Yerodin and his family in March 2016 due to my prior work with the refugee services and resettlement coalition in Central Florida. I was approached by a local church who indicated that they began sponsoring the resettlement of a newly arrived refugee family of 13 members. I was asked to help assist with the children's English acquisition and prepare them to begin schooling for the following August. The members of the church who were directly involved with their resettlement and I met numerous times to discuss the family's needs for resettlement and schooling.

In May 2016, I met with the entire family, which consisted of two parents (e.g., a father and a mother) and 11 children, including Yerodin, at their home for two hours. After interacting with the children, I spoke with the parents about what they desired for their children. They explained to me their children's prior education and its poor quality. I developed a program, specifically for the children who would be entering grade school in August 2016 that would help to develop their English acquisition, literacy and numeracy skills, and classroom norms (e.g., raising hands to take turns talking) in order to support their readiness to start schooling in the local school district.

The program started the first week of June 2016 and ran for eight weeks. Throughout this program, church volunteers taught the elementary-aged children ( $n = 3$ ) and another volunteer and I taught the secondary-aged children ( $n = 3$ ). Because of his age, Yerodin was placed with his older brothers in the secondary group. Instruction was designed to model an activity-based learning environment and was as followed: Mondays and Wednesdays from 9:00am – 11:30am and Fridays were reserved for field trips throughout Central Florida. The purpose of my involvement with this program served two reasons: (a) to provide a foundation of literacy, numeracy, and preparation for starting school in August and (b) to build a professional rapport with the family, particularly the parents, as to not violate ethical concerns when conducting research on refugee populations (Birman, 2006; Kabranian-Melkonian, 2015).

Throughout the program, I discovered that Yerodin's older siblings were strong in their mathematical skills of basic addition, subtraction, and multiplication but were weak in literacy. They knew their basic alphabetic system for their L1 of Swahili and were able to transfer some linguistic aspects to the acquisition of their L2, English. However, their reading fluency stopped at the simple decoding of sounds and pronunciation. In working with Yerodin, I learned that his mathematical skills were basic. He was able to do simple addition using his fingers to count. Unlike his brothers, he was unfamiliar with the Swahili alphabetic system and had difficulty connecting the concept that letters have specific and individual sounds, with regards to pronunciation.

## **Data Collection Procedures and Instruments**

### **Collection Instrument: Photo-Narratives**

Employing photography as a method for data collection and analysis gained considerable notice in the mid-1980s upon the publication of Collier and Collier (1986), which explained the value and procedures for using photography in anthropological and sociocultural research. Photography has the ability to capture and hold minute nuances and fine details that would otherwise go unnoticed by the researcher. Regarding identity construction, photography can bring a deeper understanding of the participants' cultural inventory, including materialistic possessions, quality of life, and psychological well-being.

Photography not only serves as a research tool for documenting the participants' experiences but also in eliciting participant interviews in order to gain their emic viewpoints by allowing the interviewer to elicit deeper understandings from the participants by using the images within the photographs themselves as a reference (Collier & Collier, 1986; Wallace, 2015). Interviews about the photographs from the direct source allow for "the potential range of data [to enlarge] beyond that contained in the photographs themselves" (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 99). Despite the professional and collaborative rapport that should have been established between the interviewer and the participants (Birman, 2006; Collier & Collier, 1986; Kabranian-Melkonian, 2015), the photographs can be used as a discussion starter and a point of reference to guide the interviews (Collier & Collier, 1986; Wallace, 2015). As a result, the participants assume ownership of their photographs by taking a conversational lead to express their expertise and first-hand account of the photographs (Collier & Collier, 1986). Because the photographs are the focal point of the interview, the participants are able to become more relaxed as they are not directly the subject of the interview (Collier & Collier, 1986).

## Collection Procedures

Yerodin was given a digital camera at the beginning of the summer program. Throughout the program, he was encouraged to take photographs of specific events, moments, people, and materials/objects that he felt were significant to his acquisition of English, schooling development, and cultural adjustment to the United States. Additionally, using a separate camera, I took photographs of Yerodin engaged in various activities related to the same purposes. Such evidence may have included, but was not limited to, friends, peers, extracurricular activities, family, schoolwork, learning activities and strategies, and/or places within the classroom, church, home, and community. Further, such evidence informs the researcher of the participants' lives regarding acculturation, cultural adaptation, and self-positioning as well as tracks continuity and change from each participant (Collier & Collier, 1986).

At the end of the 8-week program, I sat down with Yerodin and an older sibling who was fluent in both Swahili and English. Throughout Florida, Swahili is a rare minority language. Initially, I reached out to the local hospitals and African organizations in the area for translators; however, I was unable to obtain one. Thus, his sibling assisted with the translation. During this time, Yerodin and I combined our photographs. Yerodin hand-selected ten photographs that he felt signified his acquisition to English, schooling experience in the summer program, and cultural adjustment to the United States. I then proceeded to conduct an interview with Yerodin regarding the photographs. Guiding questions were purposefully open-ended and included such questions as, "Why did you select this particular photograph?", "Who is this person in the photograph?", and, "When I look at this photograph, I see XYZ. What do you see?"

## Data Analysis Procedures

Upon completion of the interview, I went back and listened to the audio recording several times in order to transcribe the interview. I also consulted my field notes in order to account for Yerodin's long pauses, facial expressions, senses of emotions (e.g., shyness, fear, anxiety, nervousness, happiness), and overall body language. For fidelity purposes, the transcript was reviewed against the audio file and my field notes by a colleague who was not attached to this project in any way and who was a doctoral student in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). This external colleague checked for biases, accuracy, and overall alignment amongst the transcription, audio file, and field notes. Next, I coded the interview data as they related to the photographs following Saldaña's (2009) coding procedures. In the first coding cycle, descriptive coding methods were employed in order to summarize the primary topics that were presented through the data analysis. In subsequent cycles, I analyzed the data for categories and subcategories through axial coding.

## FINDINGS

### Description of the Photographs Selected

Due to a privacy and confidentiality agreement established as part of the parameters for this research, Yerodin's parents requested that these photographs *not* be shared with the public, even for the purposes of publication. Thus, the photographs that were taken and selected by Yerodin for this study are not included in this chapter. Although I, as both the researcher and author of this chapter, clearly understand

## ***A Photo-Narrative of the Sociolinguistic and Sociocultural Identities of a Refugee Adolescent***

the importance and depth that providing the photographs brings to the overall study, the decision to not include them was for two reasons. First, I wanted to honor his parents' request. Secondly, researchers with expertise regarding participants from refugee backgrounds have repeatedly and strongly warned that when working with individuals from refugee backgrounds rapport with the participants cannot be established without trust and respect for the participants' needs and requests (Birman, 2006; Collier & Collier, 1986; Kabranian-Melkonian, 2015). In doing so, researchers are completing the study *with* the participants rather than *on* them (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, & Richardson, 1992). Therefore, each photograph that was selected by Yerodin is described in detail. It should be noted that although Yerodin took photographs of his own, the majority of the photographs that he selected to talk about were taken either by me or his siblings so that Yerodin himself was in the photograph.

*Photograph 1* was taken by me on the first day I met Yerodin and his family. In the photograph, the entire family is standing outside in front of their new house that was being sponsored to them by the church's refugee services office. The photograph includes his two parents, his five older brothers (ages 23, 21, 17, 14, and 14 years old, respectively), his older sister (age 19, respectively), his younger siblings (ages 5, 5, and 7, respectively), and of course, Yerodin (age 11, respectively). In addition, his mother was eight months pregnant at the time the photograph was taken, and during the summer school program, Yerodin's new baby brother was born. All ages were self-reported by Yerodin's parents and approximate as they were not exactly sure of their true age or birthdates. Most of the children, including Yerodin, had a defaulted birthday of January 1 due to not possessing a birth certificate as a result of being born in a refugee camp without a hospital or formal medical care. Everyone in the photograph is smiling with some of the children holding up peace signs with their fingers and waving to the camera.

*Photograph 2* was taken by me and shows Yerodin eating an "American breakfast", consisting of eggs, bacon, pancakes, and orange juice, that they cooked on the first day of the summer school program. Yerodin is leaning back in his chair holding a napkin and fork and smiling.

*Photograph 3* was taken at Yerodin's request to depict him swimming in one of Florida's natural springs during a field trip. He is accompanied by his older siblings. Additionally, a small handful of White adolescent boys with whom he began interacting are swimming next to him.

*Photograph 4* was taken by Yerodin and shows his siblings on a field trip to the zoo and posed in front of a giraffe after hand-feeding the giraffe lettuce. Because Yerodin took the photograph, he is not shown in it.

*Photograph 5* was taken by me of Yerodin and his older brothers in a self-pedaling swan boat as they pedaled it throughout a lake in a city park. He and his siblings are wearing life jackets and were laughing and smiling in the photograph.

*Photograph 6* was taken by a sibling, per Yerodin's request, of Yerodin holding a dog at the same city park as photograph 5. This was a random stranger who was walking her dog. When she came up to the family, the children, including Yerodin, asked to play with and hold the dog. During this photograph, the woman asked about the family, welcomed them, and wished them well on their resettlement before continuing on her walk with the dog.

*Photograph 7* was taken by me of Yerodin doing school work from one of the lessons from the summer school program. Yerodin is learning to write his name on a worksheet related to literacy.

*Photograph 8* was taken by Yerodin of a graphic organizer, a bubble map, related to their daily routines. In the center of the organizer was the central topic "Daily Routines". Three sub-bubbles, or subthemes, sprouted out from the central "Daily Routines" bubble. These subthemes included, "In the

morning,” “In the afternoon,” and “At night.” Yerodin and his siblings added their daily routines to each of the three times of day, such as “Eat breakfast” for the morning and “Sleep” at night.

*Photograph 9* was taken by me of Yerodin at the local public library. In it, he is working on pairing cards that have the 26 letters of the English alphabet with another set of cards depicting objects that begin with each of the 26 letters of the alphabet. Yerodin struggled to match the letters with the corresponding picture. In this particular photograph, he is holding up a match that he successfully paired of the letter “Y” and a yo-yo.

*Photograph 10* was taken by me and was unsolicited by Yerodin. In it, he is solving an addition math equation on the board from the summer school program. His brothers were learning how to add two-digit numbers with two-digit numbers (e.g., 21+45). They took the time to show him. In the photograph, Yerodin is successfully solving the equation 11+12 on the white board.

## **Description of the Findings’ Themes**

In analyzing the photographs and the interview transcripts that accompanied each photograph, the following three themes emerged: (a) preference for a more Westernized, American society and culture, (b) literacy, and (c) overall schooling preparation. Additionally, within each theme, patterns emerged. Each theme will be discussed with its respective photograph(s), as described in the previous section of the chapter.

Theme 1, a preference for American society and culture, was highlighted in Photographs 1-6. Overall, Yerodin enjoyed the security, freedoms, and cultural infusion that he did not experience while residing in the refugee camp back in Tanzania. From the interview data, two patterns within this first theme emerged: (a) an appreciation for his past experiences and family bond and (b) wanting to experience a more “American” and “Western” lifestyle now that he had arrived to the United States. Yerodin discussed the importance of family and wanting to make them proud by becoming literate in English, educated, and securing a successful job. He detailed each member of his family with enthusiasm, love, and reverence when discussing Photograph 1. This was especially apparent when discussing his father and older brothers as his family operated in a patriarchal structure. When discussing Photograph 2, although he appreciated his mother and older sister’s cooking of traditional Congolese meals, he preferred American food. His brother, who was helping with the translation, joked in the background that American food was not healthy and that Yerodin had experienced digestive issues due to his new American cuisine. Yerodin remarked, “I like America meal. I want to eat America meal!”

Photographs 3-6 were taken from the Friday field trips. Yerodin asked me to take Photograph 3 of him swimming. He chose this photograph not only due to his genuine enjoyment of being able to swim in a safe environment, something that he could not do without worry in the refugee camp, but also because of the White children that he had casually befriended in that moment. He remarked, “They nice to me.” When asked whether or not he was worried about being new to school and making friends, he indicated that he was worried but also excited to make more “American friends”. It should be noted, however, that as I observed this moment at the springs, the White children minimally talked with Yerodin. Instead, they primarily smiled at him and let him be the first to either get in or out of the water. The White children primarily talked with Yerodin’s high school brothers due to, what appeared to be, them being closer in age and his brothers being able to communicate more in English.

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Photograph 6 was selected for the same reason as Photograph 3: the White woman who was walking her dog at the park was kind and talked to Yerodin and his family. In addition, Yerodin loved dogs and hoped to get one now that he was in the United States. His brother indicated that they were not able to have pets while at the refugee camp, and his family concluded that the typical American household had a dog. Thus, Yerodin and his siblings desired a dog in order to become more like the “typical American household”.

Theme 2 focused on Yerodin’s literacy development. In analyzing the photographs and the interview data that accompanied them, Photographs 1, 7, and 9 spoke to this theme. Two patterns emerged within Theme 2: (a) Yerodin’s own self-reflection and understanding of his literacy development, and (b) Yerodin’s future disposition on literacy. In the first pattern, Yerodin fully acknowledged that his literacy skills needed improvement when compared to his older siblings. When asked whether or not he received any type of literacy instruction while at the refugee camp, he replied that he had not. He also understood that he did not develop literacy in his L1 of Swahili, as it pertained to reading and writing. He went through Photograph 1 and pointed out who in his family could read and write in Swahili. Interestingly, he only pointed to his older brothers but not to his mother or older sister. When asked about his father, he said, “I no know.” He looked to his brother at this moment in the interview, and his brother shrugged his shoulders indicating the same unknown knowledge about his father’s literacy skills in Swahili. Yerodin wanted Photographs 7 and 9 taken particularly to show that he was learning to write his own name, something that he did not know how to do before, and was able to pair the concept of letters with phonics. Again, this was a skill that was never practiced or learned prior to the summer school program.

In recognizing his own literacy skills, Yerodin also understood that his current skills regarding literacy would have implications at school and in the future. He indicated how he wants to, “learn how to read good,” so that he can make his family proud, especially his father, and his teachers happy. Yerodin also stated that he wants to learn to read and write so, “I get good job.” His brothers who were older than 18 years of age and his father worked for a lawn service company in which they did the manual labor of caring for lawns and trees. He said that he did not want to follow in this career path. When asked what he wanted to be when he grows up, he shrugged his shoulders. I then remarked, “But not lawn?” and he shook his head “no”.

The third and final theme, Yerodin’s overall schooling preparation, was reflected in Photographs 1 and 7-10. As discussed previously, Yerodin’s written and reading skills in both Swahili and English were in the emerging stages of literacy development. Yerodin also recognized this. In Photograph 10, however, he was beginning to add two-digit number combinations with success. I was surprised how quickly Yerodin took to mathematics. When asked about this photograph, he didn’t say much other than he liked to do math with a big smile. I asked him if he liked the summer school program, and he said that he did but admitted that the pace of instruction was too fast for him. He liked the activities, especially the field trips, but got tired during the classroom time. When asked about his feelings and anticipation for the upcoming school year in August, he said that he was excited but also nervous because he wanted to make his teachers happy and make new American friends. He was worried about how his new, “American” classmates will receive him. I asked Yerodin why school is important. His response had to be translated from Swahili, and his brother said that Yerodin wants to do well in school because it will make his father and family happy, and by doing well in school, he can get a job to become a good father for his future family.

## DISCUSSION

Yerodin's case study followed a biographical and ethnographic narrative framework (Creswell, 2013). In doing so, specific events and factors that may have influenced his individual identity constructions of his lived experiences were documented through a photo-narrative design (Collier & Collier, 1986). The findings showed clear evidence of the identities that Yerodin had constructed for himself as an EL, a student about to attend mainstream schooling in the United States, and an adolescent with refugee status in the resettlement process.

In his current sociolinguistic and sociocultural identities, as described by Norton (2001, 2013) and Bucholtz (2011), Yerodin saw himself as a newly arrived American adolescent who enjoyed the luxuries that living in the United States had to offer when compared to living in the Tanzanian refugee camp. Additionally, he saw himself as an EL who was still developing his literacy skills and overall educational development.

Yerodin's imagined identities (Anderson, 1991; Norton, 2001, 2013; Wenger, 1998) and his self-positionality (Weedon, 1997) are even more unique when framed in a sociolinguistic and sociocultural context. His resilience to better himself through the acquisition of English and education gives him hope for a future of which his father can be proud and an expanded social network of friends that go beyond his immediate network of family and church members despite his current linguistic and basic educational skills and proficiencies. Additionally, it is through education and English that Yerodin has recognized that he will become successful in later academics and in the professional job market. He also saw himself as a father and husband who can successfully provide for his family through the acquisition of English and education. Therefore, Yerodin had developed imagined, or desired, identities and communities of which he seeks to become.

These desires, along with the notion of making his family, particularly his father, proud fueled his L2 investment to learn English and do well academically. Furthermore, he recognized that he needs to be successful in these two components of learning in order to become a successful professional and to provide for a future family as a father and husband. It is not clear whether or not he saw education as a means to expand his social network to gain access to having "White friends", as he put it, but it was evident that having the language (i.e., English) to communicate with them was a recognized form of cultural capital. Further, it is not clear whether Yerodin came to this conclusion of networking and language based on the summer school program explicitly, or if it was the experience that he had at the springs (i.e., Photograph 3) in which his social interaction with the White children was significantly less than his older brothers due to the amount of English acquired at that time.

As with most individuals with dual or multiple identities related to culture and language, Yerodin was no exception to negotiating his own sets of identities and understanding of what it meant to be both an individual with refugee status and a newly arrived citizen of the United States. With this said, the findings from this study, as with the general nature of any case study research, cannot be fully generalized to other participants from similar backgrounds or contexts. Rather, only limited generalizations can be made (Gall et al., 2007). Furthermore, both sociolinguistic and sociocultural identity research in the fields of SLA, education, and anthropology highlight "the way individuals make sense of their *own* experience" (Norton, 2013, p. 59). Yes, individuals experiencing a cultural and/or linguistic dissonance between two or more different cultures and/or languages will undergo a negotiation process of the two identities (Norton, 2013; Wardhaugh, 2010). However, how one interprets his or her immediate experiences and negotiates identity – as well as the degree for each identity construct – may be drastically different from

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another individual with the same background, experiences, and context. Yerodin's desire to assimilate to the United States through various elements such as language, food, and befriending White peers, was unique for Yerodin; whereas, his siblings or another adolescent with Yerodin's same background and experiences may not hold these same identities and desires.

Although the findings of the current study cannot be generalized to a wider population of individuals who may be undergoing the same experiences as Yerodin, they are still significant. As Norton (2013) suggested, research investigating sociolinguistic and sociocultural identities seek to "contribute to efforts [...] that can enhance human agency in more equitable worlds" (p. 22). As the migration and refugee crisis prevails in today's modern world, classrooms are becoming increasingly more diverse in relation to ethnicity, language, and cultural as host countries welcome these displaced individuals. The demographics of grade school teachers in the United States have remained relatively White and monolingual (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Further, most teachers are unaware of the differences between traditional immigrant-students and those who have lived refugee experiences. As such, both sets of students' processes of acculturation and negotiation of identities are assumed to be the same (Oikonomidou, 2010). Consequently, this disparity between cultures may have a negative impact on the relationship and rapport between teachers and their students. Often when teachers are unfamiliar of their students' experiences and culture, they tend to view their students as stereotypes and prescribe experiences and identities to their students.

Too often I meet teachers who tell me that when they hear and/or see students from refugee backgrounds speaking their L1 and not English, they assume that these students are purposefully resisting English and assimilation. The findings from the current study highlight how a student with refugee status, who lacked literacy skills in both his L1 and English, and who has never attended a formal school nor received a formalized education prior to resettling to the United States showed a maturity in his identity construction. Some teachers may have regarded Yerodin as unintelligent, deficient, unmotivated, or even lazy because he lacked basic literacy skills in his L1. However, he was acutely aware that he was behind in his education compared to peers his own age. Rather than giving up, he saw education and English as cultural capital that would grant him access to desired communities and identities. Additionally, Yerodin showed an appreciation for the freedoms and sense of security that he felt in the United States while simultaneously still having an appreciation for his family, heritage, and experiences while in the refugee camp in Tanzania. He also exhibited signs of cultural assimilation with a desire to become "Americanized". These would not have been recognized as clearly as they were if it was not for this investigation into his identities. Furthermore, I believe that the use of photography helped him to open up about his experiences and feelings because in his eyes, the focus shifted to a desire to explain the photographs that he selected rather than him explicitly indulging his personal struggles and life details with me. In other words, the photographs served as a conduit, if you will, or an "ice breaker" for Yerodin to reflect on his experiences, challenges, joys, and aspirations to me.

## **CONCLUSION**

As educators of students from refugee backgrounds, it is important to remember that these individuals, whether they are children, adolescents, or adult learners, come with unique experiences related to their lives prior to resettlement. These experiences often contribute to their overall constructions of identity as family members, survivors, and learners. Additionally, these experiences may influence who they



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are as citizens of the host country of resettlement, their home country prior to assuming refugee status, and their temporary stay in a refugee camp. Their identities may provide insightful information into their adjustment, whether it is of acceptance or resistance, to their host country's dominant culture and/or language(s). Furthermore, educators must come to understand their students' aspirations and desired membership(s), or imagined identities, as these understandings may help educators to better work with their students in identifying their needs in order to reach these aspirations so that these imagined identity constructs may become a part of the students' realities and identities. Simultaneously, educators need to realize their students' current identities so that they do not make false assumptions and later prescribe what they feel is best to their students, which runs the risk of marking these students as deficient and/or as stereotypes.

In doing so, a photo-narrative approach is an effective method to tell one's story and experiences in that photo-narratives provide a visual basis for the narrator to use as a talking point, so-to-speak. Understandably, individuals who have been through trauma may not be willing to open up about their identity so readily, and those who are, may not have the linguistic articulation to do so accurately. By allowing narrators to take and select their own photographs empowers them to decide what was significant as well as what they are comfortable sharing with an outside source. In this manner, external researchers, like myself in the current study described, do not prescribe what they feel was significant for the narrators nor do they decide what is in the narrators' best interests.

In the case of Yerodin, an adolescent-EL with refugee status, this design proved to be powerful and illuminated the capabilities and power that an individual of similar experiences is able to produce. The photographs allowed Yerodin to take ownership and pride in his experiences and his personal narrative. Even though I, myself, am an immigrant to the United States, I realize that I am fortunate to never know – nor do I expect to know – the pains and experiences of what it is like to have refugee status, be raised in a refugee camp, and resettle to a host country as a person with refugee status. These experiences were Yerodin's to tell as they were experienced by him, and engaging in this photo-narrative framework, essentially, he was able to tell it through his own eyes through the use of photography.

In today's age of modern technology, students can have virtually the world at their fingertips through various technological devices, such as phones, tablets, and laptops. Through these devices, social media apps like Facebook and Instagram allow individuals to document the experiences and moments that they find significant in their lives as well as the objects and people with whom these experiences were shared. It is possible that researchers could do a content and discourse analysis of the photographs that students from refugee backgrounds may post to these mediums with the consent of the students and their parents, of course. Furthermore, not only can the photographs and images (e.g., memes) be used to narrate the students' identities but researchers could also draw from their written discourse via the descriptions that accompany each photograph and status posts. After doing a thorough investigation of existing literature, I was unable to find any scholarly publications in which studies were conducted using these social mediums as a photo-narrative to explore the sociolinguistic and sociocultural identities of students from refugee backgrounds. This is indeed an area for future research.

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**English Learner (EL):** A student who is learn English and whose first language is a language other than English.

**Host Country:** The country of which a person of refugee status has resettled.

**Identity:** The characteristics and perceptions of self that a person holds of him or herself. This also includes the characteristics and perceptions of self that a person wants the world to see him or herself as.

**Imagined Community:** A community or group that a person seeks to gain access or membership.

**L2 Imagined Community:** A community or group that a person seeks to gain access or membership but does not yet have it due to his or her L2.

**L2 Imagined Identity:** A desired identity that is constructed by a person's L2 learning experiences but is not yet assumed by that individual.

**Newly Arrived Refugee:** A person of refugee status who has recently resettled to a host country for less than one calendar year.

**Refugee:** A person who has fled from his or her country or region of residence to escape a life-threatening conflict or persecution.