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IDENTITY AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS ACROSS GLOBAL SITES

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Introduction

In a special issue of the *TESOL Quarterly* on Language and Identity that I guest–edited two decades ago (Norton 1997), I introduced the issue with an article that explored debates about whether English belongs to native speakers of English, to speakers of standard English, or to all of those who speak it, irrespective of linguistic and sociocultural identities. As I will argue in this chapter, debates on identity and English language learners are best understood in the context of social relations of power across both local and global sites, from the interaction between two people in a local community to the relationship between nation states. While such debates pertain to all languages, the discussions are particularly salient with respect to English, precisely because of the power English exerts as a global language, and the opportunities English can provide for those who speak, read, and write it, both on and offline. Of central interest to this chapter are the questions: How do English language learners across global sites navigate their identities in changing times? What impact can identity research have on theory and practice in English language education?

When addressing these questions two decades ago, cognitive and psychological theories dominated understandings of how languages are learnt, and theories of the good language learner interpreted individuals as having an essential, unique, fixed, and coherent core. In more traditional research, language learners were often defined in binary terms as motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited, with little reference to unequal relations of power between language learners and target language speakers, whether in ESL or EFL contexts. Drawing on the work of Christine Weedon (1987), I argued that identity is multiple, changing, and a site of struggle, shaped not only by material conditions and lived experiences but also by learners' imagined

futures (Kanno & Norton 2003). I have therefore defined identity as 'how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future' (Norton 2013: 45). While learners can speak from multiple positions, they can also be positioned in undesirable ways, which may limit opportunities for them to speak and be heard. For example, the identity categories of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation can shape interaction in different learning contexts, and the opportunities that are available for language learning.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the key influences on my theories of identity, and discuss the ways in which these ideas are being enriched in more recent research. I will also address the theory of investment that I developed as a sociological complement to the psychological construct of motivation. I will then illustrate the ways in which theories of identity and investment have helped to inform my research with a range of English language learners in Canada, Pakistan, Uganda, and Iran. Thereafter, drawing on the research of scholars in Hong Kong, Chile, the USA, and Mexico, I consider the implications of identity research for English language teaching across global sites.

Theories of identity and investment

My theories of identity and investment have arisen from the recognition that language is both a linguistic system and a social practice in which identities are forged, negotiated, and sometimes resisted. The conceptualization of language as both a linguistic system and a social practice is well articulated by the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1991), whose constructs of 'legitimate language' and the 'legitimate speaker' provide important insight into debates on identity and English language learning in the global community. What and who is considered 'legitimate' must be understood with respect to a given 'field' or social context that is often characterized by unequal struggles for meaning, access, and power. For example, when non-native English speaking teachers interact with students, their perceived 'legitimacy' as teachers is often related to the politics of place. A qualified non-native English teacher in Uganda, Pakistan, or Chile might be considered a highly valued 'legitimate' English teacher in each of these contexts. However, if the teacher were to move to country in which her or his variety of English was not valued, the teacher's legitimacy as both a speaker and teacher of English might be compromised, with a negative impact on the teacher's identity.

While such shifts of identity, for both teachers and students, might be associated with transitions from countries in which English is taught in what Kachru (1986) has called the 'expanding circle' or 'outer circle', to countries of the 'inner circle', there are cases in which transitions may take place in the reverse direction, i.e. from the inner to outer circle, with equally disruptive identity shifts. In my research with Margaret Early in Uganda, for example, we describe an email we received from a newly graduated Ugandan student, Doris Abiria, who had spent

a year with her husband and two young boys at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. After returning to Uganda, Ms Abiria wrote to us as follows (Early & Norton 2012: 195):

> The boys are getting better. In school the teachers complain they have gone with a style they are calling Western. The teachers say the boys have an accent that they do not hear while the boys say the teachers speak English up side down . . . Paul talks to the teacher in class any time he wishes when children are expected first to listen to the teacher and talk when the teacher asks them. Now we keep checking on them frequently in school and supporting them more at home. We hope that by next year they will be okay.

For young Paul, English as a linguistic system and a social practice was being renegotiated in the Ugandan context. If Paul was to be accorded the identity of a successful Ugandan student, he needed to adjust to the variety of English considered legitimate in his Ugandan school, and he needed to adopt the classroom practices expected of young learners in this context.

In order to capture this complex relationship of language learners to the target language, I have developed the sociological construct of 'investment' (Norton 2013; Norton Peirce 1995). Recognizing that language learning as a social practice is implicated in the operation of power, the construct of investment signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it. As I have noted, 'if learners "invest" in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic resources (language, education, friendship) and material resources (capital goods, real estate, money) which will increase the value of their cultural capital and social power' (Norton 2013: 6). As a complement to the psychological construct of motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda 2009), learners can be highly *motivated* to learn a language, but may not necessarily be *invested* in the language practices of a given classroom if it has practices that are, for example, racist or sexist. In addition to asking 'Are students motivated to learn a language?' researchers and teachers are therefore encouraged to ask the additional question, 'To what extent are students and teachers invested in the language and literacy practices of a given classroom and community?'

Because identity is often a site of struggle, investment is complex, contradictory, and frequently in a state of flux. To successfully negotiate the conditions of power that enable or constrain English language learning, learners need to develop a communicative competence that goes beyond understanding the rules of use of a target language. They also need to understand how these rules are socially and historically constructed to support the interests of dominant groups, and they need to learn what Kramsch (2009) has called symbolic competence. As a theoretical tool, investment helps scholars and teachers examine the conditions under which social interaction takes place, and the extent to which

social relations of power enable or constrain the range of identities available to language learners.

An expanded model of investment

In the 1990s, when I developed my early theories of identity and investment, large-scale migrations were transforming the economic and cultural landscapes of many urban centers. As people of different language backgrounds crossed borders to fill the labour needs of these countries, these urban centres became more multilingual and multicultural. Learning English in countries like the USA, Canada, and the UK was critical in enabling migrants to integrate into their new communities and find meaningful employment. The theory of investment became a means to examine how non-native English speakers were able to access and participate in contexts usually dominated by native English speakers (cf. McKay & Wong 1996). Research on investment has not been restricted to Anglophone countries, however, with special issues on the topic in both China and francophone Europe (see Arkoudis & Davison 2008; Bemporad in press; Norton & Gao 2008).

As technological innovations continue to transform the 21st century by offering a more flexible and multimodal engagement with the world, there are important implications for theories of language, identity, and investment (Darvin 2016). The spaces of socialization and information exchange continue to multiply, in both face-to-face and virtual worlds, locally and globally. As learners move fluidly across transnational borders, they are able to learn and use English in exciting new ways. How they negotiate these spaces has become increasingly relevant to language education research, even as the power operating in these spaces becomes less visible. It has therefore become necessary to examine how investment in this shifting communication landscape positions learners in new ways. In this new communicative order, how do English language learners claim the right to speak?

To provide a critical framework that responds to these questions, I have worked with Ron Darvin to develop an expanded model of investment that responds to the demands of a more mobile and fluid world, where language learners move in and out of online and offline contexts (Darvin & Norton 2015). This model recognizes how the skills, knowledge, and resources learners possess are valued differently in these multiple spaces. As learners are able to interact with others from different parts of the world that share specific interests, language learners are exposed to a range of belief systems and worldviews. To draw attention to how these ideologies operate on micro and macro levels, this model examines both communicative events and communicative practices. Institutional processes and patterns of control shape what become regular practices, but it is in specific instances or events that learners are able to question, challenge, and reposition themselves to claim the right to speak. Our model thus locates investment at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology, in order to provide a

window on the ways in which structures of power work, while finding oppor-tunities for language learners to exercise agency (see Figure 2.1).

In our model, Darvin and I refer to 'ideologies' as 'dominant ways of thinking that organize and stabilize societies while simultaneously determining modes of inclusion and exclusion' (Darvin & Norton 2015: 72). Neoliberal ideology, for instance, upholds the supremacy of market forces and the pursuit of profit (Duchêne & Heller 2012). Ideological assumptions guide the choices people make until these assumptions become 'common sense', and repeated actions become 'practice'. Hence, ideology is constructed and maintained through the imposition of power, hegemonic consent, and the repetition of practices. In the same way, language ideologies that privilege English, for instance, are repro-duced through language policies constructed by governments, the acquiescence to such policies, and the use of English in different discourses with limited forms of resistance.

As learners navigate across online and offline spaces, ideologies collude and compete, shaping learner identities and positioning them in different ways, which complements the view of identity as multiple and fluid. In our research in Uganda, for example, we have found contrasting ideologies related to Ugandan English, in which some teachers consider it 'broken English' and others consider it culturally
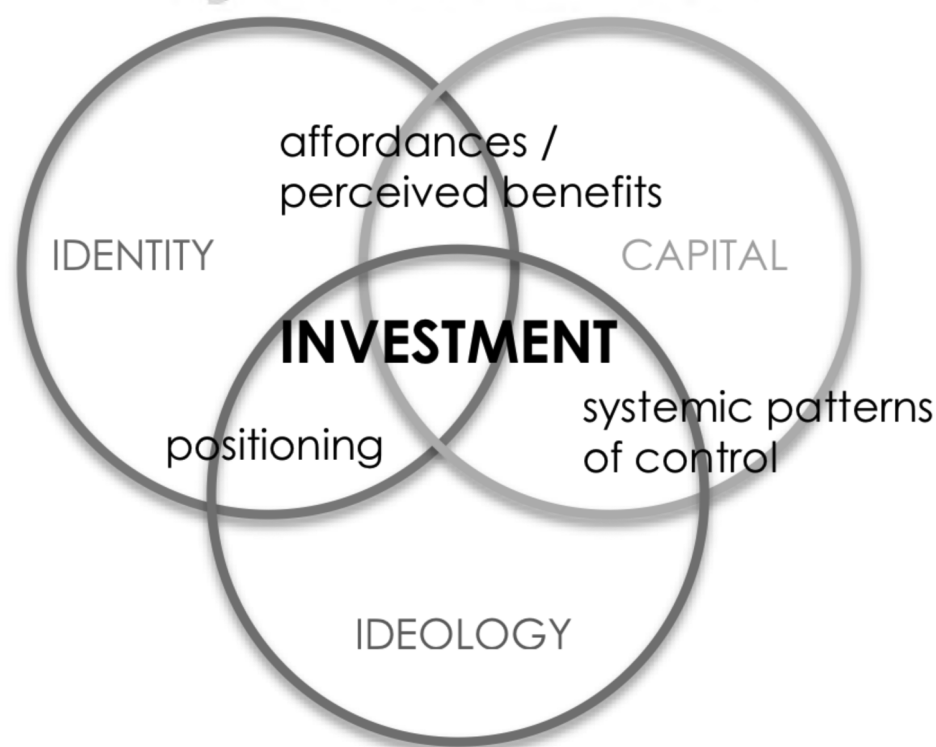

FIGURE 2.1   Darvin and Norton's 2015 model of investment

appropriate (Early & Norton 2014). Depending on which teacher instructs a given class, language learners may consider themselves either inadequate or highly competent, or vacillate from one teacher to the next. As such, the model recognizes that the value of a learner's economic, cultural, or social capital shifts as it travels across time and space. However, the value of capital is subject to but not completely constrained by the ideologies of different groups or fields. As Bourdieu (1991) notes, it is only when different forms of capital are perceived and recognized as legitimate that they become symbolic capital. It follows that the extent to which teachers are able to recognize the value of the linguistic or cultural capital learners bring to the classroom—their prior knowledge, home literacies, and mother tongues—will impact the extent to which learners will invest in the language and literacy practices of their classrooms.

English language learning across global sites

Drawing on my collaborative research on identity and English language learning across global sites, I will now illustrate the ways in which the 2015 model of identity and investment can help to inform theory and practice in English language education. Of central interest in the model is the interplay of identity, capital, and ideology, and the conditions under which language learners invest in the language and literacy practices of their classrooms. The model extends the question, 'To what extent are learners invested in the language and literacy practices of their classrooms and communities?' to a wider range of questions, as given below. These questions will then be discussed in greater detail with reference to my research in Canada, Pakistan, Uganda, and Iran, where children, youth, adolescents, and adults, respectively, navigated their relationship to the English language.

1. What do learners perceive as *benefits* of investment, and how can the capital they possess serve as *affordances for learning*?
2. What *systemic patterns of control* (policies, codes, institutions) make it difficult for learners to invest and acquire certain capital? How have prevailing *ideologies* structured learners' investments?
3. What are learners' imagined *identities*? How do these impact their investment in different language and literacy practices?

Young English language learners in Canada

In my research with Archie comic readers in Canada (Norton & Vanderheyden 2004), I collaborated with Karen Vanderheyden to examine the investments of young girls and boys in Archie comic books, written in English. The readers were approximately 9–11 years of age, and were both native speakers of English and migrant English language learners. We learnt from some of the migrants that it was comic book reading, more than any other activity, which had advanced their English skills, and that they engaged in translingual practices (Canagarajah

2013), in both the mother tongue and English, when discussing Archie comics with peers from their migrant community. Native speakers also provided important insight into the relationship between Canadians and migrant students. A boy we called Dylan, for example, defined newcomers to Canada as 'kids with English problems', and shared an intriguing reflection on why popular culture can improve relationships between native and non-native speakers of English:

> Karen: I want to find out one more thing. You've got ESL kids and a lot of them hang out with their own group of friends. Then you've got English-speaking friends and they hang out together. Is popular culture like Archie a good way of bringing kids together?
>
> Dylan: Well, yes because I know that one reason most of the kids with English problems and kids with good English don't relate is because the English kids seem to think that either they are stupid because they can't speak English which is totally a misconception or they're not like them and they're kind of pushed away by that.
>
> Karen: So that's what you think, that it's a good way 'cause they can talk to each other?
>
> Dylan: 'Cause it would give them something to realize that these kids like some things that they like, that they are kids who like things that other kids like, which is a way of bringing them together.

With reference to the question given above, 'How have prevailing *ideologies* structured learners' investments?', we have much to learn from young Dylan. First, although the current literature in the field (Blackledge & Creese 2009; May 2014) reflects the ideological position that English language learners should be positioned as valued 'multilingual' learners rather than as deficient 'ESL' learners, the comment from Dylan suggests that this ideological position has had little penetration in his school and community. Multilingual students are still, for Dylan and his peers, 'kids with English problems' who are sometimes considered 'stupid'. Clearly, this ideological position would have impacted how young migrants saw themselves in Dylan's school, and how they perceived their power relative to native speakers.

Second, with reference to the question, 'What do learners perceive as *benefits* of investment, and how can the capital they possess serve as *affordances for learning*?' the data is more promising. Implicit in Dylan's comments is that if the social capital of English language learners is to be enhanced (leading to more regular interaction with native speakers and enhanced language learning), there needs to be investment on the part of both native speakers and language learners. In other words, both the native speaker and the language learner need to appreciate that benefits can accrue from their mutual interaction. As Dylan said of migrant

students, 'they are kids who like things that other kids like, which is a way of bringing them together.' Dylan suggests that it is the common interest in Archie comics that can provide this dual investment, and that language learners' knowledge of Archie comics (their cultural capital) could serve as an affordance for learning and social engagement. This finding has significant implications for classroom practice and the important role that teachers can play in providing opportunities for young non-native English speakers to interact productively with young native speakers.

Pakistani youth as English language learners and tutors

In my research with Farah Kamal in Pakistan (Norton & Kamal 2003), we examined the investments in English of middle-school students aged approximately 12–14 who, while English language learners themselves, had been active in teaching English to young orphans from Afghanistan. In relation to the question on the benefits of investment, students discussed the perceived usefulness of English, both locally and internationally, in advancing the speaker's cultural, economic, and social capital. As Shahida said:

> The English language is an international language spoken all over the world and it is the language of science. Therefore to promote their education and awareness with modern technologies, it is important to teach [the Afghanis] English.

Pakistani students noted that knowledge of English would enable the Afghan children to communicate directly with people all over the world, without the help of translators, and explain to the wider community how much they had suffered. Fariha's comments have important implications for ideological positions taken up in the international community, in which English often serves as a lingua franca:

> English is the language spoken commonly. This language is understood throughout the world. If the Afghan children learn English, know English, speak English, they will be able to discuss their problems with the people of the world.

With regard to cultural capital associated with English, students such as Jamshed noted further that English serves as a common language not only across nations but within nations, which in turn has important implications for both an individual and a nation's imagined identity:

> We choose this as our next step because English is the international and global media language and most of the Afghan immigrants do not know English and have no particular language to communicate with local

[Pakistani] people. Therefore we choose this as the next step so they can communicate with local people.

With regard to the model of investment, what we learn from these young Pakistanis is that Pakistan youth, as tutors, were highly invested in teaching English to the Afghani children because they had learnt that language, and English in particular, is central to the exercise of power, both locally and internationally. Of interest in our study was some evidence of resistance to this ideological position.

Adolescent English language learners in Uganda

Turning now to my long trajectory of research in the African country of Uganda, one particularly interesting research participant was Henrietta, an 18-year-old female student who participated in a study on the use of digital resources for HIV/AIDS education and enhanced English language learning (Norton, Jones, & Ahimbisibwe 2011). Henrietta lived in a rural Ugandan village that had limited electricity and no running water, with a per capita income of less than $1 a day. In the study, we brought Henrietta and her peers to an Internet café in a neighbouring town to research HIV/AIDS. By working on this task, Henrietta and other students were able to develop the skills of navigating the web to find the information they needed, while at the same time improving their English skills. During data collection, Henrietta noted that her 'main interest in learning more about computers is to know how they use Internet, to communicate to people in the outside countries'. She stated her belief that knowledge gained through the Internet would enhance self-knowledge, as she would learn more about herself 'through sharing view with Canadian people'. Her fervent desire to 'join the group of knowledgeable people in the world' indexes a powerful imagined identity that helped structure her investment in the language and literacy practices of the digital literacy course.

Ron Darvin and I have noted, however, that Henrietta's opportunities to develop her literacy and to continually engage in transnational conversations in English may be highly restricted (Darvin & Norton 2015). Not only is Henrietta's own economic capital limited, but the technological infrastructure of her local community is poorly resourced. In this case, both her own social location and the economic position of rural Uganda constrain access to the technology necessary for Henrietta to master literacies relevant to the knowledge economy. It is for situations such as this that our model of investment incorporates what we have called 'systemic patterns of control'. While Henrietta may be driven by a strong desire to learn more about computers and to connect more regularly with other people, her social location makes it very difficult for her to enter these new spaces of socialization. Even though her desire to engage in transnational conversations can be seen as a way to increase her social capital, the perceived benefit may not be sustainable.

Because discourses of globalization construct Henrietta's own conceptions of what is valuable or not, she positions herself as inadequate, as one who is not sufficiently 'knowledgeable'. Such data is illustrative of the relationship between identity and ideologies that privilege the global over the local, and in which the global North is seen as more knowledgeable than the global South. As Henrietta seeks to gain access to affordances of learning like devices and books, systemic patterns of control will also hinder this access. These include the limited allocation of technology budgets to local schools, and connectivity challenges in rural Uganda. Ideologies that privilege urban vs. rural, middle vs. lower class, or male vs. female will also further limit opportunities for Henrietta to achieve her imagined identity.

In terms of linguistic capital, although she speaks English, a common language of the Internet, Henrietta's access to valued forms of English is also restricted. Interestingly, what she finds particularly appealing about the Internet is that it gives her the opportunity to 'understand more about English language'. As she notes, 'I got communication. I have learnt the English language because the English in Internet has been very create and it has arranged properly.' How others will position her as a teenage girl from rural Uganda will shape the dynamics of their interaction, and the value of her linguistic capital may be uneven, as exemplified by Blommaert's data from his young Tanzanian friend, Victoria (Blommaert 2003).

Adolescent and adult English language learners in Iran

In a very different part of the world, Mehri Mohammadian and I recently conducted research on the appeal of English language institutes (ELIs) for Iranian adolescents and adults (Mohammadian & Norton in press), which provides further insight into identity and English language learning internationally. ELIs in Iran are fee-charging institutions of varying sizes, which seek to provide a more communicative language curriculum than that available in Iranian schools. School-aged language learners attend English classes at ELIs after school hours, usually from 6 to 8 p.m, and enjoy the flexibility of the ELI curricula. Our 2012 pilot study focused on interviews with administrators at five ELIs in Shiraz, Iran, most of whom would agree with the following comment from one of the administrators:

> The students directly, after finishing school, come here and they are so tired, but they come with interest because they like it! Because the system is totally different from the public schools. Here, we have more flexible techniques and ways of teaching.

We also found that the number of female students at ELIs is far greater than that of male students, suggesting that female students are particularly invested in the opportunities that ELIs provide. This finding is also consistent with research

around the globe that suggests the learning of English may be associated with the desire for greater gender equity (Kobayashi 2002). In the context of Iran, young women have limited mobility, and going to cinemas, restaurants, or coffee shops with friends is generally not an option approved by parents. For such families, English classes are a particularly desirable form of outdoor recreation and a place where young women can experience a different world.

We also learnt that Iranian students have diverse investments in learning English, including being able to find information from different sources on the Internet; continuing education abroad; getting scholarships; finding better jobs; travelling to foreign countries; or living abroad. Their participation in English classes at ELIs is not mandatory, but they are eager to learn English and 'they come with interest', as noted above. As for the adult language learners, we also found a range of investments in language learning. One administrator explained,

> People like to learn English because it's an international language and it means a password for them to gain status. If they want to be somebody, to go abroad, to have new opportunities, they have got to learn the English language.

Such comments provide further evidence of the relationship between investment, identity, and capital, and support the argument that the imagined identity of a learner, whether a child, youth, adolescent, or adult, is particularly salient to investment in English.

Pedagogical implications

It is evident from recent publications (Mahboob 2010; Moussu & Llurda 2008; Selvi 2014) that debates on English language learning have shifted dramatically to a focus on multilingualism and transnationalism (Canagarajah 2013), and that, in the applied linguistics literature, there is increasing interest in English as a lingua franca, and its implications for identity (Jenkins 2007). Such research suggests that there is a need for innovative approaches to classroom pedagogy, teacher education, and language policy. How should the English teacher, whether native or non-native, develop classroom practices that promote investment by language learners, and enhance the range of identities available to them? In posing these questions, teachers of English are encouraged to design learning activities that recognize the rich diversity of learners, and affirm the knowledge, languages, and identities that they bring to the classroom. Learners who may be marginalized by virtue of race, gender, ethnicity, or social class can be helped to reframe their relationship with others in order to appropriate more powerful identities from which to speak, read, and write English, both on and offline (Motha 2014).

The following examples, drawn from research with English language learners and teachers in Hong Kong, Chile, the USA, and Mexico, are illustrative of the

ways in which English teachers have developed classroom practices that enhance learner investment in the English language and expand the range of identities available to both learners and teachers. What these methods have in common is innovative pedagogies with respect to 'audience', which is indexical of findings of the Archie comic research, discussed earler.

Hafner (2014) (see also Hafner and Miller, Chapter 11) describes a compelling study in which university students incorporated digital literacy in their learning of scientific English, and provides convincing evidence that the students were highly invested in these pedagogical practices. Students were required to develop a project in which they conducted a simple scientific experiment and then reported their findings in two formats—one as a multimodal scientific documentary shared on YouTube for an audience of non-specialists, and the other as a written lab report for an audience of specialists. The students combined a range of modes to develop the appropriate identities with which to engage the non-specialist audiences, from that of scientist and investigative journalist to that of curious traveller. Hafner describes how each of these identities indexed different purposes, from educating the audience to entertaining it, and the students needed to harness diverse semiotic modes, including image and sound, to achieve desired effects.

With respect to experimenting with 'audience' in a very different context, the research of Menard-Warwick, Heredia–Herrera, & Palmer (2013) on teacher identity and online pedagogy in Chile and the USA illustrates the ways in which English teachers, both native and non-native, can navigate productive relationships to the English language. In an audience-oriented online Internet chat exchange between prospective teachers studying English in Chile and Californian graduate students who served as tutors, the researchers found that it was not the native language of the tutor that led to differences in online discussion, but rather a given tutor's particular orientation to cultural issues. One non-native tutor, Eugenia, for example, had a more global orientation to educational and political issues, while the native speaker tutor, Dionne, had a more local orientation. Particularly interesting was the finding that the Chilean language learners were no more apprehensive about accuracy when the audience was the native speaker rather than the non-native speaking tutor, suggesting that relatively equitable power relations can be established in online communities.

Drawing on research with three non-native English teachers in Oaxaca, Mexico, Sayer (2012) describes vividly the practices adopted by these teachers as they sought greater legitimacy in their classrooms and communities. Sayer, for example, described the activities of one teacher, Carlos, who made innovative use of role-play in the classroom and provided learners with the opportunity to experiment with a variety of English speaker identities and audiences in a 'Black Horse Restaurant' in the classroom. Although the students did not remember all the vocabulary and struggled with some grammatical expressions, Carlos was excited that the students 'really got into it' (p. 48) and sought to apply in practice what they had learnt theoretically in class. Sayer noted that the three teachers' engagements with the language did not simply comprise their competence with

respect to the linguistic forms of English, but also evoked what he called 'their whole biographical history with the language' (p. 79), such as the opportunities the teachers had had to travel outside Mexico. It is clear that the teachers' knowledge of English as both a linguistic system and a social practice was implicated in their perceived legitimacy as English teachers, and in their students' investments in the language practices of the English classroom.

Concluding comments

My research and that of colleagues internationally suggests that language learner investment is important for English language learning, and that it is useful to investigate investment with respect to the constructs of identity, capital, and ideology. Further, the range of research discussed, across a wide variety of global sites, supports the view that investment is enhanced when the pedagogical practices of the teacher increases the range of identities and audiences available to language learners, whether face-to-face, digital, or online. Such findings have important implications for research (De Costa & Norton 2016) as well as for classroom pedagogies that promote greater agency on the part of learners (see Wen, Chapter 7). Drawing on research discussed in this chapter, English teacher education programmes are encouraged to provide language teachers with greater opportunities to explore language as both a linguistic system and a social practice. Such programmes should encourage teachers to harness the social, cultural, and linguistic capital that language learners already possess, and to better understand their hopes for the future. As the ownership of English is increasingly associated with all who speak it in the global community, an examination of the identities and investments of English language learners provides much insight into the many faces of English internationally.

Acknowledgements

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