

## Chapter 13

# Language and Identity

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### Overview: Key Terms and Goals

For the past 10 years, I have taught a graduate course at the University of British Columbia, called 'Language, Discourse, and Identity', which has given me the opportunity to remain connected to the burgeoning literature on language and identity in the field of language education. However, given the immense wealth of this literature, which includes an entire journal devoted to the topic (*The Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*), this chapter, like my course, is selective in orientation. To achieve some balance between depth and breadth, I include some of the classic literature in the area, while making space for new voices and emerging themes. I begin by defining key terms, and then outline what I see as some of the primary goals of this area of research.

As a starting point, and with a view to defining key terms, it is useful to consider why I include the term discourse in the title of my graduate course. In order to understand the relationship between language and identity, as discussed in this chapter, it is important to understand the poststructuralist theory of language, which is defined as discourse. Poststructuralist theories of language achieved much prominence in the late 20th century, and are associated, amongst others, with the work of Bakhtin (1981, 1984), Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1991) and Stuart Hall (1997) and Weedon (1997). These theories build on, but are distinct from, structuralist theories of language, associated predominantly with the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1966). For structuralists, the linguistic system guarantees the meaning of signs (the word and its meaning) and each linguistic community has its own set of signifying practices that give value to the signs in a language.

One of the criticisms poststructuralists have levelled at this conception of language is that structuralism cannot account for struggles over the social meanings that can be attributed to signs in a given language. The signs /feminist/, /research/, /sociolinguistics/ for example can have different meanings for different people within the same linguistic community.

While structuralists conceive of signs as having idealized meanings, and linguistic communities as being relatively homogeneous and consensual, poststructuralists take the position that the signifying practices of a society are sites of struggle, and that linguistic communities are heterogeneous arenas characterized by conflicting claims to truth and power. Thus language is not conceived of as a neutral medium of communication, but is understood with reference to its social meaning, in a frequently inequitable world. It is this conception of language that poststructuralists define as 'discourse'.

How does a poststructuralist theory of language as discourse help us to understand the relationship between language and identity? If we take the position that linguistic communities are not homogeneous and consensual, but often heterogeneous and conflicted, we need to understand how power is implicated in relationships between individuals, communities and nations. This is directly relevant to our understanding of the relationship between language and identity. As Bourdieu (1977) notes, 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. Every time we speak, we are negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self in relation to the larger social world, and reorganizing that relationship across time and space. Our gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, among other characteristics, are all implicated in this negotiation of identity.

The research of feminist poststructuralists such as Weedon (1997) has been particularly influential in helping language educators to theorize identity, or what feminist poststructuralists call subjectivity, which is derived from the term 'subject'. The use of the term 'subject' is compelling because it serves as a constant reminder that a person's identity must always be understood in relational terms: one is either subject *of* a set of relationships (i.e. in a position of power) or subject *to* a set of relationships (i.e. in a position of reduced power). In this view, the commonsense notion of 'the real me' remains a fiction (see Bhabha, 1987). Three defining characteristics of subjectivity are of particular interest to language educators: the multiple, nonunitary nature of the subject; subjectivity as a site of struggle; and subjectivity as changing over time. From a language educator's perspective, the conceptualization of subjectivity as multiple and changing is consistent with the view that pedagogical practices can be transformative. While some identity positions may limit and constrain opportunities for learners to speak, read or write, other identity positions may offer enhanced sets of possibilities for social interaction and human agency. Indeed, in poststructuralist theory, subjectivity and language are theorized as mutually constitutive. As Weedon (1997) notes, it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across a range of sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person

gains access to – or is denied access to – powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak. These ideas speak directly to language teachers and learners.

Drawing on these notions of language, discourse, and identity, language educators and researchers have the primary goal of examining the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which language learning and teaching takes place, and how learners and teachers negotiate and sometimes resist the diverse positions those contexts offer them (see monographs by Block, 2007; Clarke, 2008; Day, 2002; Goldstein, 2003; Heller, 2007; Kanno, 2008; May, 2008; Miller, 2003; Nelson, 2009; Norton, 2000; Potowski, 2007; Rampton, 2006; Stein, 2008; Toohey, 2000). These goals represent a shift in the field of language education from a focus on psycholinguistic models of language acquisition to include greater interest in sociological and anthropological dimensions of language learning (Albright & Luke, 2008; Block, 2007; Gao, 2007; Morgan, 2007; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2003; Ricento, 2005; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). To better understand these contexts, many language educators are interested in the extent to which relations of power within classrooms and communities promote or constrain the conditions under which learners speak, read or write. We take the position that when learners speak or remain silent; when they write, read or resist, we need to understand the extent to which the learner is valued in a particular classroom, institution or community. At the same time, however, we seek to understand the diverse ways in which learners may challenge both subtle and overt forms of discrimination, and what implications this has for the teaching of language. Language is thus theorized not only as a linguistic system, but as a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated. More recent developments in notions of ‘investment’ and ‘imagined communities’ are discussed under Key Research Findings below.

### Common Research Methods and Challenges

Research on the relationship between language and identity tends to be qualitative rather than quantitative, and often draws on critical ethnography, feminist poststructuralist theory, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, in seeking to determine both questions and methods. There are a number of common assumptions that many researchers of language and identity bring to their qualitative research projects, three of which are as follows:

First, much identity research rejects the view that any research can claim to be objective or unbiased. In this view, researchers have to understand our own experience and knowledge as well as those of the participants in our studies. This does not suggest that qualitative research is

lacking in rigor; on the contrary, all research studies are understood to be 'situated', and the researcher integral to the progress of a research project. In her research in India, Ramanathan (2005: 15) notes for example 'Questions and issues of what are "present" and "absent" clearly underlie what are "visible" and "invisible" in literacy events and practices and are determined, to a large extent, by the researcher's lens'. Second, identity researchers aim to investigate the complex relationship between social structure on the one hand, and human agency on the other, without resorting to deterministic or reductionist analyses. While taking race, class, gender and other structural issues into account in our analysis, we need to ensure that we leave conceptual room for the actions and investments of human agents. Menard-Warwick (2006) makes the case that Bakhtin's theories of language have the potential to resolve some of the contradictions between continuity and change that characterize debates on identity in the fields of second language acquisition and literacy. Third, identity researchers seek to better understand how power operates within society, constraining or enabling human action (Cummins, 2000; Fairclough, 2001; Janks, 2000; Pennycook, 2007). We often draw on Foucault (1980) to understand not only the relationship between knowledge and power, but also the subtle ways in which power operates in society. Foucault notes for example that power is often invisible in that it frequently naturalizes events and practices in ways that come to be seen as 'normal' to members of a community. As Pennycook notes,

Foucault brings a constant scepticism towards cherished concepts and modes of thought. Taken-for-granted categories such as man, woman, class, race, ethnicity, nation, identity, awareness, emancipation, language or power must be understood as contingent, shifting and produced in the particular, rather than having some prior ontological status. (Pennycook, 2007: 39)

Qualitative research on language and identity is not without its challenges, however, and the following two studies are illustrative of some of its difficulties. Drawing on their research on task-based language learning in urban settings in the United Kingdom, Leung *et al.* (2004) examine the inelegance of qualitative research, arguing that the 'epistemic turbulence' in qualitative research in second language acquisition centres on the question of what constitutes or represents reality. The methodology adopted in their study was to collect naturally occurring data with the use of video and audio recordings, which were supplemented by field notes. They describe the data as 'messy' in that it was difficult to represent and account for data that did not fit neatly into the theoretical construct of task-based language use. Leung, Harris and Rampton make the case that researchers need a conceptual framework that acknowledges rather than obscures the messiness of data.

In a very different context, Toohey and Waterstone (2004) describe a research collaboration between teachers and researchers in Vancouver, Canada, with the mutual goal of investigating what practices in classrooms would make a difference to the learning opportunities of minority-language children. While teachers were comfortable discussing and critiquing their educational practices, they expressed ambivalence about translating their practice into publishable academic papers, noting that they felt little ownership over the academic language characteristic of many published journals. To address precisely this type of challenge, Sharkey and Johnson (2003) have initiated a productive and engaging dialogue between researchers and teachers, with the express aim of demystifying research and theory that addresses themes of identity, power and educational change.

### Key Research Findings and Future Directions

In this section, I discuss key research findings on language and identity with reference to five areas of research, and then suggest additional directions for the future. The five areas address research on identity and investment, identity and imagined communities, identity categories and educational change, identity and literacy, and identity and resistance.

#### 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 (see e.g. Schumann, 1986). Further, theories of motivation did not pay sufficient attention to unequal relations of power between language learners and target language speakers. My research found that high levels of motivation did not necessarily translate into good language learning, and that unequal relations of power between language learners and target language speakers was a common theme in the data. For this reason, I developed the construct of 'investment' to complement constructs of motivation in the field of SLA. The construct of investment, inspired by the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1991), 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

often conceive of the language learner as having a unitary, fixed and ahistorical 'personality', the construct of investment conceives of the language learner as having a complex identity, changing across time and space, and reproduced in social interaction. Thus while motivation can be seen as a primarily psychological construct (Dornyei, 2001), investment must be seen within a sociological framework, and seeks to make a meaningful connection between a learner's desire and commitment to learn a language, and their changing identity.

The construct of investment provides for a different set of questions associated with a learner's commitment to learning the target language. Instead of asking for example 'To what extent is the learner motivated to learn the target language?' the researcher asks, 'What is the learner's investment in the target language practices of this classroom or community?' A learner may be a highly motivated language learner, but may nevertheless have little investment in the language practices of a given classroom or community, which may for example be racist, sexist, elitist or homophobic. Thus despite being highly motivated, a learner could be excluded from the language practices of a classroom, and in time positioned as a 'poor' or unmotivated language learner (see Norton & Toohey, 2001).

By way of illustration, it is instructive to consider a recent classroom-based study conducted by Duff (2002) in a multilingual secondary school. Drawing on macro-level and micro-level contexts of communication in one content-level course, Duff found that the teacher's attempts to foster respect for cultural diversity in the classroom had mixed results. In essence, the English language learners in the class were afraid of being criticized or laughed at because of their limited command of English. As Duff (2002: 312) notes, 'Silence protected them from humiliation'. This silence, however, was perceived by the native English speakers as representing 'a lack of initiative, agency, or desire to improve one's English or to offer interesting material for the sake of the class' (Duff, 2002: 312). It is clear from the classroom data, however, that the English language learners in the class were not 'unmotivated'; rather, it could be argued that they were not 'invested' in the language practices of their classroom, where there were unequal relations of power between the English language learners and native speakers. Their investments were co-constructed in their interactions with their native speaker peers, and their identities a site of struggle.

The construct of investment has sparked considerable interest in the field of applied linguistics and language education (see e.g. Cummins, 2006; Haneda, 2005; McKay & Wong, 1996; Pittaway, 2004; Potowski, 2007; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002), including a special issue on the topic in the *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* (Arkoudis & Davison, 2008). McKay and Wong (1996) have drawn on this construct to explain the English language development of four Mandarin-speaking students in Grades 7 and 8 in a California school, noting that the needs, desires and negotiations of

students are integral to their investment in the target language. 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 do not adequately address the complex lives of adult learners, and that an understanding of a woman's domestic and professional identities is necessary to explain their investment in particular adult ESL programs. Haneda (2005) has drawn on the construct of investment to understand the engagement of two university students in an advanced Japanese literacy course, concluding that their multimembership in differing communities may have shaped the way they invested in writing in Japanese. Potowski (2007) uses the construct of investment to explain students' use of Spanish in a dual Spanish/English immersion program in the United States, noting that even if a language program is well-run, a learner's investment in the target language must be consistent with the goals of the program if language learning is to meet expectations. Cummins (2006: 59) has drawn on the construct of investment to develop the notion of the identity text, arguing that the construct has emerged as a 'significant explanatory construct' in the second language learning literature.

### 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. I have drawn on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), and later Anderson (1991) to argue that in many second language classrooms, all of the members of the classroom community, apart from the teacher, are newcomers to the language practices of that community. The question that arises then is what community practices do these learners seek to learn? What, indeed, constitutes 'the community' for them?

In many language classrooms, the community may be, to some extent, a reconstruction of past communities and historically constituted relationships, but also a community of the imagination – a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future. Such imagined communities can be highly varied, from the imagined community of the more public professional to that of the more local homemaker. 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. In essence, an imagined community assumes an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the target language must be understood within this context.

Such issues have been taken up more extensively in publications such as Pavlenko and Norton (2007) and in a co-edited special issue of the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* on 'Imagined Communities and Educational Possibilities' (Kanno & Norton, 2003) in which a number of scholars have explored the imagined communities of learners in diverse regions of the world; some of whom have subsequently followed up this initial research in more recent publications. In the Japanese context for example Kanno (2008) examines the relationship between school education and inequality of access to bilingualism in five different Japanese schools promoting bilingual education. She found that while additive bilingualism was promoted for upper-middle-class students, subtractive bilingualism was far more common in schools serving immigrant and refugee children. Kanno argues that in the schools she researched, different visions of children's imagined communities called for different forms of bilingual education, exacerbating existing inequities between students with unequal access to resources.

In Canada, Dagenais *et al.* (2009) have investigated the linguistic landscape in the vicinity of two elementary schools in Vancouver and Montreal, illustrating the ways in which the children imagined the language of their neighbourhoods, and constructed their identities in relation to them. Dagenais *et al.* describe the innovative ways in which researchers and students drew on multimodal resources such as digital photography to document the linguistic landscape of these neighbourhoods, and the way children in both cities were encouraged to exchange letters, posters, photographs and videos. Dagenais *et al.* argue that documenting the imagined communities of neighbourhoods, as depicted and understood by children, can provide much information on the children's understanding of their community, an important consideration for language educators.

In another region of the world, Kendrick and Jones (2008) have drawn on the notion of imagined communities to analyse the drawings and photographs produced by primary and secondary schoolgirls in the Ugandan context. Their research, drawing on multimodal methodologies, sought to investigate the girls' perceptions of participation in local literacy practices, and to promote dialogue on literacy, gender and development. What they found was that the girls' visual images provided insight into their imagined

communities, which were associated with command of English and access to education. As they conclude:

Providing opportunities for girls to explore and consider their worlds through alternative modes of communication and representation has immense potential as a pedagogical approach to cultivate dialogue about the nature of gender inequities, and serve as a catalyst for the positing of imagined communities where those inequities might not exist. (Kendrick & Jones, 2008: 397)

### Identity categories and educational change

While much research on language and 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 impact the language learning process. 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 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, as Hue learns the multiple ways in which she is racialized in her school, and Khatra learns how her body signifies certain ethnic, racial and national identities. Their experiences support 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 Cameron (2006), Pavlenko (2004), Sunderland (2004) and Higgins (this volume) is particularly insightful with regard to intersections of gender and language. 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. A number

of these issues are taken up in Norton and Pavlenko (2004), who document research from diverse regions of the world that addresses the relationship between gender and language learning with respect to the dominance of the English language internationally.

In a similar spirit, King (2008), Moffatt and Norton (2008) and Nelson (2009) explore the extent to which sexual orientation might be an important identity category in the 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. Nelson contrasts a pedagogy of inquiry, which asks how linguistic and cultural practices naturalize certain sexual identities, most notably heterosexuality, with a pedagogy of inclusion which aims to introduce images as well as experiences of gays and lesbians into curriculum materials. Nelson's approach can fruitfully be applied to other issues of marginalization, helping learners to question normative practices in the target culture into which they have entered.

Interest in identity categories and language learning is gaining momentum. Special issues of the *TESOL Quarterly* on 'Gender and Language Education' (Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004) and 'Race and TESOL' (Kubota & Lin, 2006) include insightful debates on gender, race and language learning, while recent monographs by May (2008), Heller (2007) and Rampton (2006) ensure that issues of language, ethnicity and class remain on the radar in the field.

### Identity and literacy

Researchers of language and 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*, whether these be written, oral or multimodal. There is growing recognition that when a learner engages in textual practices, both the comprehension and construction of the text is mediated by the learner's investment in the activity and the learner's identity. Scholars such as Barton (2007), Blommaert (2008), Hornberger (2003), Kress *et al.* (2004), Martin-Jones and Jones (2000), Prinsloo and Baynham (2008) and Street and Hornberger (2008) have influenced much research on the relationship between literacy and learner identity.

Much emerging research on literacy and learner identity also addresses the impact of literacy practices on relationships beyond the classroom (Kramsch & Thorne, 2002; Lam, 2000; Snyder & Prinsloo, 2007; Warriner, 2007; Warschauer, 2003). Lam (2000) for example who studied the internet correspondence of a Chinese immigrant teenager in the United States who entered into transnational communication with a group of peers, demonstrates how this experience in what she calls 'textual identity' related to

the student's developing identity in the use of English. In another context, White (2007) has investigated innovation in distance language teaching in the Australian context, arguing that attention to issues of identity can enhance our understanding of educational innovation. 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.

### Identity and resistance

The relationship between language, identity and resistance has become a compelling and fruitful area of research in language education. While larger structural constraints and classroom practices might position learners in undesirable ways, learners, with human agency, can resist these positions in innovative and unexpected ways, as the following three examples illustrate. In exploring what he calls the subversive identities of language learners, Canagarajah (2004a) addresses the intriguing question of how language learners can maintain membership of their vernacular communities and cultures while still learning a second language or dialect. He draws on his research with two very different groups, one in the United States and the other in Sri Lanka, to argue that language learners are sometimes ambivalent about the learning of a second language or dialect, and that they may resort to clandestine literacy practices to create 'pedagogical safe houses' in the language classroom. In both contexts, the clandestine literacy activities of the students are seen to be forms of resistance to unfavourable identities imposed on the learners. At the same time, however, these safe houses serve as sites of identity construction, allowing students to negotiate the often contradictory tensions they encounter as members of diverse communities.

A second example of resistance is found in the work of McKinney and van Pletzen (2004). Working with relatively privileged students at a historically white and Afrikaans university in South Africa, McKinney and van Pletzen introduced critical reading into their first year English studies course using two curriculum units on South African literature. In exploring representations of the apartheid past, McKinney and van Pletzen encountered significant resistance from students to the ways in which they felt uncomfortably positioned by the curriculum materials on offer. McKinney and van Pletzen attempted to create discursive spaces in which both they and the students could explore the many private and political processes through which identities are constructed. In doing so, they

re-conceptualized students' resistance more productively as a meaning-making activity that offers powerful teaching moments.

The third example of identity and resistance is drawn from Talmy (2008), who investigated the multiple ways in which English language learners in a Hawai'i high school resisted being positioned as an 'ESL student' in their dedicated-ESL classes. While the school-sanctioned ESL student was expected to bring required materials to class, read assigned fiction, do bookwork, meet assigned dates, follow instructions and work for the full class session, resistant ESL students engaged in a wide variety of oppositional activities, including leaving materials 'at home', talking with friends and playing cards. From a pedagogical point of view, two of Talmy's observations are particularly significant. The first observation is that the ESL teachers began to change their practices in response to the resistance of their students, necessitating a shift in teacher identity; the second is that the students' actions paradoxically turned the ESL program into precisely what the students disliked most, 'an easy, academically inconsequential program that did little to meet their L2 learning or educational needs' (Talmy, 2008: 639).

### Future directions

With regard to future directions in the field of language and identity, one area that is receiving increasing attention is that of the language teacher and the language teacher educator (see Clarke, 2008; Hawkins, 2004; Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Morgan, 2004; Pennycook, 2004; Varghese *et al.*, 2005). In a compelling narrative, Pennycook (2004) reflects on his experience of observing a teacher in a TESOL practicum in Sydney, Australia. His experience reminds us that a great deal of language teaching does not take place in well-funded institutes of education, but in community programs, places of worship and immigrant centres, where funds are limited and time at a premium. Of central interest in his narrative is a consideration of the way in which teacher educators can intervene in the process of practicum observation to bring about educational and social change. To this end, Pennycook argues that 'critical moments' in the practicum can be used to raise larger questions of power and authority in the wider society, and provide an opportunity for critical discussion and reflection.

A second area that has much potential for future research on language and identity concerns growing interest in globalization and language learning (see e.g. Block & Cameron, 2002; García *et al.*, 2006; Lin & Martin, 2005; Morgan & Ramanathan, 2005; Pennycook, 2007; Rassool, 2007). Morgan and Ramanathan (2005) argue persuasively that the field of language education needs to consider ways in which English language teaching can be decolonized, proposing that there is a need to decentre the

authority that Western interests have in the language teaching industry. In particular, we need to find ways to restore agency to professionals in periphery communities (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Mutonyi & Norton, 2007; Tembe & Norton, 2008) and to give due recognition to local vernacular modes of learning and teaching (Canagarajah, 2004b). In this regard, special issues of a number of journals are significant, including: special issues of the *TESOL Quarterly* on Language in Development (Markee, 2002) and Language Policies and TESOL (Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007); and two recent issues of the *AILA Review of the International Association of Applied Linguistics* on 'Africa and Applied Linguistics' (Makoni & Meinhof, 2003) and 'World Applied Linguistics' (Gass & Makoni, 2004).

### Language, Identity and Classroom Pedagogies

I now turn to the relevance of theories of language and identity for classroom teaching. As Lee's (2008) research in a Canadian post-secondary institution suggests, while many language teachers strive to enhance the range of possibilities available to their students, there is often a disjuncture between the pedagogy as it is conceptualized by the teacher and the practices adopted in the classroom. Despite the best intentions, classroom practices can recreate subordinate student identities, thereby limiting students' access not only to language learning opportunities, but to other more powerful identities.

Lee's findings are consistent with those of Ramanathan (2005) who, in a very different part of the world, found that teachers' language practices can reinforce existing inequities among diverse learners of English. In the Indian context, Ramanathan (2005) investigated how students who had been socialized into either Gujarati or English-medium schools through grades K-12 adjusted to English in English-medium tertiary level institutions. What she found was that students who received English medium instruction through high school were better prepared to succeed in English-medium colleges than those schooled in the vernacular. The English curriculum for the students educated in the English medium tended to focus on the creative analysis of English literature, while the English curriculum for the vernacular students, who were mostly lower-caste Dalit students, made extensive use of grammar and translation. What Ramanathan's research suggests is that pedagogical language practices that are ritualized and allow for little meaning-making on the part of students may limit the learner's language learning progress and access to more powerful identities.

In a recent chapter, Carolyn McKinney and I have argued that responding to diversity in the language classroom requires an imaginative assessment of what is possible as well as a critical assessment of what is desirable (McKinney & Norton, 2008). Clearly, the assessment of what is 'possible'

requires ongoing interaction between teachers, administrators and policy-makers, with reference to larger material conditions that can serve to constrain or enable the range of identity positions available to students (see Luke, 2004). The theories of language and identity that I have discussed thus far, I suggest, offer important ways of connecting the possible and the desirable. If we agree that diverse identity positions offer learners a range of positions from which to speak, listen, read or write, the challenge for language educators is to explore which identity positions offer the greatest opportunity for social engagement and interaction. Conversely, if there are identity positions that silence students, then teachers need to investigate and address these marginalizing practices.

A number of recent research projects, drawn from diverse regions of the world, are illustrative of the ways in which particular pedagogical practices in language classrooms can offer students opportunities to draw on their multiple identities, promote their investment in learning, and offer possibilities for re-imagining both the present and the future. The projects I examine took place in Mexico, South Africa, Uganda, Canada and the United Kingdom (see also the multiple projects addressed in Norton & Toohey, 2004).

In Mexico, Clemente and Higgins (2008) drew on their longitudinal study of pre-service English teachers in Oaxaca to raise questions about the dominant role that English plays in the globalized political economy, and to illustrate the ways in which the non-native English teachers in their study sought to appropriate and 'perform' English without sacrificing local identities. Defining their research site as a 'contact zone', they describe the way the student teachers confronted the demands of English through various forms of language play in both English and Spanish, making the case that the student teacher groups were safe havens in which participants could play with both languages. Such performances allowed them to explore various identity positions, as a counter-discourse to dominant discourses on the native English teacher. As one student teacher said,

I have a Mexican accent. English is mine from the very moment I put it into practice and I am able to establish communication. But when I say that the English language is mine, I do not mean to say that I want to take the culture that comes with it. (Clement & Higgins, 2008: 123)

In South Africa, Stein (2008) explored the way in which English language classrooms in under-resourced township schools in South Africa became transformative sites in which textual, cultural and linguistic forms were re-appropriated and 're-sourced', with a view to validating those practices that had been marginalized and undervalued by the apartheid system. This transformation took place as teachers provided opportunities for English language learners to make use of multimodal resources, including linguistic, bodily and sensory modes, in order to engage in

meaning-making. Stein's learners embraced the opportunities they were given to produce multimodal counter-texts that subverted the canon, and to draw on topics sometimes considered taboo.

In a similar spirit, one of the Ugandan projects that our research team at the University of British Columbia has undertaken is to investigate the extent to which multimodal pedagogies that include drawing, photography and drama can be incorporated more systematically into the English curriculum in Uganda (Kendrick *et al.*, 2006; Kendrick & Jones, 2008). Drawing on our research in two regions of the country, we argue that multimodal pedagogies offer teachers innovative ways of validating students' literacies, experiences and cultures, and are highly effective in supporting English language learning in the classroom. In the photography project for example the students' perception of English as being a somewhat restrictive and artificial medium of instruction diminished as English began to be used for communication, expression and ownership of meaning.

Canadian colleagues, most notably Margaret Early and Jim Cummins, have been working on another project that seeks to provide a range of identity options for learners in multilingual schools in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. Working with more than 50 teachers, four schoolboards, a teacher's union and non-government literacy organizations, this Multiliteracies Project ([www.multiliteracies.ca](http://www.multiliteracies.ca)) seeks to understand the literacy practices of students in and outside of school, to explore innovative classrooms in which teachers engage in multiliterate practices, and to investigate how educational systems influence the multiliteracy practices of schools. The project website provides a workspace for students, teachers and researchers to assemble and organize annotated galleries, construct demonstration classroom projects, and create case studies on what Cummins (2006) has called the 'identity texts' produced by these students.

In the United Kingdom, Wallace (2003) has worked with adult language learners on critical reading courses that address the socially embedded nature of the reading process, exploring text-focussed activities that address how meaning and power is encoded in texts. In doing so, she makes use of a range of popular texts, including newspaper articles, magazine articles, and advertisements. Wallace contrasts her approach with dominant English Foreign Language methodologies such as communicative language teaching and task-based learning, arguing that such approaches can be 'domesticating' for learners, teaching them only how to fit in with dominant cultures rather than to question and reshape powerful discourses.

Wallace's insights provide a useful segue into my concluding thoughts on the relationship between language and identity within the field of language education. In the classroom pedagogies described in this section, and in many transformative classrooms that have been discussed in the

literature, the language teachers' conceptions of 'language' and thus 'language teaching' are broad in scope. The teachers conceive of language not only as a linguistic system, but as a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated. There is recognition that if learners are not invested in the language practices of the classroom, learning outcomes are limited, and educational inequities perpetuated. Further, such teachers take great care to offer learners multiple identity positions from which to engage in the language practices of the classroom, the school and the community. In every region of the world, innovative language teachers are seeking to provide learners with diverse opportunities to take ownership over meaning-making, and to re-imagine an expanded range of identities for the future. In essence, these remarkable teachers are seeking to make the desirable possible.

### Suggestions for further reading

Block, D. (2007) *Second Language Identities*. London/New York: Continuum

In this monograph, David Block insightfully traces research interest in second language identities from the 1960s to the present. He draws on a wide range of social theory, and brings a fresh analysis to seminal studies of adult migrants, foreign language learners, and study-abroad students.

Norton, B. (2000) *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity, and Educational Change*. Harlow, England: Longman/Pearson.

Drawing on a longitudinal study of immigrant women in Canada, Bonny Norton draws on poststructuralist theory to argue for a conception of learner identity as multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change. She also develops the construct of 'investment' to better understand the relationship of language learners to the target language.

Norton, B. & Toohey, K. (eds) (2004) *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Identity is a central theme in this collection of articles by leading researchers in language education. Diverse authors address a wide range of contemporary topics on language learning and teaching, including critical multiculturalism, gender, multimodal pedagogies, popular culture and action research.

Pavlenko, A. and Blackledge, A. (eds) (2003) *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

The authors in this collection provide insight into the ways in which identities are negotiated in diverse multilingual settings. They analyse the discourses of education, autobiography, politics and youth culture, demonstrating the ways in which languages may be sites of resistance, empowerment or discrimination.

Toohey, K. (2000) *Learning English at School: Identity, Social Relations and Classroom Practice*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Drawing on a longitudinal ethnography of young English language learners, Kelleen Toohey investigates the ways in which classroom practices are implicated in the range of identity options available to language learners. She draws on socio-cultural and poststructural theory to better understand the classroom community as a site of identity negotiation.

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