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# Language, Identity, and the Ownership of English

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This article serves as the introduction to the special-topic issue of the *TESOL Quarterly* on Language and Identity. In the first section, I discuss my interest in language and identity, drawing on theorists who have been influential in my work. A short vignette illustrates the significant relationship among identity, language learning, and classroom teaching. In the second section, I examine the five articles in the issue, highlighting notable similarities and differences in conceptions of identity. I note, in particular, the different ways in which the authors frame identity: social identity, sociocultural identity, voice, cultural identity, and ethnic identity. I explore these differences with reference to the particular disciplines and research traditions of the authors and the different emphases of their research projects. In the final section, I draw on the issue as a whole to address a prevalent theme in many of the contributions: the ownership of English internationally. The central question addressed is the extent to which English belongs to White native speakers of standard English or to all the people who speak it, irrespective of linguistic and sociocultural history. I conclude with the hope that the issue will help address the current fragmentation in the literature on the relationship between language and identity and encourage further debate and research on a thought-provoking and important topic.

*Just as, at the level of relations between groups, a language is worth what those who speak it are worth, so too, at the level of interactions between individuals, speech always owes a major part of its value to the value of the person who utters it. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 652)*

The relationship between language and identity is an intriguing one, partly because debates on theories of language are as inconclusive and indeterminate as debates on theories of identity. However, whereas some linguists may assume, as Noam Chomsky does, that questions of identity are not central to theories of language, we as L2 educators need

to take this relationship seriously. The questions we ask necessarily assume that speech, speakers, and social relationships are inseparable. Such questions include the following: Under what conditions do language learners speak? How can we encourage language learners to become more communicatively competent? How can we facilitate interaction between language learners and target language speakers? In this view, every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. They are, in other words, engaged in identity construction and negotiation.

## LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY: THEORY AND PRACTICE

### Identity in Theory

As McNamara (this issue) and Hansen and Liu (this issue) demonstrate, there is much interest in language and identity in the field of language learning. Different researchers, drawing on different sources and using a variety of methodologies, have brought diverse perspectives to this relationship. In my own work, I use the term *identity* to refer to how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future. As I outline below, theorists who have been influential in helping me to develop an understanding of identity include Cornel West, Pierre Bourdieu, Chris Weedon, and Jim Cummins.

I take the position, following West (1992), that identity relates to desire—the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation, and the desire for security and safety. Such desires, West asserts, cannot be separated from the distribution of material resources in society. People who have access to a wide range of resources in a society will have access to power and privilege, which will in turn influence how they understand their relationship to the world and their possibilities for the future. Thus the question “Who am I?” cannot be understood apart from the question “What can I do?” According to West, it is people’s access to material resources that will define the terms on which they will articulate their desires. In this view, a person’s identity will shift in accordance with changing social and economic relations.

Bourdieu’s (1977) work complements West’s because it focuses on the relationship between identity and symbolic power. As the epigraph to this article indicates, Bourdieu argues that the value ascribed to speech

cannot be understood apart from the person who speaks, and the person who speaks cannot be understood apart from larger networks of social relationships—many of which may be unequally structured. His position is that the linguist (and, I would argue, many applied linguists) take for granted the conditions for the establishment of communication: that those who speak regard those who listen as worthy to listen and that those who listen regard those who speak as worthy to speak. I have argued, however (Peirce, 1995), that it is precisely such assumptions that must be called into question. Bourdieu (1977) argues persuasively that an expanded definition of competence should include the “right to speak” or “the power to impose reception” (p. 75).

Because the right to speak intersects in important ways with a language learner’s identity, I have used the term *investment* to signal the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it. Central questions in my own work are not “Is the learner motivated to learn the target language?” and “What kind of personality does the learner have?” Instead, my questions are framed as follows: “What is the learner’s investment in the target language? How is the learner’s relationship to the target language socially and historically constructed?” The construct of investment conceives of the language learner as having a complex history and multiple desires. An investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own social identity, which changes across time and space.

Unlike West and Bourdieu, Weedon (1987) has worked within a feminist poststructuralist tradition. Whereas West’s work has focused on the relationship between identity and material relations of power, and Bourdieu’s on the relationship between identity and symbolic power, Weedon has sought to integrate language, individual experience, and social power in a theory of subjectivity. In this theory, the individual is accorded greater human agency than in Bourdieu’s theory, whereas the importance of language in constructing the relationship between the individual and the social is given greater prominence than in West’s theory. Three defining characteristics of subjectivity have been influential in my work: (a) the multiple, nonunitary nature of the subject; (b) subjectivity as a site of struggle; and (c) subjectivity as changing over time. In this theory, subjectivity is produced in a variety of social sites, all of which are structured by relations of power in which the person takes up different subject positions—teacher, child, feminist, manager, critic. The subject, in turn, is not conceived of as passive; she or he is conceived of as both subject of and subject to relations of power within a particular site, community, and society: The subject has human agency. Furthermore, and of central importance, subjectivity and language are theorized as mutually constitutive.

In drawing a distinction between coercive and collaborative relations of power, Cummins (1996) complements the work of West, Bourdieu, and Weedon. He maintains that coercive relations of power refer to the exercise of power by a dominant individual, group, or country that is detrimental to others and serves to maintain an inequitable division of resources in a society. Collaborative relations of power, on the other hand, can serve to empower rather than marginalize. In this view, power is not a fixed, predetermined quantity but can be mutually generated in interpersonal and intergroup relations. As Cummins observes, "The power relationship is additive rather than subtractive. Power is created with others rather than being imposed on or exercised over others" (p. 15). By extension, relations of power can serve to enable or constrain the range of identities that language learners can negotiate in their classrooms and communities.

There is growing interest among L2 educators in the negotiated, constructed, and conflicted nature of identity. The work of Bourdieu (1977), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), and Bakhtin (1981) has been used to frame innovative sociolinguistic and ethnographic research on language and identity (Canagarajah, 1993; Corson, 1993; Goldstein, 1996; Martin-Jones & Heller, 1996; May, 1994, Morgan, 1995/1996; Walsh, 1987). Drawing on a different tradition, Peirce (1995), McKay and Wong (1996), and Siegal (1996) have found the feminist poststructuralist theory developed by Weedon (1987) productive for understanding language learners' multiple and changing identities, and McKay and Wong have expanded on the construct of investment, drawing on a different group of learners than Peirce does.

## **Identity in Practice: Mai's Story**

It is not only theorists and researchers who find the relationship between language and identity interesting and important. To demonstrate the relevance of this relationship for learners and teachers, I relate a story of classroom resistance that is best understood with reference to learner identities and investments. The story is a short vignette in the life of Mai, one of the participants in my longitudinal study of five immigrant women in Canada (Peirce, 1993).

After completing a 6-month ESL course offered to adult immigrants in Canada, Mai, a young woman from Vietnam, continued taking ESL courses at night in order to improve her spoken and written English. Mai had to make great sacrifices to attend these courses. After a long day at work, she rushed home, made dinner, and rushed out again to take public transportation to her class. At night, she came home exhausted,

with some dread that potential assailants were “chasing” after her while she was walking from the bus stop to her home at 10:30 p.m.

Given the sacrifices that Mai made to attend these evening courses, she expressed great frustration with one particular course she was attending. In an interview with Mai, I questioned her more closely about her experience in this course. Mai explained that it was centered around students’ presentations on life in their home countries. She described how frustrating it was to sit for a whole lesson and listen to one student speak:

I was hoping that the course would help me the same as we learnt [in the 6-month ESL course], but some night we only spend time on one man. He came from Europe. He talked about his country: what’s happening and what was happening. And all the time we didn’t learn at all. And tomorrow the other Indian man speak something for there. Maybe all week I didn’t write any more on my book.

After struggling through this course for a number of weeks and coming to feel that she “didn’t learn at all,” Mai never returned to the class.

It could be argued that the Mai’s ESL teacher was attempting to incorporate the lived histories of the students into the classroom by inviting them to make public presentations about their native countries. The teacher was giving students the opportunity to practice speaking in the classroom and inviting them to share their heritage with the rest of the class. This approach, however, did not have a desirable pedagogical effect—at least as far as Mai was concerned. She was convinced that she did not “learn at all” when she sat mute, listening to fellow classmates discuss their native countries.

Although I cannot provide a definitive interpretation of the course of events, it is possible to argue that the teacher’s methods did not do justice to the complexity of learner identities. Whereas immigrant learners’ experiences in their native country may be a significant part of their identity, these experiences are constantly being mediated by their experiences in the new country, across multiple sites in the home, workplace, and community. At that stage in the course, the teacher had not provided learners with the opportunity to critically examine experiences in their native countries in the light of more recent experiences in Canada or to critically examine their experiences in Canada in light of experiences in the native country. As a result, Mai had little investment in the presentations of her fellow classmates, and a potentially rich opportunity for language learning and teaching had been lost.

This story is a simple illustration of the view that the relationship between language and identity is not only abstract and theoretical but

also has important consequences for positive and productive language learning and teaching.

## **LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY: A WINDOW ON THE WORLD**

Having introduced theories of language and identity that have been influential in my own work and illustrated their importance for classroom teaching, I now highlight what for me were particularly noteworthy aspects of the five articles in this issue. Thereafter, I reflect on the authors' collective contribution the authors provide to theorizing the relationship between language and identity. My comments do not provide a definitive analysis; they invite readers to explore each of the articles in greater depth.

### **It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It**

In an innovative and thought-provoking article on identity and intonation, Morgan (this issue) draws on his reflections as a teacher-researcher in a community-based adult ESL classroom in Toronto, Canada. His topic, the relationship between identity and intonation, has received little attention in the L2 literature. Whereas there has been increasing interest in communicative approaches to the teaching of pronunciation (Morley, 1991), the ways in which intonation engages the speaker's sense of self have been little explored. Morgan presents a fascinating account of his teaching of intonation to a group of predominantly Chinese immigrant women. A particularly engaging part of the lesson takes place when Morgan teaches his learners that the different intonation patterns used to realize the word *Oh* can have very different social meanings and presuppose disparate social relationships. With reference to the lesson as a whole, he writes,

What stands out most in this activity is how the foregrounding of social power and identity issues seemed to facilitate greater comprehension of sentence-level stress and intonation as strategic resources for (re)defining social relationships.

Morgan does not, however, exclusively describe a language lesson. In drawing on Halliday's (1985) sociocultural theory of language, Morgan brings a rich theoretical framework to his analysis. He contends that new meanings arise from the tension between text and context within the larger context of culture. Furthermore, looking to critical research, he

investigates how a common subject area such as pronunciation can have what he calls “emancipatory potential.” This investigation is consistent with his view, and that of many other ESL teachers working within a critical tradition, that ESL teachers need to conceive of their students as having social needs and aspirations that may be inseparable from linguistic needs. Morgan also raises important questions about the status of teacher-research. Drawing on his experience as both a teacher and a researcher, he takes issue with the view that teacher-research can be a benign and politically neutral activity. He argues persuasively that teachers who choose not to interview, tape-record, or externalize the emic voices of their students should not be excluded from contributing to the knowledge base of the TESOL profession.

### **Those Who Can, Teach**

Duff and Uchida (this issue) take readers to another country on a different continent and to a new set of issues pertaining to language and identity. The country is Japan, the participants are teachers of English as a foreign rather than a second language, and the questions are as follows: How are teachers’ sociocultural identities, understandings, and practices negotiated and transformed over time? What factors are associated with these changes? To address these questions, Duff and Uchida conducted an ethnographic study of two American and two Japanese EFL teachers and their classes in a private language institution in a large, cosmopolitan Japanese city. One of the American teachers was male; the remaining three were female. Data were collected over a 6-month period by means of teacher/student questionnaires, journals, audio- and videotaped observations, life-history interviews, and Uchida’s participant-observer research journal.

In taking on this ambitious task, Duff and Uchida tackle a number of perennial questions in the field of TESOL: How should researchers theorize culture in the field of language learning and teaching? To what extent are teachers of English teachers of culture? What emerges from their research is a tapestry that is no less complex than the object of research, a tapestry that challenges any simplistic analyses of the relationship between language and culture. Drawing on Britzman (1991), Clifford (1986), and Kramsch (1993), Duff and Uchida’s central insight is that culture is not just a body of knowledge; it comprises implicit assumptions, dynamic processes, and negotiated relationships. The two Japanese teachers, for example, although sharing a similar cultural history, had different understandings of language and culture, which were implicated in their identities and practices as teachers. Miki saw herself as a teacher of language, not culture (a “linguistically oriented

Japanese teacher”) and believed that the transmission of culture was best left to native speakers of English. Kimiko, on the other hand, believed that language and culture were inseparable and dedicated her teaching to raising learners’ cross-cultural awareness. Such data highlight interesting disparities among teachers with respect to theories of language and culture and the relationship between native and nonnative teachers of English.

## Long Walk to Freedom

Thesen (this issue) takes the reader to southern Africa, a region in which the English language has had a turbulent history. Her research on identity and transition provides a window on the vibrant changes taking place in postapartheid South Africa and the concomitant effects on language learners’ identities in that society. *Transition* has multiple referents. At its broadest level, it refers to the transitions taking place in South Africa at this time, in which White minority rule has been displaced by a multiracial, multilingual democracy. In this context, the identities of institutions and those of learners and teachers of language are in a state of intense flux. Transition also refers to the changes that Thesen’s participants faced as they transferred from secondary school to a tertiary educational institution. What were their expectations for the future? How did these intersect with their histories and experiences and with their relationship to the acquisition of academic literacy? Transition also refers to the research process—the complexity of conducting research in a context of rapid change and one in which conclusions drawn at one time may have only transitory relevance. Whereas Thesen suggests that a research context in transition may raise problems for interpretation, I believe it also provides a unique opportunity to gain insight into language and identity at the very juncture—in time and space—at which learners’ identities are being contested and renegotiated.

Thesen’s analysis is based on biographical interviews with five Black, English language learners in their 1st year at a historically White Anglophone tertiary institution. The research elicited a rich corpus of data that effectively challenge some dominant assumptions about identity and English for academic purposes (EAP). Thesen examines the discrepancy between the conventional categories by which her students are identified—“disadvantaged,” “underprepared,” “second language”—and how they identify themselves. Robert and Faith, for example, although both framed as “disadvantaged” with respect to the institution, appeared more invested in relationships with peers. With reference to the development of academic literacy, Thesen describes how the participants struggled to negotiate the expectations of the institution with



regard to such practices as plagiarism and how these practices conflicted with the learners' identities. As Mkhululi said, "Sometimes you come up with what you feel is your personal feeling and then you're told that you're plagiarising some White guy who happened to be fortunate enough to get information and to jot it down." A central argument Thesen makes is that current critical discourse theory does not do justice to the human agency of individuals and that greater attention to the voices of learners generates unexpected consequences and new understandings.

## **Where the Heart Is**

Schecter and Bayley (this issue) transport the reader out of classrooms and educational institutions into the domestic sphere of the home. The authors investigate the relationship between language and cultural identity as manifested in the language socialization practices of Mexican-descent families in the U.S. They see their research as a response to the challenge by Zentella (1996) that researchers explore the diversity of Latino communities in the U.S., given that such diversity is little recognized by much of the educational community.

The research is based on a larger study of 40 families (20 in California and 20 in Texas) that sought to investigate the relationship between home language socialization practices and the development of bilingual and biliterate abilities by Mexican-descent children. In this article Schecter and Bayley richly and comprehensively describe the home language practices of four of the eight families—two in northern California and two in south Texas—that were selected for an intensive case study. Among their findings are that all four focal children and their parents defined themselves in terms of allegiance to their Mexican heritage, that they all viewed bilingualism as a positive attribute, and that they all accorded Spanish a substantial role in the formation of cultural identity. The families in each respective state differed, however, in the extent to which they actually used Spanish to affirm identity and in the way they saw the idealized role of the school in relation to Spanish language maintenance and cultural identity. These differences are examined at length in the article. Schecter and Bayley assert that the differences between the California and Texas participants in this sample can be partly explained by the sociocultural ecologies of the two respective communities and the depth of their ties with the U.S.

Schecter and Bayley's analysis is supported by a remarkable corpus of data including audio- and videotaped observations, interviews with the focal child in each family, samples of the child's writing, and home observations. One of the questions addressed to both parents and focal

children is central to the article: “We’d be interested to know how you see yourself. Let’s say someone asked you about your cultural identity. What would you call yourself?” Schecter and Bayley note, however, that additional insights into language and cultural identity were gleaned throughout the research process.

## Rule Britannia?

In the final article in this issue, Leung, Harris, and Rampton seek to integrate theory, research, and practice with respect to questions of language and identity within urban classrooms in contemporary England. The purpose of their article is threefold. First, the authors challenge dominant understandings of classroom realities in multilingual urban schools in England. Based on biographical data from adolescent bilingual and multilingual learners, they argue in particular that a disjuncture exists between the experiences of the learners and the linguistic and ethnic categories imposed upon them. They take the position that the needs of ESL students cannot be simplistically portrayed in terms of fixed categories of ethnicity and language. Second, they draw on recent research in cultural theory to better understand the complex relationship between ethnicity, identity, and language use in the context of the postcolonial diaspora. The theorists they have found most useful in this regard include Bhabha (1994), Gilroy (1987), Hall (1988), and Hewitt (1991). They cite in particular Hall’s notion of *translation*, which addresses what Hall calls the *cultures of hybridity* characteristic of late modernity. Third, the authors claim that attempts to address the diverse needs of contemporary school populations in England have lacked analytic clarity.

To address what the authors call the “paralysis” experienced by TESOL practitioners and mainstream teachers in responding to the language needs of their students, Leung, Harris, and Rampton develop Rampton’s (1990) earlier work to offer a framework for analysis. They argue that the terms *native speaker* and *mother tongue* should be replaced with the notions *language expertise*, *language inheritance*, and *language affiliation*. Thus the central questions teachers need to ask are not “What is the learner’s mother tongue?” and “Is the learner a native speaker of Punjabi?” Rather, the teacher should ask, “What is the learner’s linguistic repertoire? Is the learner’s relationship to these languages based on expertise, inheritance, affiliation, or a combination?” These constructs, which are clearly explained in the article, are highly productive for understanding the relationship between language and ethnic identity.

## Theorizing Language and Identity

In reflecting on the central themes relating to language and identity within these five articles, I am intrigued by the similarities and differences among them. The juxtaposition of the articles provides a unique opportunity for intertextual analysis. With respect to the similarities, the authors appear to have very consistent conceptions of identity. First, they all see it as complex, contradictory, and multifaceted and reject any simplistic notions of identity. As Schecter and Bayley write,

The diversity of meanings ascribed by the participants to the ideas of Mexican and Mexican American identity reinforces critiques of essentialist descriptions, based on reductionist categories, as aids to understanding the backgrounds and aspirations minority children bring with them to classrooms.

Second, the authors see identity as dynamic across time and place. Indeed, a recurring theme in the articles is that of transition. Most of the participants in the five research projects were undergoing significant changes in their lives, whether moving from one country to another (Duff & Uchida; Morgan; Schecter & Bayley); from one institution to another (Thesen); or from one community to the next (Leung, Harris, & Rampton). As Morgan notes,

Identity is not so much a map of experience—a set of fixed coordinates—as it is a guide with which ESL students negotiate their place in a new social order and, if need be, challenge it through the meaning-making activities they participate in.

Third, all the authors point out that identity constructs and is constructed by language. Leung, Harris, and Rampton argue that “language use and notions of ethnicity and social identity are inextricably linked”; Duff and Uchida examine the “inseparability” of language and culture; and Schecter and Bayley conceive of language as embodying in and of itself “acts of identity.” Fourth, most of the authors note that identity construction must be understood with respect to larger social processes, marked by relations of power that can be either coercive or collaborative. Morgan demonstrates how issues of language, power, and identity might be approached in ESL pedagogy; Thesen draws on theorists who see “profound links” between literacy and social processes; and Schecter and Bayley acknowledge the “relevance of ideological and power relations.”

Finally, all the authors seek to link identity theory with classroom practice. Leung, Harris, and Rampton stress that it is of “utmost importance” for TESOL pedagogy to explicitly recognize and address

societal inequalities among ethnic and linguistic groups. Duff and Uchida, who take the position that teaching is itself a cultural practice, assert that the cultural underpinnings of language curricula and teaching require further examination. Thesen describes the innovative EAP courses at her institution that explicitly focus on writing, identities, and transition; and Morgan observes that “identity work in an ESL classroom is not just descriptive but fundamentally transformative.”

With respect to the differences among the authors, I was struck by the fact that the authors framed identity in different terms. The focus of Morgan’s research was on “social identity,” Duff and Uchida’s on “sociocultural identity,” Thesen’s on “voice,” Schechter and Bayley’s on “cultural identity,” and Leung, Harris, and Rampton’s on “ethnic identity.”

I have always been interested in social identity as distinct from cultural identity (see Peirce, 1995). As I have understood it, social identity refers to the relationship between the individual and the larger social world, as mediated through institutions such as families, schools, workplaces, social services, and law courts. I have asked to what extent this relationship must be understood with reference to a person’s race, gender, class, or ethnicity. Cultural identity I have understood to refer to the relationship between individuals and members of a group who share a common history, a common language, and similar ways of understanding the world. I have tended not to draw on theories of cultural identity because I have debated whether they could do justice to the heterogeneity within the groups I have encountered and the dynamic nature of identity I have observed. As I have reflected on these five articles, however, I have seen the difference between social identity and cultural identity as fluid and the commonalities more marked than the differences.

Morgan, for example, who is particularly interested in social identity, nevertheless explores the relationship between intonation and identity with reference to the dominant cultural practices of a particular group of Chinese immigrants in Canada. He does not, however, reify these cultural practices but seeks to understand them in relation to the dynamics of ethnicity and gender. Schechter and Bayley, who are particularly interested in cultural identity, nevertheless seek to understand their research with reference to larger social debates over the terms of Latino participation in U.S. society. Furthermore, within their sample of four families, they reflect on the discrepancies in their participants’ understanding of Spanish maintenance. They note, for example, that

Enrique and Mariana Villegas, from an upper-middle-class background in Guadalajara, equated Spanish maintenance with preservation of the cultivated Spanish of the educated Mexican elite, a social dialect that was never spoken by the adults in the other families studied.

Such an analysis suggests that social relations of class are important in understanding the relationship between language and identity. Duff and Uchida, indeed, collapse the distinctions between the social and the cultural.

Sociocultural identities and ideologies are not static, deterministic constructs that EFL teachers and students bring to the classroom and then take away unchanged at the end of a lesson or course . . . . Nor are they simply dictated by membership in a larger social, cultural, or linguistic group, the way many scholars approach the topic of language and social identity . . . . Rather, in educational practice as in other facets of social life, identities and beliefs are co-constructed, negotiated, and transformed on an ongoing basis by means of language.

The apparent differences between the theoretical orientations of the authors might be explained in terms of the disciplines and research traditions that inform their work and the different emphases of their research projects. At the risk of oversimplification, my tentative observations are as follows. Morgan, working within an institutional context and committed to social change, adopts a more sociological approach to his conception of identity; Schecter and Bayley, whose research focuses on the language socialization of a particular group of people with a common linguistic heritage, adopt a more anthropological approach to their analysis of identity; Duff and Uchida, working within an institutional context but addressing differences between American and Japanese teachers, find both social and cultural theories of identity useful; Leung, Harris, and Rampton, who are interested in the extent to which schools in England are adapting to an increasingly bilingual and multilingual student population, find theories of ethnicity helpful in addressing identity; and Thesen, who is interested in the life histories and biographies of students in transition and seeks to give greater prominence to human agency in theorizing identity, finds the social theory of Bakhtin (1988), particularly the notion of *voice*, relevant:

I also use the term in Bakhtin's sense (1988), referring to the *speaking consciousness*—the individual speaking or writing, at the point of utterance, always laden with the language of others, from previous contexts, and oriented towards some future response.

## **IDENTITY AND THE OWNERSHIP OF ENGLISH INTERNATIONALLY**

Having focused in depth on the five articles in this issue, I now draw on the contributions in the issue as a whole to address questions

concerning language, identity, and the ownership of English in the field of TESOL. I arrived at this decision after reflecting on the diverse contributions to the issue. Whereas all of the contributions are framed with reference to a given time and place, many of them, implicitly or explicitly, address the larger question, "Who owns English internationally?" In other words, the authors raise questions about whether English belongs to native speakers of English, to speakers of standard English, to White people, or to all of those who speak it, irrespective of their linguistic and sociocultural histories. Although these questions are more frequently asked in the context of language planning (Kachru, 1990; Lowenberg, 1993; Ndebele, 1987; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Peirce, 1989; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996; Swales, 1997; Tollefson, 1991; Widdowson, 1994), they have a direct bearing on the relationship between language and identity. If learners of English cannot claim ownership of a language, they might not consider themselves legitimate speakers (Bourdieu, 1977) of that language. By extension, there is an important relationship among language, identity, and the ownership of English.

In this section I address the following questions raised in the contributions to this issue:

1. What is the relationship between native and nonnative ESL teachers? How is race implicated in this relationship?
2. How are ESL learners categorized?
3. What is the relationship between standard and nonstandard speakers of English?
4. Do TESOL educators perpetuate Western cultural hegemony in different parts of the world?

The many overlapping themes among these questions all require further research, reflection, and analysis.

### **What is the relationship between native and nonnative ESL teachers? To what extent is race implicated in this relationship?**

The relationship between native and nonnative ESL teachers is not only symbolic; it has significant material consequences. When studying the employment advertisements at the TESOL convention in Chicago in March 1996, I was struck by the number of advertisements that called specifically for a "native English speaker." Another disturbing issue in this debate, although rarely addressed, is the issue of race and the ideal English teacher.

These topics are taken up by Tang and Amin in the Teaching Issues section of this issue. In her 1995–1996 survey of 47 nonnative ESL teachers (NNESTs) in Hong Kong, Tang found that her participants believed native ESL teachers were superior to NNESTs with respect to communicative aspects of English. In contrast, the NNESTs felt they had a better command of grammar and, when the teacher shared the mother tongue of the students, could more effectively address errors due to language transfer. According to Tang, the NNEST can be an empathetic listener for beginning and weak students, a needs analyst, an agent of change, and a coach for local public examinations. In a different context, Amin, based on research with five visible-minority ESL teachers in Toronto, Canada, found that her participants believed ESL students make a number of problematic assumptions about the authentic ESL teacher. Among them are that only White people can be native speakers of English and that only native speakers know “real” English. As a result of her research and her own experience as an ethnic Pakistani ESL teacher, Amin argues that “TESOL in Canada and the U.S. should clearly define the terms *native* and *nonnative*, emphasizing that there is no intrinsic connection between race and ability in English.”

At a broader level, the relationship between native and nonnative English speakers is taken up by Mawhinney and Xu (this issue) and by Leung, Harris, and Rampton. Describing their research in a recredentialing program in Ottawa, Canada, aimed at helping foreign-trained teachers obtain an Ontario Teaching Certificate, Mawhinney and Xu report on the professional growth of seven teachers in the context of challenges posed by language proficiency. Two of the findings address the relationship between native and nonnative English-speaking teachers. The first concerns the accents of nonnative English-speaking teachers. One principal claimed, “If these teachers want to be accepted in my school, they must totally get rid of their accent because the students will have trouble understanding them.” The second concerns the complex question of race. In the words of one teacher, “Talk about difference? The only difference is that we are not White. They do not want us to stay in school. No matter how well we do, they do not like us.”

Such findings concur with those of Leung, Harris, and Rampton, who, although working on a different continent, claim that “there is an abstracted notion of an idealised speaker of English from which ethnic and linguistic minorities are automatically excluded.” Furthermore, they point out that notwithstanding research to the contrary, England is for all practical purposes cast as a homogeneous community with one language and one culture. The diversity they have found is not restricted to ethnic and linguistic minorities. They make the important point that there is also much diversity within the majority ethnic community and

question the assumption that White, monolingual English speakers are automatically affiliated to standard English.

## **How are ESL learners categorized?**

Ndebele (1995), quoted by Thesen, notes that naming is a political act: “The namer isolates the named, explains them, contains them, and controls them” (p. 4). The undesirable consequences of how ESL learners are named and categorized are a theme addressed in four contributions. Pao, Wong, and Teuben-Rowe (this issue), for example, based on their research on mixed-heritage adults in the U.S., assert that “the individuals’ identities had been constantly challenged by a racially conscious society set on placing people into distinct categories.” They argue that L2 educators can play a critical role in promoting positive self-identities for mixed-heritage students. Hunter (this issue), drawing on her research on the development of children’s literacy in a multilingual elementary classroom in urban Canada, remarks on the contrast between the school’s construction of the students’ identities based on ethnicity and English proficiency and the students’ own investments in very different social identities. The outcomes of such labelling, she notes, “often allowed for reinforcement of the school’s label for them as ‘deficient’ in language and literacy.”

The research of Leung, Harris, and Rampton in England and that of Thesen in South Africa also convincingly problematize the categories used to define English language learners in their respective societies. Leung, Harris, and Rampton point out that there are serious problems with routine practices in the education of bilingual learners in England, in which they are frequently attributed a kind of “romantic bilingualism” and turned into “reified speakers” of community languages. Central to Thesen’s work is an examination of the “labelers and the labeled” and a search for new categories in the field of EAP. Thesen takes the position that naming is inevitable and can be useful (“equitable educational policy cannot happen without it”) but that the categories have to be kept open and co-constructed with learners.

## **What is the relationship between standard and nonstandard speakers of English?**

Nero (this issue) highlights the ambivalent identities of Anglophones from the Caribbean, eloquently captured in the title of her report, “English Is My Native Language . . . or So I Believe.” She notes that



Anglophone immigrant students entering U.S. colleges from the Caribbean are frequently placed in remedial writing or ESL classes, which many of these students find problematic. After analyzing the language of four such students with a view to informing pedagogy in English classes, she concludes that the participants' spoken and written language reflects to varying degrees a unique interaction of Creole and English that provides a point of departure for writing pedagogy.

Interesting common themes emerge from the research of Nero in the U.S. and that of Leung, Harris, and Rampton in England. The latter maintain that "the question of similarities and differences in L2- and Creole-influenced language continues to be unresolved in the English educational literature." Either many of the students defined as bilingual learners are most comfortable linguistically with a local, urban spoken English vernacular, they observe, or a nonstandard variety of this kind serves as their first spoken entry into English in the local community context.

### **Are TESOL educators perpetuating Western imperialism in different parts of the world?**

In her insightful review of three of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's books (1977, 1986, 1993), MacPherson raises a compelling issue.

One question I have wrestled with as a graduate student in the field is whether we are unwittingly serving exploitative multinational corporate interests as missionaries once served conquistadors, weakening the cultural and linguistic resources of people in a manner that makes the carnage of local cultures and economies possible.

MacPherson is not alone in wrestling with this question. It is vigorously debated not only in TESOL but also in the broader educational community (Kachru, 1990; Lowenberg, 1993; Ndebele, 1987; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Peirce, 1989; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996; Swales, 1997; Tollefson, 1991; Widdowson, 1994). In reviewing Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work, MacPherson seeks to bring to the attention of the TESOL community the conflicts this question has raised for a noted African writer and scholar. Central to this issue is the question raised by Duff and Uchida: Are TESOL educators teachers of English or teachers of culture? Duff and Uchida demonstrate convincingly that language and culture are, to some extent, inseparable. Culture relates to not only the cultural content of the courses L2 educators teach but also the subtle practices that are characteristic of their teaching: the way they arrange seating in their classrooms, the questions they ask, the stories they tell, the exercises they set.

These concerns are relevant not only in EFL settings in different parts of the world but also in ESL settings in the West, where language learners have to negotiate new social and cultural relationships. Morgan notes that classroom relationships and interactions both consciously and unconsciously define what is desirable and possible for learners. Like Duff and Uchida, he observes that the influential role of the teacher is determined not only by the explicit content of the lessons but by the type of materials incorporated into a lesson and the methods used by the teacher. As Starfield (this issue) suggests, drawing on her reading of Cummins (1996), Goldstein (1996), and Wink (1997), teachers in the West cannot be complacent about the extent to which teaching practices can both constrain and enhance possibilities for ESL learners.

Notwithstanding questions raised about the spread of English and Western cultural hegemony, the research in this issue cautions against drawing neat conclusions about the learning of English in either EFL or ESL contexts. In this regard, the research of McMahon (this issue) in Japan and Boshier (this issue) in the U.S. is instructive. For the female EFL learners in Japan who were part of McMahon's study, learning English seemed to be an empowering experience. As one woman said, "When speaking Japanese, it takes a lot of courage to express my convictions or insist upon my beliefs, but in English I can do so with a sense of being equal to the person I am talking to." According to McMahon, this was achieved in spite of the ambivalence some women felt about the role of English in perpetuating Western culture. In a different, ESL context, based on research with 100 Hmong students in U.S. postsecondary institutions, Boshier (this issue) found that newcomers were able to develop "bicultural" identities by adapting to the host culture without giving up their native culture or ethnic affiliation. She concludes that her study demonstrates support for multicultural/bilingual educational and social policies.

## CONCLUSION

I began this article with some reflection on my own understanding of language and identity as informed by my reading of such theorists such as West, Bourdieu, Weedon, and Cummins. I then focused attention on the five articles in this issue, using the authors' research in Canada, Japan, South Africa, the U.S., and England as the starting point for a more textured analysis of the relationship between language and identity. Next, I drew on the issue as a whole to address a recurrent theme: the relationship between identity and the ownership of English.

I conclude with a few reflective comments. First, as Thesen argues, discourse theory has tended to have a somewhat deterministic view of

language and identity because it has often overlooked a focus on individual accounts. This special-topic issue attempts to do justice to the individual accounts of learners and teachers in different parts of the globe and seeks to ensure that debates on language and identity have taken the voices of learners and teachers seriously. Second, the Forum contributions of McNamara and Hansen and Liu suggest that research on language learning and identity has hitherto been rather fragmented and insular. This special-topic issue is an attempt to address such fragmentation. I hope that readers will take the opportunity not only to compare the different theories, research traditions, and findings in the various articles and reports but also to enrich the debate with their own contributions. Finally, because the mandate of TESOL is the teaching of English, I suggest that if English belongs to the people who speak it, whether native or nonnative, whether ESL or EFL, whether standard or nonstandard, then the expansion of English in this era of rapid globalization may possibly be for the better rather than for the worse.

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## Errata

In the Summer 1997 issue (Vol. 31, No. 2), the heading on page 365 reads “Teaching Issues, edited by Bonny Norton Peirce.” This should have been entitled “Research Issues, edited by Patricia A. Duff.” We apologize for the oversight.

In Tony Silva’s Forum contribution, “On the Ethical Treatment of ESL Writers” (Vol. 31, No. 2, page 361), the third sentence of the second paragraph should read: “If they enroll in courses with titles like Introductory Writing or Freshman Composition, I believe it is certainly reasonable for them to expect and to get courses that focus primarily if not exclusively on writing, as opposed to **courses that primarily focus on** such interesting and important yet inappropriate topics as peace education, conflict resolution, environmental concerns, political issues, particular ideologies, literature, critical thinking, cultural studies, or some other cause célèbre du jour, and use writing merely as an add-on or reinforcement activity.”

The phrase in boldface was not included in the sentence. We apologize for the omission.

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