In many of the world's countries, language plays an important role for the creation of national identity. Discuss the relation between language and narratives of national identity, highlighting both positive aspects of the relation and potential problems.

The concept of national identity is complex. According to Jan Meschelke[1] "National identity refers to a specific kind of collective feeling, i.e., a self-image or an understanding." This collective feeling is attached to the nation in which one lives in, was born in, or the nation of their ancestors. The topic of national identity raises complex questions. What constitutes a nation? Can anyone in a given nation identify with its national identity or is it just reserved for certain people? Is national identity created or does it evolve over time? This essay will address how language affects of national identity, through the lens of multilingualism in Lebanon.

Lebanon has always been a religious melting pot, being home to both Sunni and Shia Muslims, Catholic, Maronite, and Orthodox Christians, Druze, and Jews. The US Department of State[2] cites an independent company called Statistics Lebanon who reported in 2015 that the religious demographic of Lebanon is made up of 56.3% Muslim, 35.5% Christian, 5.2% Druze, and 3% other religious minorities. Arabic was always the language of the Muslim population since the Muslim conquests in the 7th century. However, French didn't appear in Lebanon until the arrival of Frankish Crusaders in the 11th-13th Century who came to retake Jerusalem back from the Muslims. The Maronite Christians (a Roman Catholic sect) who lived on Mount Lebanon[4] had a strong religious connection with the Catholic Frankish Crusaders and viewed them as their 'saviours' as opposed to invaders. The Crusaders were eventually removed from the region by the Muslims; however, they shared a relationship of mutual aid and respect with the Maronites that remains to this day. Then in the 19th Century, Christian missionaries arrived in Lebanon and the Lebanese Maronite Christians took an interest in English and French, due to the common religious beliefs and shared history between the two groups and thus they

[1] Marschelke, J. (2021). National Identity. In: Sellers, M., Kirste, S. (eds) Encyclopedia of the Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy. Springer, Dordrecht.
[2] US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. (2015). *International Religious Freedom Report for 2015: Lebanon*. Retrieved from US Department of State: https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper

spread amongst this part of the population[3]. Arabic remained the main language of the region, for both the Maronites and the Muslim population, due to the Ottoman rule of the region. Arabic was, of course, most important to the Muslim population as it is important to their religious expression and also ties them to the culture of the surrounding Arabic speaking regions and nations, and there were calls to prioritise Arabic in Lebanese society, for example Muhammad ‘Abduh called for the “political liberation of the Islamic peoples.”[4] At this time, the Sunni upper-class realised the importance of education in economic growth, and thus Muhammad ‘Abduh and his followers pushed for more inclusion of Arabic and Islamic studies in Lebanese education. He wanted Muslim run schools with Arabic instruction because he believed that Muslim students that attended French, British and American schools were either “Christians in faith and Muslims in name only or atheists and materialists.”[5] He wanted to start a boarding high school under the following conditions:

- The head must be fluent in Arabic.
- Arabic must be the language of instruction.
- The ethos of the school must be “restoration of faith and love for one’s own country”.

In an attempt to decrease Christian education and promote Islamic education for Muslim students, Ottoman authorities shut down many of the Christian schools in majority Muslim areas, which was easy as often they did not comply with the law – of a total of 181 schools, only 10 had an official licence.[6]

Article 11 of the Lebanese constitution[7] states that “The Arabic language is the official national language. The conditions under which the French language is to be used are determined by law” and unofficially English is widely spoken throughout the country. Britain and France both set up schools and universities in their languages, for example the American University of Beirut and Université Saint-Joseph and

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[3] Baladi, S. S. (2018). Polyglotism and Identity in Modern-Day Lebanon. *Lingua Frankly 4*.
[4] Strohmeier, M. (1993). Muslim Education in the Vilayet of Beirut, 1880-1918. *Decision Making And Change In The Ottoman Empire*, 215-240.
[5] Strohmeier, M. (1993). Muslim Education in the Vilayet of Beirut, 1880-1918. *Decision Making And Change In The Ottoman Empire*, 215-240.
[6] Strohmeier, M. (1993). Muslim Education in the Vilayet of Beirut, 1880-1918. *Decision Making And Change In The Ottoman Empire*, 215-240.
[7] The Republic of Lebanon. (1926). *Lebanon 1926 (rev. 2004)*. Retrieved from Constitute Project: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Lebanon_2004

therefore English and French became important languages in the Lebanese academic and economic worlds. According to Deanna Ferree Womack, by the 20th Century "the student population in Beirut's Christian schools was three times higher than in Muslim schools" by 1882."[8] Today, members of the Lebanese upper-class send their children to Anglo- and Francophone schools as "French is considered the language of culture and English the language of utility"[9], and they will speak Lebanese Arabic in informal settings. French Catholic and American or British Protestant culture, faith, and political leanings governed the curriculum and linguistic rules within the missionary schools, and over time Lebanese academics used their Western education to start to form identities both on a local and national scale. Though they weren't the deciding factor in how identity was formed, you can sense Christian attitudes towards language in the language policies that these groups created. Many American mission schools ran Arabic language courses (both classical Arabic and modern/spoken/dialectal Arabic), and the Protestant schools translated the Bible into Arabic, to encourage the students to keep in touch with their Arab culture and the linguistic diversity of their country, which fostered a strong relationship between the Western and Arab ideologies, thus enforcing a stronger connection between the three languages. Both Christian and Muslim leaders picked up on how influential language can be in fostering a national identity, so they encouraged the mission schools to instruct in all three languages, so that no matter what background a student came from, they had access to both the language and culture of their family and of their peers. This brought the opposing cultures – Christian and Muslim, Protestant and Catholic, Western and Arab – together and forged a deep relationship between them, essentially creating one identity from the three.

In conclusion, Lebanon has had a complex history in terms of language. Language means more to them than just the words they speak – it also has ties to culture, ancestors, religion, class, and education. The main two religions in Lebanon are Christianity and Islam. The Christian population was attracted to French and English

[8] Womack, D. F. (2012). Lubnani, Libanais, Lebanese: Missionary Education, Language Policy and Identity Formation in Modern Lebanon. Studies in World Christianity, 18(1), 4–20. https://doi.org/10.3366/SWC.2012.0003
[9] Baladi, S. S. (2018). Polyglotism and Identity in Modern-Day Lebanon. *Lingua Frankly 4*.

through the Crusades, and later through anglo- and francophone missionaries. They also had ties to the Vatican, as a large percentage of these Christians are Catholic. The Muslim population has always leaned towards Arabic, due to the religious and cultural ties to the region surrounding it, and their Ottoman history. However, the Christian missionaries set up English, French, and Arabic speaking schools within Lebanon and across the Middle East, with a very high standard of education. Therefore, parents across the nation decided to educate their children in these schools. Therefore, Lebanese people of all backgrounds were encouraged to be at least bilingual, if not trilingual. French and English became the languages of the intelligentsia, and later of the professional world, and so mastering these languages would be a step in the direction of accessing these parts of society. Christian and Muslim leaders recognised early on that linguistic diversity was important to creating a united national identity, and thus encouraged a multilingual education across the nation. The Christian and Muslim communities are tied by their shared Lebanese Arabic, which has lots of French and English linguistic influence, and often Lebanese people have such a high mastery of French, Arabic, and English that they are able to interchange between these languages mid-sentence. It is a very unique linguistic situation in Lebanon, and the Lebanese people are aware of this. This unique feature of their country has forged a strong national identity, which I believe is here to stay.

Word count: 1390

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