

## 5 Identity and Poststructuralist Theory in SLA

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### Introduction

As communities across the globe confront the challenges and possibilities of multilingualism, and look to research and theory to inform language learning and teaching, there has been an increasing interest in identity, particularly with reference to poststructuralist theory. In this chapter, I present the argument that poststructuralist theory has brought great insight into debates on identity and language learning, both inside and outside the classroom. My arguments will be made with the help of three vignettes, drawn from my published research in the international community. I will begin with a vignette of a language learner outside the classroom and draw on this vignette to outline central arguments with respect to the relevance of identity and poststructuralist theory in second language acquisition (SLA). I will then turn to the other two vignettes to illustrate how poststructuralist theory can address issues of identity in classroom practice.

The first vignette takes place in a Canadian restaurant in which Martina, a mature English language learner from the former Czechoslovakia, was struggling for recognition and respect from her Canadian co-workers, who were all younger than she was.

Martina had immigrated to Canada for a better life for her three children. Partly because she was not a proficient speaker of English, she struggled

#### Vignette #1: Martina in the workplace

In restaurant was working a lot of children but the children always thought that I am – I don't know – maybe some broom or something. They always said 'Go and clean the living room', and I was washing the dishes and they didn't do nothing. They talked to each other and they

thought that I had to do everything. And I said 'No.' The girl is only 12 years old. She is younger than my son. I said 'No, you are doing nothing. You can go and clean the tables or something'.

(Interview with Martina, Norton, 2000: 99)

to find work in her profession as a quantity surveyor, and was employed in a fast food restaurant in the greater Toronto area. Her co-workers, as well as the manager's children (who frequently visited the restaurant), were all born in Canada, and spoke English fluently. Martina communicates in this extract that engaging in social interaction with her co-workers was a struggle, primarily because she was positioned as a dehumanized and inanimate 'broom'. To resist these marginalizing practices, Martina reframed her relationship with her co-workers as a domestic one rather than a professional one, and from the identity position 'mother', rather than 'immigrant', or 'broom' she claimed the right to speak.

While this data extract has been discussed more fully in other publications (Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995) the vignette is a sobering reminder of the powerful relationship between language and identity, which is of central concern to many scholars in the field of language education and SLA. Indeed, over the past 15 years, there has been an explosion of interest in identity and language learning, and 'identity' now features in most encyclopaedias and handbooks of language learning and teaching (McKinney & Norton, 2008; Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Norton, 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Ricento, 2005). In the broader field of applied linguistics, interest in identity has also gained considerable momentum. There is work, for example, on identity and pragmatics (Lo & Reyes, 2004; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009), identity and sociolinguistics (Edwards, 2009; Joseph, 2004; Omoniyi & White, 2007), identity and discourse (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Wodak *et al.*, 2009; Young, 2009), and identity and foreign language learning (see, e.g. Kanno, 2003, 2008; Kinginger, 2004; Kramsch, 2009; Pavlenko, 2003).

This chapter will focus on the work I have done with respect to identity and poststructuralist theory in SLA (Norton, 1997, 2000, 2001; Norton & Morgan, *in press*; Norton Peirce, 1995). In reviews of the literature, many scholars have found this work helpful in reframing debates on identity (see Block, 2007a, 2007b; De Costa, 2010; Menard-Warwick, 2005; Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Ricento, 2005; Swain & Deters, 2007; Zuengler & Miller, 2006) and, as Block (2007a: 864) notes, a poststructuralist approach to identity 'has become the approach of choice among those who seek to explore links between identity and second language (L2) learning'. Poststructuralist theory has led me to define identity as multiple, changing, and a site of struggle, frequently negotiated in the context of inequitable relations of power. Identity signals the way a person understands her or his relationship to the world, how

that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future. It is the importance of the future that is central to the lives of many language learners, and is integral to an understanding of the sociological construct of investment that I have developed as a complement to the psychological construct of motivation in SLA.

## Central Arguments for Identity and Poststructuralist Theory in SLA

In 1998, the sociolinguist, Susan Gass, made the important argument that the theoretical relevance of identity to second language learning needed to be established. The points below summarize the claims made by identity and language learning researchers, with illustrative reference to Martina's vignette above.

- (i) Contemporary theories of identity offer ways to see the individual language learner situated in a larger social world. While some previous SLA research defined learners in binary terms (such as motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited), identity theorists see these affective descriptors as constructed in frequently inequitable relations of power, as variable over time and space, and sometimes co-existing in contradictory ways within a single individual. As illustrated in the data from Martina, identity is theorized as multiple, changing, and a site of struggle between her various identities of worker, immigrant, broom, and mother.
- (ii) Identity theorists highlight the diverse positions from which language learners are able to participate in social life, and demonstrate how learners can, and sometimes cannot, appropriate more desirable identities with respect to the target language community. As Martina found, while some identity positions may limit and constrain opportunities for learners to listen, speak, read, or write (particularly under conditions of marginalization), other identity positions (such as 'mother') may offer enhanced sets of possibilities for social interaction and human agency, i.e. the possibility to take action in social settings.
- (iii) Language learning theory and research needs to address how power in the social world affects learners' access to the target language community, and thus, to opportunities to practise listening, speaking, reading, and writing, widely acknowledged as central to the SLA process. Identity theorists are therefore concerned about the ways in which power is distributed in both formal and informal sites of language learning, as it was for Martina, and how it affects learners' opportunities to negotiate relationships with target language speakers.

- (iv) Identity and the social/cultural practices we engage in (e.g. working, sharing meals, exercising, travelling) are inextricably linked to resources that are available. At the same time, these practices also serve to construct our identities. The variable practices and resources of specific settings, and an individual's access to them (as Martina found), relate powerfully to the ways in which identities of individuals are constructed. Martina was sent away to 'clean the living room'; she had to 'do everything'. Examination of practices, resources, and identities in relation to language learning offers promise for improving and enhancing learning contexts.
- (v) Second language learning is not entirely determined by social conditions and contexts, partly because these conditions and contexts, themselves, are always in a process of change. In addition, language learners who struggle to speak from one identity position, as Martina did, may be able to reframe their relationship with their interlocutors, thereby changing their access to the practices and resources available within the context, and claim alternative identities from which to speak, listen, read, or write. If learners are successful in their bids for more powerful identities, their language acquisition may be enhanced.
- (vi) The sociological construct of investment, explained below, complements the psychological construct of motivation in SLA. In past research (Norton, 2000; Norton, in press; Norton Peirce, 1995) I have been concerned that most psychological theories of language learner motivation did not do justice to the complex identities of language learners, and the often inequitable relations of power they negotiate in different sites. The construct of investment seeks to make a meaningful connection between a learner's desire and commitment to learn a language, and the language practices of the classroom or community. Although Martina was a highly motivated language learner, she was not invested in the language practices of her workplace, where she experienced discriminatory practices. Such theorizing has helped to shift contemporary debates on motivation in the field of SLA (see Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Ushioda, Chapter 9, this volume).
- (vii) The theoretical constructs, imagined communities, and imagined identities, contribute usefully to understanding SLA, because a learner's concerns for the future (or the future of the learner's children) are integral to language learner identity (see Ryan & Irie, Chapter 8, this volume). For many learners, the target language community is not only 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. As I have argued in previous research, an imagined community assumes an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the target language can be understood within this context.

## Poststructuralist Theories of Language, Subjectivity, and Positioning

Not only poststructuralist theories of language, but also of subjectivity and positioning, inform recent work on identity and language learning. These three areas will be discussed in greater detail below.

### Poststructuralist theories of language

Poststructuralist theories of language have become increasingly attractive to researchers investigating identity and language learning (Norton & Morgan, 2013). Structuralist theories of language, often cited as originating with the work of the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1966), emphasized the study of the linguistic knowledge (competence) that allowed idealized speakers/hearers to use and understand the language's stable patterns and structures. From this perspective, actual instances of language usage (performance), which could be affected by memory lapses, fatigue, slips, errors, and so on, were not seen as revealing of idealized patterns, and thus were of little interest in the scientific study of language. However, poststructuralist theories of language, proposed by many, but particularly by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986), saw language 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, language had no independent existence outside of its use, and that usage was social. He used the metaphor of speech communication being a 'chain', an ongoing conversation that new speakers (e.g. children or newcomers to speech communities) strive to join. While structural theories might see language learning as a gradual individual process of internalizing a set of rules, structures, and vocabulary of a standard language, Bakhtin saw language learning as a process of struggling to use language to participate in specific speech communities. Using language meant using a tool others had used before, and Bakhtin saw speakers as constrained by those past usages. However, he also saw speakers as able to use language to express their own meanings.

The work of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, directly addresses the poststructuralist study of the politics of language (see Albright & Luke, 2008; Bourdieu, 1977, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). While poststructuralists are not the only theorists interested in language and power, Bourdieu explicitly drew attention to the importance of power in structuring discourse, with interlocutors seldom sharing equal speaking 'rights'. For Bourdieu, 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' speakers were distinguished by their differential 'rights to speech' or their 'power to impose reception' (Bourdieu,

1977: 648). In other words, a group of workers might listen more carefully to a talk given by the senior director of a company, than they would to a talk given by a junior member of the human resources department. For Bourdieu, using language was a social and political practice in which an utterance's value and meaning was determined in part by the value ascribed to the person who speaks. Recognizing that the value ascribed to a person or group can vary depending on circumstances or contexts (in Bourdieu's terms, 'fields'), he saw linguistic discourse as 'a symbolic asset which can receive different values depending on the market on which it is offered' (Bourdieu, 1977: 651). He further noted that dominant usage is associated with the dominant class. Heller (2008: 50) explicitly paralleled access to language with access to other resources. These might include friendship networks, educational activities, work opportunities, and so forth. From this perspective, the ascribed identities of both individuals and groups affect access to and opportunities for language use and learning.

### Poststructuralist theories of subjectivity

Christine Weedon (1987/1997), one of the most well-known scholars working in the feminist poststructuralist tradition, argued that it is through language that the individual constructs her 'subjectivity', which she saw as 'the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world' (Weedon, 1997: 28). Her use of the term subjectivity reminds us that an individual can be simultaneously the subject of a set of relationships (e.g. in a position of power) or subject to a set of relationships (e.g. in a position of reduced power). In poststructuralist theory, subjectivity and language are seen as mutually constitutive, and are thus centrally important in how a language learner negotiates a sense of self within and across a range of sites at different points in time. It is through language that a learner gains access to, or is denied access to, powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak.

Weedon used the terms subject and subjectivity to signal a break with dominant Western humanist views of the individual. While Western humanist philosophy stressed the essential, unique, fixed, and coherent *core* of an individual, Weedon's view, like that of other poststructuralists, was that the individual (i.e. the subject) was diverse, contradictory, dynamic, and changing over historical time and social space. Like Foucault (1980), Weedon argued that subjectivity is discursively constructed, and is always socially and historically embedded. Holland and Lave (2001) discuss the apparent paradox of identity being experienced as unitary and durable, while being, at the same time, variable and situated in dynamic practice. Like many other poststructuralist theorists, they emphasized that 'both the continuity and the transformation of social life are ongoing, uncertain projects' (Holland & Lave,

2001: 4) and that individuals maintain 'histories in their persons'. These theories of identity are central in my early work, and have been taken up by many identity theorists, including Kramsch (2009) whose compelling book, *The Multilingual Subject*, focuses on the subjectivity of the foreign language learner.

Language educators have found poststructural observations about subjectivity helpful in theorizing how education can lead to individual and social change. A conceptualization of subjectivity as multiple, non-unitary, and dynamic leaves room for the view that individuals need not be locked forever in particular positions. Rather, from this perspective, although some contexts and practices may limit or constrain opportunities for learners to listen, speak, read, or write, other contexts and practices may offer enhanced sets of possibilities for social interaction and human agency. Thus, pedagogical practices have the potential to be transformative in offering language learners more powerful positions than those they may occupy either inside or outside the classroom. For example, teaching students to use cameras and adopt the identity 'photographer' might offer learners enhanced possibilities for engaging with members of their community from a position of strength (Kendrick & Jones, 2008).

Postcolonial theorists, such as Stuart Hall (1992, 1997) and Homi Bhabha (1994), used poststructuralist identity theory to analyse how categories such as race and gender have been essentialized and understood in simplistic ways. In theorizing cultural identity, Hall focused on identity as changing and in process, 'becoming', and stresses that identity is 'not an essence, but a positioning' (Hall, 1997: 226) in particular historical and cultural environments. This means of theorizing difference has not been entirely satisfactory to those who would assert that their identities are homogenous and unitary, foregrounding a particular aspect of their experience such as gender, race or religious affiliation. Current worldwide expressions of nationalism and religious fundamentalism testify to this. Such unitary assertions of identity are often explained as strategic essentialism in service of political goals (see Spivak in Fuss, 1989; Yon, 1999). The terms identity politics or the politics of difference reference this particular coalescence of identity and power relations.

### Poststructuralist theories of positioning

Bakhtin (1981) was particularly interested in how position or status was signalled in language in works of fiction, and in conversation in general. Many identity and language learning researchers and theorists also stress the importance of considering how contexts shape positioning among particular interlocutors. While positioning has been discussed by many poststructuralist theorists (Foucault, 1980; Hall, 1997; Henriques *et al.*, 1984; Weedon, 1987/1997), it was Davies and Harré (1990: 7) who explicitly used position as 'the central organising concept for analysing how it is that people do being

a person'. They and other poststructuralist theorists have reminded us that identities are contingent, shifting, and context-dependent, and that while identities or positions are often given by social structures or ascribed by others, they can also be negotiated by agents who wish to position themselves. As Davies and Harré (1990: 7) put it, 'discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time are a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions'.

Recognition of the apparent paradox of positioning, reflecting the socially given and the individually struggled for, has been important in many studies of language learning. Menard-Warwick (2007), for example, identified particular positioning speech acts of both a vocational English language class teacher and her Latina students, such that learners were enabled or constrained to claim voice in the classroom. Noting that while vocational teachers often aim at empowering their students, Menard-Warwick observed that customary classroom materials and activities, as well as powerful societal discourses, often constrain students' possibilities for claiming desirable identities. She pointed out that teachers should be alert to how students position themselves in classroom discourse and to approach language instruction from a critical perspective to enable learners to name, and perhaps struggle against, some of the disempowering tendencies of the linguistic practices of their new cultures.

## Poststructuralist Theory, SLA, and Classroom Teaching

Poststructuralist theories of identity help us make sense of debates on what it means to be a 'good teacher' or a 'good learner' in classroom settings. By way of illustration, I now turn to two vignettes from classroom practice (vignette #2 and 3), in South Africa and Canada, respectively, to demonstrate how poststructuralist theory has enabled me to better understand the findings of my research and their implications for pedagogy (Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce & Stein, 1995). While each of these vignettes took place at different times and in different places, what they have in common are struggles over language, identity, and power—themes of central interest to poststructuralist theory, with direct relevance to language learning and teaching (Norton & Morgan, 2013).

### Vignette #2: Identity and the construction of textual meaning

This vignette, reported in the *Harvard Educational Review* (Norton Peirce & Stein, 1995), describes an incident in which African English language learners in apartheid South Africa debated the meaning of a reading



text that was being piloted for use in a high-stakes English admission test developed by the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg. The passage drew on a newspaper article about monkeys that were shot by police after having taken fruit from the trees of homeowners in the coastal city of Durban. After completing the test without incident, the students had the opportunity to discuss their response to the passage. Pippa Stein, a professor from Wits, of European descent, who piloted the test, concluded her assessment of the discussion as follows:

The atmosphere in the classroom became more and more charged as the students became increasingly interested in debating the moral issues raised in this text: Who owns the land? Why should the monkeys go hungry? Which parties have the right to the fruit? Why not seek nonviolent solutions to the problem? Most of the students entering the discussion read the monkeys passage as an example of racist discourse and appeared to identify with the plight of the dispossessed monkeys . . . My assumptions about the meanings of a text were seriously challenged. Where does the meaning of a text lie? Is this text about monkeys or is it about the dispossessed? What discursive histories did each individual student bring to bear on that text in that particular place at that particular moment?

This classroom vignette raises important issues about the relationship between language, learning, and identity in the South African context. It is intriguing to observe that when the students were taking the reading test administered by Stein, they assumed the identity 'test taker', and performed as required by the dictates of the testing genre. In other words, the students were silent; they worked alone; they observed time limits; and they made little attempt to challenge the test maker's interpretation of the text. The students were relatively powerless participants who desired entry into university, but had experienced a history of apartheid, and struggled linguistically and economically. Stein, in contrast, was in a position of power relative to the students: She was from a prestigious university, a native speaker of the dominant language English, and a member of a racially and economically powerful group. She was the 'knower'. In the context of this social occasion, the contrasting identities of students and teacher, and the differentials of power, the meaning of the reading passage was stable and unitary.

Significantly, however, during the subsequent discussion, when Stein sat on the desk, inviting comment and critique, the relationship between Stein and the students changed dramatically. Stein was no longer the controller of knowledge and power, and her identity shifted from 'knower' to 'learner'. The

students were no longer powerless test takers, but informed community members. While some students still took the position that the text was a simple story about monkeys that attacked people, many students positioned the text as a metaphor for inequitable social relations between blacks and whites in South Africa. Thus, while the same reading passage was read by the same students on the same day, the characteristics of the solitary test event, on the one hand, and the open communal discussion, on the other, led to contested readings of the monkeys passage. The incident demonstrates convincingly that the meaning of a text is not stable, but is re-negotiated in the context of different social occasions, shifting identities, and changing relations of power.

A structuralist conception of language, which conceives of meaning as stable and predictable, would not be able to account for the range of meanings associated with the monkeys passage in this classroom vignette. Poststructuralists such as Gunther Kress explore in persuasive terms how meanings become destabilized in the context of different social occasions. As he notes:

Language always happens as text; and as text, it inevitably occurs in a particular generic form. That generic form arises out of the action of social subjects in particular social situations. (Kress, 1993: 27)

In theorizing language as 'text' (either spoken or written) within the context of a particular 'genre', Kress highlights the fact that language is not a neutral medium of communication, but takes on different meanings when the relationship between speakers change, together with shifts in relations of power.

A social theory of genre will need to be closely attentive to the constantly shifting relations between the language in the spoken and in the written mode, and its relations to shifts in power. (Kress, 1993: 37)

Michel Foucault (1980), in particular, helps us to understand not only the relationship between knowledge and power, but also the subtle ways in which power operates in society. What he calls the 'capillaries of power' operate in subtle and often invisible ways. Foucault makes the case that power 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)

In the case of the monkeys passage, the newspaper reporter who wrote the story takes for granted that the rights of the powerless are secondary to the rights of the powerful, and uses language in such a way that obscures the manner in which the powerful abuse power. For example, the author positions the actions of the monkeys who were defending a trapped mother and baby as violent and extreme through words such as 'rampage', 'attacking', and 'hurled'. Later, the writer does not use the active voice to state that the police 'killed' the monkeys. Instead the writer uses the agentless passive voice to indicate that the monkeys were 'shot dead'. In the resistant reading of the text, during the class discussion, it is precisely such sets of meaning that were called into question.

The pedagogical implications of this vignette are profound. Not only does it raise questions about the construct of 'reading' that is assumed in many reading tests, but it challenges teachers to consider the conditions under which multiple readings of a text emerge, how learner identities are implicated in the construction of meaning, and how these insights might be harnessed to enhance language learning and teaching.

### Vignette #3: Identity and classroom resistance

The third vignette, drawn from Norton (2000: 143), describes the experience of a young adult immigrant woman in Toronto, Canada, who grew increasingly unhappy with her English language class, and eventually withdrew from the course. As the student, pseudonymously called Mai, noted:

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.

While the South African classroom vignette illustrates how poststructuralist theory can illuminate how unstable the construction of meaning is, the Canadian vignette illustrates how the poststructuralist construct of 'investment', which I have developed in my work (Norton, 2000; Norton, in press; Norton Peirce, 1995) may be helpful in understanding the relationship between motivation and resistance. The construct of investment signals the complex relationship between language learner identity and language learning commitment. If learners 'invest' in learning a language, they do so with the understanding that their social and economic gains will enhance the range of identities they can claim in a particular community. Unlike more

traditional notions of 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 frequently inequitable relations of power.

The construct of investment, which is beginning to have an impact on psychological constructs of language learning (see Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), provides for a wider range of questions for the committed language teacher. In addressing practices of resistance in the language classroom, for example, the teacher could ask not only, 'Are the students motivated to learn this language?' but also 'Are the students invested in the language practices of my classroom?'; a student can be highly motivated; but if the language practices of the classroom make a learner unhappy or dissatisfied, the learner may resist participation in classroom activities, or become increasingly disruptive. Resistance can arise from practices that may, for example, be racist, sexist, or elitist. Alternatively, there could be a discrepancy between a learner's expectations of 'good teaching' and the pedagogical practices of the teacher.

At the time that Mai was taking her English class in the greater Toronto area, I met with her on a regular basis. I knew her to be highly motivated and dedicated. She worked all day in a factory, and would take public transportation to her class in the cold and dark Ontario winter evenings. Despite the challenges she faced, Mai was eager to learn English, and made many sacrifices to increase opportunities to learn the language. Over time, however, Mai grew dissatisfied with her English class. Although highly motivated, she was not invested in the language practices of the classroom.

Although limited, the data discussed provide a number of clues as to why Mai was not invested in the language practices of her English classroom. Discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Norton, 2000), I wish to focus on one important issue: the teacher's construction of student identity. Canada has often prided itself on being a multicultural country, and in this spirit, it could be argued that the teacher was attempting to validate the multicultural composition of the class by asking students to discuss events in their home countries. At the same time, however, it could be argued that the teacher had a unitary, essentialized notion of identity, focusing only on the students' cultural identities, and ignoring other identities such as gender, race, age, and class. As poststructuralists would argue, identities are complex, multiple, and changing across both time and space. Such multiplicity was not acknowledged by this possibly well-meaning teacher.

Further, while Mai was struggling with daily challenges, and was anxious about the future, the teacher focused on students' past experiences in their home countries, which bore little relationship to the complex identities the students were negotiating in their new country, and the identities they were hoping to construct in the future. An emerging body of research on language learning, imagined identities, and imagined communities (e.g.

Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2001; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007, Ryan & Irie, Chapter 8, this volume) suggests that learners' hopes and desires for the future have a significant impact on their investment in language practices in classrooms and communities. In such a context, it would be very practical for Mai's teacher to ask: 'Do the language practices of my classroom address Mai's daily challenges and her anxiety about the future?'

Promoting student investment in the language practices of classrooms does not mean that the teacher abdicates power. The teacher has an important responsibility to ensure that the activities in which students engage are meaningful to students and pedagogically rigorous. At first glance, it might appear that Mai's teacher was engaging in collaborative power sharing with her students. However, at least for Mai, the classroom activities were neither meaningful nor pedagogically sound.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that poststructuralist theory can help teachers, administrators, and policy makers make more informed decisions about classroom practice. Whether administrators are debating the importance of accent in the language classroom, whether teachers are discussing the meaning of a text, or whether students are resisting essentializing pedagogical practices, it is clear that language is a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated. The research discussed in this chapter suggests that language teaching is most effective when the teacher recognizes the multiple identities of students in the class, and develops pedagogical practices that enhance students' investment in the language practices of the classroom. It follows that teachers, administrators, and policy makers need to better understand the language practices of classrooms, and how learners negotiate and sometimes resist the practices made available to them. Further, administrators and policy makers need to be supportive of language teachers as they seek to be more effective in linguistically diverse classrooms. A poststructuralist understanding of identity and SLA has great relevance to educators committed to educational and social change.

### Recommended reading

Kramsch, C. (2009) *The Multilingual Subject*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

With reference to a wide variety of data from young adult foreign language learners in institutional settings, Kramsch draws on poststructuralist theory to investigate the relationship between language learning and memory, emotion, and imagination. She makes a convincing case

that identity, language, and learning must be understood with reference to symbolic relations of power and possibility.

Norton, B. and Morgan, B. (in press) Poststructuralism. In C. Chapelle (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

This article examines three characteristics of poststructuralism relevant to applied linguistics and language teaching: the conception of identity as multiple and fragmented; the critique of knowledge as objective and universally applicable; and the indeterminacy of language and texts. These ideas are illustrated with reference to two critical incidents in Norton's published research.

Norton, B. and Toohey, K. (2011) Identity, language learning, and social change. *Language Teaching* 44 (4), 412–446.

This is a comprehensive, state-of-the-art review article on identity, language learning, and social change. Norton and Toohey draw on a wide range of contemporary research to argue that poststructuralist theories of language, identity, and power offer new and important perspectives on language learning and teaching.

### Note

- (1) This chapter draws extensively on Norton (2000) and articles published in *Issues in Applied Linguistics* (Norton, 2011) and *Language Teaching* (Norton & Toohey, 2011)

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## 6 Dual Identities Perceived by Bilinguals

Chantal Hemmi

### Introduction

Recent perspectives on the notion of self have tended to view learners' selves in relation to how they interact with and position themselves within society. Such a perspective is used in this chapter in exploring the identities of bilinguals. I will first discuss what identity is and examine the concept from a number of different viewpoints. I will then consider the relevance of these perspectives in understanding the identities of bilingual people. In the second part of the chapter, I present a part of a small-scale study that consists of six case studies of bilingual Japanese women, in which I examined how these women perceived their identities and their sense of belonging in society in Japan.

### Different Views of Identity

In this section, I will examine identity focusing on three different aspects: a postmodernist perspective on identity, a sociocultural perspective on identity, and, finally, regarding the role of power in shaping identities. I shall then discuss current research on the identity of bilinguals in SLA.

#### Postmodernist views on identity

In the last decade, the notion of identity has become important when considering issues related to education, especially in the globalised and diverse world that we live in. In attempting to define identity, it is helpful to draw on postmodernist views of reality in connection to the self. Postmodernism is largely a reaction to the assumed certainty of science to explain reality, and it requires us to 'abandon all established and preconceived values and theories' (Vidich & Lyman, 2000). In essence, it is based