

# **Assessing the performances of the MEIM, EIS and FESM scales to measure ethnic identity: a case study**

## ***La valutazione delle performance delle scale MEIM, EIS e FESM per la misurazione dell'identità etnica: studio di un caso***

Antonino Mario Oliveri and Gabriella Polizzi

**Abstract** Measuring the ethnic identity of linguistic minorities is a research problem that can be tackled starting from a clear operational definition of the construct, which must first be distinguished from similar and partially overlapping constructs, such as national identity or cultural identity. This paper presents the performances of some scales widely used in literature, analyzed through research conducted in 2016 in the Arbëreshe Municipalities of Piana degli Albanesi and Santa Cristina Gela (province of Palermo). The MEIM and FESM scales showed high internal consistency and overall reliability, while the EIS scale proved to be weaker.

**Abstract** *La misurazione dell'identità etnica delle minoranze linguistiche rappresenta un problema di ricerca che può essere affrontato a partire da una chiara definizione operativa del costrutto, che va preliminarmente distinto da costrutti simili e parzialmente sovrapponibili, come l'identità nazionale o l'identità culturale. All'interno di una ricerca condotta nel 2016 nei Comuni arbëreshe di Piana degli Albanesi e Santa Cristina Gela, in provincia di Palermo, sono state analizzate le performance di alcune scale ampiamente utilizzate in letteratura. Si tratta delle scale MEIM, EIS e FESM. Le scale MEIM e FESM hanno mostrato elevata coerenza interna e attendibilità complessiva, mentre la scala EIS si è dimostrata più debole.*

**Key words:** ethnic identity, measurement, reliability.

### **1 Ethnic identity: a conceptualization**

At a time when Western societies are invested by massive migratory flows made up of subjects with cultural and ethnic identities that integrate with difficulty in host societies, the issue of ethnic identity is particularly relevant, since it constitutes, on the one hand, a protective factor against disadvantage and maladjustment, and, on the other, a possible obstacle to integration.

As shown by Berry (2005), the outcomes of the encounter between the culture of origin and the host culture can be multiple: the category of *assimilation* is used when people take leave of their former culture due to interaction with other cultures. *Integration* means the possible maintenance of one's own culture of origin, even in the presence of interaction with the host culture. *Separation* consists in maintaining one's own culture of origin not being willing to interact with other cultures. Finally, *marginalization* would take place in case a subject had little interest in his/her own culture and the interaction with other cultures.

Ethnicity is considered a permanent character linked to the culture of the country of origin, while ethnic identity would consist in the way subjects perceive themselves within an environment (Constant and Zimmermann, 2007). Proximity or distance are felt depending on how they try to fit into society. As such, ethnic identity may be different for migrants who share the same origin or it may be comparable among migrants from different ethnic backgrounds.

Ethnic groups are conceived as communities which identify themselves in terms of similarities and differences with respect to a series of traits or markers (Berthoud et al., 1997). It is probably Blumer (1996) who built the most complete classification of the distinctive features of ethnic groups: real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared past, focus on one or more symbolic elements such as kinship, religion, and language, and a shared territory, nationality or appearance. Another important element is the awareness of belonging to the group.

## **2 Measuring ethnic identity: a case-study**

A questionnaire was constructed with the specific objective of measuring the ethnic identity of the arbëreshe populations living in Sicily. The arbëreshe communities are made up of descendants of the ancient Albanians who settled in Sicily in the fifteenth century escaping the Ottoman domination.

The questionnaire was administered to the families of all the students of the "Skanderbeg" comprehensive school in the Municipalities of Piana degli Albanesi and Santa Cristina Gela in the province of Palermo between April and May 2016. About 1,200 questionnaires were distributed and 196 returned. The questionnaire was divided into sections, related to the different dimensions of ethnic identity. The research focus was therefore quite broad, and consisted in the measurement of the concept of ethnic identity with reference to all the relevant theoretical dimensions. An additional objective consisted in the analysis of the statistical and psychometric characteristics of the new scales included in the questionnaire. However, the occasion was favorable for assessing the reliability of some commonly used scales.

Specific reference is made to the MEIM, EIS and FESM scales which have been more used than others.

The MEIM (Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure) scale (Phinney and Ong, 2007) measures exploration (i.e. the degree to which individuals try to find out something about their ethnicity), participation in cultural activities and the extent to which positive feelings are expressed towards one's own ethnic group.

The EIS (Ethnic Identity Scale) by Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004) evaluates three dimensions in the formation of ethnic identity: *exploration*, *resolution* and *affirmation*. Resolution is awareness of belonging to a certain group; *affirmation* is how much individuals feel positively or negatively integrated into the host society.

Criticism was made by the authors of the EIS scale on the MEIM scale, based on the fact that the latter measures the achievement of ethnic identity through a single scale. On the contrary, one of the peculiarities of the EIS scale consists in considering the three subscales separately.

Finally, the FESM scale (Familial Ethnic Socialization Measure) was introduced by Umaña-Taylor and Fine (2001) and consists of 12 Likert-type items.

### 3 Results

The original MEIM scale consists of fourteen items. However, it was amended and a reduced version was proposed by Roberts et al. (1999), obtained by eliminating the two items 13 and 14 that replicate, with reverse polarity, items 1 and 3. Overlaps can still be noticed among several of the remaining items: item 3 "I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me" and item 7 "I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me"; item 6 "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group" and item 11 "I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group"; item 5 "I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to" and item 12 "I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background". As a consequence, in this study the number of items of the MEIM scale was reduced to nine, merging those with similar content. The revised MEIM scale includes only nine items, but maintains an acceptable degree of overall reliability, as measured by the Cronbach alpha index ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ).

Similar considerations can be made for the EIS scale, which consists of 17 items in its original formulation. In this case some items seem to overlap even more evidently, namely items 1, 7, 9, 16; items 7 and 13; items 5, 8 and 15; items 6 and 11; items 3, 12, 14 and 17.

The EIS scale used in this study is therefore a reduced scale as well, built once the overlapped items were merged and resulting in a much simpler 7-item structure than the original model.

However, the reliability of the EIS scale was rather low, as shown by a Cronbach index of 0.54. What is more, numerous items seem to show a bad fitting, poorly performing in terms of item-scale correlation, and such as to increase the value of the alpha index if eliminated.

The FESM scale of ethnic socialization was doubled in terms of socialization received as children and to that given as adults. The analysis of internal consistency was made also for this scale and the Cronbach Alpha index was calculated. Both FESM scales showed good performances, with Alpha values as much as 0.90 and 0.92 respectively.

## 4 Conclusions

The most known ethnic identity scales showed a variety of performances when used for the arbëreshe Sicilian communities. In particular, several items of the MEIM and EIS scales were clear overlapping in contents, thus suggesting to elaborate short versions. While the FESM scale and the revised MEIM scale showed high internal consistency, the revised EIS scale was affected by poor reliability.

## References

1. Berry, J. W.: Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *Int J Intercult Rel* **29**, 697–712 (2005).
2. Berthoud, R., Modood, T., Smith, P.: Introduction. In: Modood, T., Berthoud, R., Lakey, J., Nazroo, J., Smith, P., Virdee, S., Beishon, S. (eds.) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain Diversity and Disadvantage*, pp. 1-18. Policy Studies Institute, London (1997).
3. Blumer, M.: The ethnic group question in the 1991 Census of Population. In: Coleman D., Salt J. *Ethnicity in the 1991 Census*, pp. 33-62. The Stationery Office, London (1996).
4. Constant, A., Zimmermann, K.F.: Measuring Ethnic Identity and Its Impact on Economic Behavior. *IZA Discussion paper*, **3063**, 1-23 (2007).
5. Phinney, J.S., Ong, A.D.: Conceptualization and Measurement of Ethnic Identity: Current Status and Future Directions. *J Couns Psychol*, **54**(3), 271-281 (2007).
6. Umaña-Taylor, A.J., Fine, M.A.: Methodological implications of grouping Latino adolescents into one collective ethnic group. *Hispanic J Behav Sci*, **23**, 347-362 (2001).
7. Umaña-Taylor, A.J., Yazedjian, A., Bámaca-Gómez, M.: Developing the Ethnic Identity Scale Using Eriksonian and Social Identity Perspectives. *Id Int J Th Res*, **4**(1), 9-38 (2004).