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Identity: Second Language

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Interest in second language identity in the field of applied linguistics is best understood in the context of a shift in the field from a predominantly psycholinguistic approach to second language acquisition (SLA) to include a greater focus on sociological and anthropological dimensions of second language learning, particularly with reference to sociocultural, poststructural, and critical theory. Researchers of second language identity have been interested not only in linguistic input and output in SLA, but in the relationship between the language learner and the larger social world. In particular, these researchers have examined the diverse social, historical, and cultural contexts in which language learning takes place and how learners negotiate and sometimes resist the diverse positions those contexts offer them.

Many researchers interested in second language identity are also interested in the extent to which relations of power within classrooms and communities promote or constrain the process of language learning. It is argued that the extent to which a learner speaks or is silent or writes, reads, or resists has much to do with the extent to which the learner is valued in any given institution or community. In this regard, social processes marked by inequities of gender, race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation may serve to position learners in ways that silence and exclude. At the same time, however, learners may resist marginalization through both covert and overt acts of resistance. What is of central interest to researchers of second language identity is that the very articulation of power, identity, and resistance is expressed in and through language. Language is thus more than a system of signs; it is social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated.

After tracing the genesis of work in second language identity from the 1970s to the present day, this chapter outlines some of the major theoretical influences on second language identity research. It then examines four trajectories of research that have much promise for the future: identity and investment, identity and imagined communities, identity categories and educational change, and identity and literacy.

The Historical Context

In the 1970s and 1980s, applied linguistics scholars interested in second language identity tended to draw distinctions between social identity and cultural identity. While 'social identity' was seen to reference the relationship between the individual language learner and the larger social world, as mediated through institutions such as families, schools, workplaces, social services, and law courts (e.g., Gumperz, 1982), 'cultural identity' referenced the relationship between an individual and members of a particular ethnic group (such as Mexican and Japanese) who share a common history, a common language, and similar ways of understanding the world (e.g., Valdes, 1986). In my own earlier work (Norton Peirce, 1995), I initially examined identity as a social construct as opposed to a cultural construct because I debated whether theories of cultural identity could do justice to the heterogeneity within the groups encountered and the dynamic and changing nature of identity observed in my research. As Atkinson (1999) has noted, past theories of cultural identity tended to essentialize and reify identities in problematic ways. In more recent years, however, the difference between social and cultural identity is seen to be theoretically more fluid, and the intersections between social and cultural identities are considered more significant than their differences. In this more recent second language research, identity is seen as socioculturally constructed, and scholars draw on both institutional and community practices to understand the

conditions under which language learners speak, read, and write the target language.

A brief review of some of the articles published in the special issue of the *TESOL Quarterly* on Language and Identity exemplifies the increasingly interdisciplinary approach to second language identity research characteristic of the 1990s. I argued at the time that while the contributors framed their notions of identity in different terms, the similarities between the conceptions of identity were more marked than their differences (Norton, 1997). Thus Morgan (1997), for example, who was particularly interested in *social* identity, nevertheless explored the relationship between intonation and identity with reference to the dominant *cultural* practices of a particular group of Chinese immigrants in Canada. He did not, however, reify these cultural practices, but sought to understand them in relation to the dynamics of ethnicity and gender. Schecter and Bayley (1997), who were particularly interested in *cultural* identity, nevertheless sought to understand their research with reference to larger *social* debates over the terms of Latino participation in American society, suggesting that social relations of class are important in understanding the relationship between language and identity. Duff and Uchida (1997), indeed, collapsed the distinctions between the social and the cultural by arguing for a sociocultural theory of identity in which identities and beliefs are co-constructed, negotiated, and transformed on a regular basis through language.

The diverse research covered in the 1997 *TESOL Quarterly* special issue, as well as special issues of *Linguistics and Education*, edited by Martin-Jones and Heller (1996), and *Language and Education*, edited by Sarangi and Baynham (1996), anticipated the wide range of research on second language identity characteristic of the early years of the 21st century. A number of monographs on the topic have appeared in catalogs and conferences (Day, 2002; Kanno, 2003; Miller, 2003; Norton, 2000; and Toohey, 2000); a growing body of research, common themes of which are discussed below, have been published in a wide variety of journals including *The Modern Language Journal* (Potowski, 2004), *TESOL Quarterly* (Lam, 2000; Maguire and Graves, 2001), and *Journal of Second Language Writing* (Hyland, 2002; Ramanathan and Atkinson, 1999); and there has been the establishment in 2002 of the award-winning *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, edited by Tom Ricento and Terrence Wiley, which has already published an exciting array of research on second language identity.

Current research on second language identity conceives of identity as dynamic, contradictory, and constantly changing across time and place. Indeed, a recurring theme throughout much of the research is that of 'transition.' Many of the participants in research projects on second language identity are undergoing significant changes in their lives, whether moving from one country to another (Kanno, 2003) or from one institution to the next (Harklau, 2000). Such transitions can be productive for language learning, providing learners with enhanced skills at negotiating bilingual identities; other transitions can be more problematic, as learners struggle to accommodate changing expectations in different institutional contexts. In such changing sets of circumstances, identities that might be seen as contradictory may in fact be constructed within contexts that are themselves sites of struggle (Cummins, 2000).

Theoretical Influences

A broad range of theorists have been influential in shaping current research on second language identity, most notable of whom are Bakhtin (1981, 1963/1984), Bourdieu (1977, 1979/1984), Weedon, and Lave and Wenger (1991). All of these theorists, while working within diverse disciplinary frameworks, are centrally concerned with both institutional and community practices that have an impact on learning.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1963/1984) takes the position that language needs to be investigated not as a set of idealized forms independent of their speakers or their speaking, but rather as situated utterances in which speakers, in dialogue with others, struggle to create meanings. For Bakhtin, the notion of the individual speaker is a fiction, as he sees all speakers constructing their utterances jointly on the basis of their interaction with listeners in both historical and contemporary, and both actual and assumed, communities. In this view, the appropriation of the words of others is a complex and conflictual process in which words are not neutral but express particular predispositions and value systems.

Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1979/1984), a contemporary French sociologist, focuses on the often unequal relationships between interlocutors and the importance of power in structuring speech. He suggests that the value ascribed to speech cannot be understood apart from the person who speaks and that the person who speaks cannot be understood apart from larger networks of social relationships. In this view, when a person speaks, the speaker wishes not only to be understood, but to be believed, obeyed, and respected. However, the speaker's ability to command the attention of the listener is unequally distributed because of the symbolic power relations between them. To redress the inequities between what Bourdieu calls 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' speakers, he argues

that an expanded definition of competence should include the "right to speech" or "the power to impose reception" (1977: 648).

The work of Christine Weedon, like that of Bakhtin and Bourdieu, is centrally concerned with the conditions under which people speak, within both institutional and community contexts. Like other poststructuralist theorists who inform her work, Weedon foregrounds the central role of language in her analysis of the relationship between the individual and the social, arguing that language not only defines institutional practices, but also serves to construct our sense of ourselves and our "subjectivity" (Weedon, 1987: 21). Weedon notes that the terms *subject* and *subjectivity* signify a different conception of the individual than that associated with humanist conceptions of the individual dominant in Western philosophy. While humanist conceptions of the individual presuppose that every person has an essential, unique, fixed, and coherent 'core,' poststructuralism depicts the individual (i.e., the subject) as diverse, contradictory, dynamic, and changing over historical time and social space.

A shift from seeing learners as individual language producers to seeing them as members of social and historically constituted communities is of much interest to anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that what they call "situated learning" is an integral and inseparable part of social practice, as newcomers are mentored into the performance of community practices. Their notion "legitimate peripheral participation" represents their view that communities are composed of participants who differentially engage with the practices of their community and that conditions vary with regard to ease of access to expertise, to opportunities for practice, to consequences for error in practice, and so on. From this perspective, then, educational research might focus not so much on assessing individual 'uptake' of particular knowledge or skills, but on the social structures in particular communities and on the variety of positionings available for learners to occupy in those communities.

Rather than seeing language learning as a gradual individual process of internalizing a neutral set of rules, structures, and vocabulary of a standard language, the work of Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Weedon, and Lave and Wenger offers applied linguists ways to think differently about language learning. Such theory suggests that second language learners need to struggle to appropriate the voices of others; they need to learn to command the attention of their listeners; they need to negotiate language as a system and as a social practice; and they need to understand the practices of

the communities with which they interact. Drawing on such theory, becoming a 'good' language learner is seen to be a much more complicated process than earlier research had suggested (Norton and Toohey, 2001).

Research Trajectories

Research on second language identity has taken a number of interesting directions that hold much promise. The four trajectories I wish to examine address research on identity and investment, identity and imagined communities, identity categories and educational change, and identity and literacy.

Identity and Investment

In my research with immigrant women in Canada (Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995), I observed that existing theories of motivation in the field of SLA were not consistent with the findings from my research. Most theories at the time assumed motivation was a character trait of the individual language learner and that learners who failed to learn the target language were not sufficiently committed to the learning process. Such theories did not do justice to the identities and experiences of the language learners in my research. For this reason, I made the case that the notion of 'investment' might help to extend notions of motivation in the field of SLA. The notion of investment, inspired by the work of Bourdieu, signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it. If learners 'invest' in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital. Unlike notions of instrumental motivation, which conceive of the language learner as having a unitary, fixed, and ahistorical 'personality,' the notion of investment conceives of the language learner as having a complex identity, changing across time and space, and reproduced in social interaction. An investment in the target language is best understood as an investment in the learner's own identity.

The notion of investment has sparked considerable interest in the field of applied linguistics (see Pittaway, 2004). McKay and Wong (1996), for example, have drawn on this concept to explain the English language development of four Mandarin-speaking students in Grades 7 and 8 in a California school. They note that the needs, desires, and negotiations of students are not simply distractions or deviations from an ideal language learning situation; on the contrary, they

must be regarded as constituting "the very fabric of students' lives and as determining their investment in learning the target language" (McKay and Wong, 1996: 603). Angelil-Carter (1997) found the concept useful in understanding the language development of an English language learner in South Africa, noting how the student's investment in prior discourses impacted on his acquisition of written academic discourses. Skilton-Sylvester (2002), drawing on her research with four Cambodian women in adult ESL classes in the United States, has argued that traditional views of adult motivation and participation are limited because they do not address the complex lives of adult learners or their investment in learning English. Her findings suggest that an understanding of a woman's domestic and professional identities is necessary to explain the investment in particular adult ESL programs. Potowski (2004) uses the notion of investment to explain students' use of Spanish in a dual Spanish/English immersion program in the United States. She notes that no matter how well-run a language program is, unless a learner's investment in the target language is consistent with the goals of the program, target language growth may not meet expectations. Potowski makes the case that the notion of investment makes an important contribution not only to the study of SLA, but to research on heritage language maintenance.

Identity and Imagined Communities

An extension of interest in identity and investment concerns the imagined communities that language learners aspire to when they learn a new language. In Norton (2001), I drew on my research with two adult immigrant language learners to argue that while the learners were initially actively engaged in classroom practices, the realm of their desired community extended beyond the four walls of the classroom. This imagined community was not accessible to their respective teachers, who, unwittingly, alienated the two language learners who then withdrew from the language classroom. The work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) helped me to make sense of this data. In many second language classrooms, all of the members of the classroom community, apart from the teacher, are newcomers to a set of language practices and to a community that includes those language practices in its activities. The question that arises then is what community practices do these learners seek to learn? What, indeed, constitutes 'the community' for them?

For many language learners, the community is one of the imagination – a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future. The community may also be, to some extent, a reconstruction of past communities and historically constituted relationships. In essence, an imagined community assumes an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the target language must be understood within this context. Learners have different investments in particular members of the target language community, and the people in whom learners have the greatest investment may be the very people who represent or provide access to the imagined community of a given learner. Of particular interest to the language educator is the extent to which such investments are productive for learner engagement in both the classroom and the wider target language community. Such questions have been taken up more extensively in a coedited special issue of the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* on Imagined Communities and Educational Possibilities (Kanno and Norton, 2003) in which Adrian Blackledge, Diane Dagenais, Farah Kamal, Yasuko Kanno, Bonny Norton, Aneta Pavlenko, and Sandra Silberstein explore the imagined communities of specific groups of learners in Canada, Japan, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Identity Categories and Educational Change

While much research on second language identity explores the multiple and intersecting dimensions of learners' identities, there is a growing body of research that seeks to investigate the ways in which particular relations of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation may have an impact on the language learning process (Norton and Toohey, 2004). Innovative research that addresses these issues does not regard such identity categories as variables, but rather as sets of relationships that are socially and historically constructed within particular relations of power. Ibrahim's (1999) research with a group of French-speaking continental African students in a Franco-Ontarian High School in Canada explores the impact on language learning of 'becoming black.' He argues that the students' linguistic styles, and in particular their use of Black Stylized English, was a direct outcome of being imagined and constructed as Black by hegemonic discourses and groups. From a slightly different perspective, Taylor's (2004) research in an anti-discrimination camp in Toronto, Canada, argues for the need to understand language learning through the lens of what she calls *racialized gender*. The stories of Hue, a Vietnamese girl, and Khatra, a Somali girl, are particularly powerful in this regard, supporting the view held by Kubota (2004) that a color-blind

conception of multiculturalism does not do justice to the challenges faced by language learners of diverse races and ethnicities.

Similarly, the work of scholars such as Ehrlich (1997) and Pavlenko (2004) is particularly insightful with regard to intersections of gender and language learning. Their conception of gender, which extends beyond female-male divides, is understood to be a system of social relationships and discursive practices that may lead to systemic inequality among particular groups of learners, including women, minorities, elderly, and disabled. Pavlenko, for example, argues for the need to understand the intersections between gender and other forms of oppression, noting that both girls and boys who are silenced in the language classroom are more likely those from the working class. In a similar spirit, Nelson (2004) explores the extent to which sexual orientation might be an important identity category in the second language classroom. Of central interest is the way in which a teacher can create a supportive environment for learners who might be gay, lesbian, or transgendered. Interest in identity categories and language learning is gaining momentum. A special issue of the *TESOL Quarterly* on Gender and Language Education, edited in 2004 by Kathy Davis and Ellen Skilton-Sylvester as well as an edited volume *Gender and English Language Learners* (Norton and Pavlenko, 2004) are available.

Identity and Literacy

Researchers of second language identity have become interested not only in the conditions under which language learners speak, but in the extent to which identities and investments structure their engagement with *texts*. There is growing recognition that when a second language learner reads or writes a text, both the comprehension and construction of the text is mediated by the learner's investment in the activity and the learner's sociocultural identity. By way of example, Norton Peirce and Stein (1995) demonstrate how the meaning of a South African reading comprehension text shifted when the social conditions under which it was read changed. They argue that the changing social occasions created different kinds of investments on the part of the students, and as the students' identities shifted from compliance to resistance, so did their interpretation of the text. Student resistance is also a theme in Canagarajah's (2004) literacy research with Tamil students in Sri Lanka and African American students in the United States, in which he demonstrates how students learning a second language or dialect sometimes engage in clandestine literacy activities to resist unfavorable identities imposed on them.

Much emerging research on literacy and second language identity also addresses the impact of literacy practices on relationships beyond the classroom. Lam (2000), for example, studied the Internet correspondence of a Chinese immigrant teenager in the United States who entered into transnational communication with a group of peers. She demonstrates how this experience of what she calls *textual identity* related to the student's developing identity in the use of English. The research of Kramsch and Thorne (2002) indicates, however, that not all transnational Internet communication leads to positive identity outcomes. In their study of the synchronous and asynchronous communication between American learners of French in the United States and French learners of English in France, they found that students had little understanding of the larger cultural framework within which each party was operating, leading to problematic digital exchanges. Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999), indeed, make the case that there is much need for cross-cultural writing research to better inform both teachers and students of the sociocultural knowledge of student writers from diverse regions of the world.

Scholars such as Luke (2004), Kress (1993), and Ivanič (1997) have influenced much research on the relationship between literacy and second language identity. While Luke's work has focused on the contribution of critical literacy to second language education and Kress's on the conception of text as a socially and historically constituted genre, Ivanič has explored the notion of writer identity, making the case that writers' identities are constructed in the possibilities for self-hood available in the sociocultural contexts of writing. Ivanič's distinctions between the "autobiographical self," the "discoursal self," and the "authorial self" have been useful in writing research with both young second language learners (Maguire and Graves, 2001) and college-level students (Hyland, 2002; Starfield, 2002).

Conclusion

Research on second language identity has struck a chord in the field of applied linguistics, opening up multiple avenues for research on every aspect of the field. While this chapter has focused on the identity of the second language learner, there is now increasing interest in the identity of the second language teacher (Johnston, 2002; Lin, 2004), the second language teacher educator (Goldstein, 2003; Pennycook, 2004), and the second language researcher (Hawkins, 2004; Leung *et al.*, 2004). If we take seriously the argument that the identity of the second language

learner is not a personality variable but a socially and historically constructed relationship to both institutional and community practices, then it follows that teachers, researchers, administrators, testers, and policy makers are all implicated in the range of identities available to the second language learner. There is every indication that the interest in second language identity will grow in momentum, enriching existing trajectories of research and forging new, exciting directions.

See also: Applied Linguistics: Overview and History; Critical Applied Linguistics; Interlanguage; Motivation and Attitude in Second Language Learning; Politics of Teaching.

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Ideophones

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Introduction

The study of ideophones dates back to the end of the 19th century, but it was especially influenced by Diedrich Westermann (1927, 1937) who examined the sound symbolism of a special class of onomatopoeic words called 'Lautbilder' ('*sound pictures*') in West African languages, which "describe an object or denote an event as a whole" (Westermann, 1937: 159).

Until the late 1970s, ideophones were almost exclusively described for African languages, but no ideophones were reported for languages of the Khoisan family. In recent years, an increased interest in ideophones has provided us with detailed studies in Khoisan, as well as in European, Asiatic, Australian, and Amerindian languages (cf. Asher, 1982; Nuckolls, 1996; Kita, 1997; Alpher, 2001; Voeltz and Kilian-Hatz, 2001) so that it is now established that the existence of ideophones is not restricted to some African language families but seems to be a universal feature of human language. Examples of ideophones are in English *wop, wiggle-waggle, tic-tac, ding-dang-dong, ptt ptt ptt* or in Southern Sotho (Sotho, Southern) *nele* ('disappear and be silent for a long time'), *shwɛrɛrɛ* ('tell lies'), *ɲɛkɛthɛ* ('have a salty taste'), *hlanahlana* ('fly up and down and from side to side'), and *tlɔpɔrɔ* ('be straight') (Kunene, 1978: 50ff.).