CHAPTER 4

Dialogues Around "Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning," by Bonny Norton Peirce (1995)

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ABSTRACT OF THE NORTON PEIRCE ARTICLE

The author argues that second language acquisition (SLA) theorists have struggled to conceptualize the relationship between the language learner and the social world because they have not developed a comprehensive theory of social identity which integrates the language learner and the language learning context. She also maintains that SLA theorists have not adequately addressed how relations of power affect interaction between language learners and target language speakers. Using data collected in Canada from January to December 1991 from diaries, questionnaires, individual and group interviews, and home visits, the author illustrates how and under what conditions the immigrant women in her study created, responded to, and sometimes resisted opportunities to speak English. Drawing on her data analysis as well as her reading in social theory, the author argues that current conceptions of *the individual* in SLA theory need to be reconceptualized, and she draws on the poststructuralist conception of social identity as multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change to explain the findings from her study. Further, she argues for a conception of *investment* rather than *motivation* to capture the complex relationship of language learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to speak it. The notion of investment conceives of the language learner, not as ahistorical and unidimensional, but as having a complex social history and multiple desires. The article includes a discussion of the implications of the study for classroom teaching and current theories of communicative competence.

JUDY SHARKEY RESPONDS: CHRISTMAS, 1998: "NOW DASH AWAY, DASH AWAY, DASH AWAY ALL!"

Ivan, a 15-year-old immigrant from the southeast Russian republic of Khabarovsk, is a sophomore in a U.S. public high school. He has been in the United States for 3 years. A handsome young man, with poise beyond his years, he does construction work with his father after school and on weekends. His passion for aeronautics is evidenced by his membership in the civil air patrol and the ease with which he talks about the capabilities and specifications of the latest Russian fighter jets. Ivan is enrolled in all mainstream classes at the high school, but frequently comes to the ESL room to get extra help with his assignments and hang out with his friends, bilingual students from Russia, Ukraine, Rwanda, and Indonesia.

December in the ESL room means a heavy dose of U.S. cultural literacy through a multitude of Christmas activities: making ornaments, decorating the classroom tree, and participating in the ESL students' Christmas production. This year, each student is given a 16-by-20-inch page from a coloring book version of the Clement Clarke Moore poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (O'Brien, 1990), popularly known as "'Twas the Night Before Christmas." Each student is given a picture to color and must memorize the line of verse that accompanies it. The final production will be a row of ESL students (ages 14–19) holding up their colored pages and saying their lines at the appropriate time.

Ivan is given a picture of Santa leading his reindeer and shouting "Now dash away, dash away, dash away all!" He sees this task as childish but he cannot explicitly say this to his teachers. Instead, he demonstrates his resistance by coloring the reindeer with hot pink heads, fluorescent yellow collars, and bright purple antlers, a Las Vegas nightclub interpretation of Santa's flight crew. Tom, the social studies ESL teacher, shakes his head upon seeing Ivan's work and says, "I don't know, Ivan. I think we'll have to redo that." Later, Susan, the head ESL teacher, tells me that Ivan is a nice guy but a poor student. She voices her concern over what she perceives as his refusal to improve his English. She interprets his reindeer artistry as another example of his negative attitude (field notes, December 18, 1998).

In this response, I attempt to show how my teaching and my thinking about language learning have evolved in the 7 years since I read "Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning" by Bonny Norton Peirce. I begin with my experience in Ivan's classroom but also share earlier attempts at understanding the notions of subjectivity/subject positions and investment.

During the 1998–1999 school year, I worked as a volunteer tutor in the ESL room at a U.S. public high school. I got to know students like Ivan over months of working with them, helping them with a variety of assignments, from writing essays for English class and completing college applications to finishing up science lab reports and checking grammar exercises in their

ESL textbooks. Bonny's article had a tremendous influence on my experience at the high school. The concept of subjectivity and subject positions led to questions such as "Who are students allowed to be in this classroom? In this curriculum?" and "How might this positioning of students affect their language learning?" Although I was not in the sanctioned role of classroom teacher at the time, I asked these questions as a teacher, and I thought about these questions in light of my teaching (past and future) in order to understand how teaching positions students.

Let us go back to Ivan for a minute. Outside of the high school he is a young man planning for his future as a jet pilot, actively involved in community service, and contributing to the financial status of his family. Standing up in front of 2,000 fellow high school students with a page from a coloring book and shouting out, "Now dash away, dash away, dash away all!" contradicts his self-image. It gives him an image that he does not want to project to the high school community. He rejects the subject position of child that this student production offers him and subverts his participation by coloring the reindeer a combination of shocking hues. He wins. His teachers decide that his coloring is not appropriate and that he will not be participating in the activity. He loses, too, for now his teachers use this behavior to label him an unmotivated English language learner. Again, I think about my own teaching: What subject positions are available to students in my classroom? This is not a question I asked myself before reading Bonny's article. What follows are some of my early attempts at addressing this question.

Spring 1995—Exploring Learner Identity

When I first read "Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning," I was in the middle of the first year of a 3-year contract teaching at a small junior college halfway between Osaka and Kyoto, Japan. Bonny's article stimulated immediate reflection.

By articulating the complexity of identity and how power operates in social interactions, Bonny gave me the language to reexamine my past experiences and practices. For example, I knew that my past struggles to learn Chinese involved my inability to retain an important piece of my identity—my sense of humor—in Chinese. I also knew that social position and seniority affected the ways my students in Pakistan were allowed to question or challenge each other in the classroom. However, I did not know how to use this knowledge to inform my teaching.

In Japan, I knew that my students showed just fragments of themselves in the English language classroom, but after reading Bonny's article I started having different kinds of conversations with students. I began asking them if they felt they were different people when speaking English and Japanese. In the halls, cafeteria, playing fields, and bookstore of our college campus, the students were often loud, rowdy, even raucous. When students would say that Japanese students were quiet or shy, I would ask if

they meant in Japanese or English? With friends or strangers? With classmates or teachers?

This line of questioning led to an activity, "The Fourth Student," which my colleague Carolyn Layzer and I designed to raise awareness of learner identity. We wrote and distributed an essay, accompanied by student-drawn illustrations, entitled "Japanese Students: All the Same?" The text consisted of three profiles of fictitious Japanese students, all with very different purposes for and attitudes toward learning English. Our students could immediately see pieces of themselves, their classmates, and their other friends within the characters of the text. For homework, we asked students to imagine that they were "the fourth student" and write a profile of themselves to share in class. These texts generated rich discussions as students shared examples of their classroom learner identity and their social learner identity (i.e., how they used English in informal situations). They could see that their goals and attitudes toward English influenced their learning. Raising awareness allowed teachers and students to question and find spaces for change in the curriculum and in our classroom practices. At the end of the semester, we revisited the texts and posed the question, "Are you still the same person?" Discussion revealed that some pieces had changed, and some had remained the same.

Talking about how students felt using English in different contexts was a good starting point for discussing issues of power within social interactions. I shared my own experiences with other native English speakers as examples. Vivid instances included faculty meetings where the participants (both male and female) would take the U.S. and British male teachers' comments more seriously than those of the female teachers or would attribute ideas suggested by women to the men. I wanted to show the students that teachers were not free from the messiness of power inequalities; I was not the liberated seeking to liberate others. I hoped that by hearing about my experiences and frustrations, the students would gain a better appreciation of the complexity of the issues. Of course, being aware of power issues does not guarantee access to power, but it can initiate a dialogue that, as Bonny says, helps us "understand how feelings of inadequacy are frequently socially constructed, and find spaces for the enhancement of human possibility" (p. 28).

Spring 1997—Taking on Ideology: Subjectivity as a Contested Site

"The Fourth Student" raised the issue of identity but did not delve into the broader societal structures and practices that shape it. In the spring of 1997, our last semester in Japan, Carolyn and I designed and taught a course on media literacy that focused on U.S. and Japanese media. We each had three sections with approximately 20 students per section. The overall purpose of the course was to help students understand how media shape cultural values and opinions and to enable students to analyze messages inherent in media products while extracting relevant cultural

information. The content and context of this class allowed us to explicitly address issues of ideology. We believe that media play an important role in shaping individuals' identities because they tell consumers what types of subject positions are available to them. But media images are not passively consumed; audiences negotiate meaning and images can be contested. In addition, when students create their own media products, a space is created where their ideologies can be expressed and analyzed.

In one part of the course, we analyzed dominant messages about gender. As a final project, students created posters in which they analyzed images and created advertisements conveying their own ideologies regarding gender. These student-created products were excellent examples of subjectivity as a contested site and of how individuals negotiate their places in the world.

The following excerpts come from one student's media log: "Advertisement 1: Submissiveness [in women] is sexy. Makes me feel good." "Advertisement 2: Man is controlling woman in this way. Why? It makes me angry. I want them to be equal." Another student's analysis of a collage of images of women in Japanese print ads read:

> The message is women should be thin. I agree half. Actually, I want to be slim because thin people match cute and slim clothes. However, too thin people don't look nice, they look like only skin and bone, and unnatural diet is bad for health.

These texts reveal individuals engaged in a struggle of constructing subjectivity and contesting available subject positions. At the time of this course, most of our students, 99% of whom were women, were job hunting. We did not have to tell these young women how power operates in those social interactions. They knew employers were looking for a particular kind of young woman: pretty, thin, and submissive. Students could see how this type of woman was promoted and perpetuated in media images, and how such idealized images contributed to feelings of inadequacy. Our class became a place where students could talk back to those images and challenge them. Teachers and students created a classroom space that helped us acknowledge our contradictions and struggles and also share alternative visions.

Fall 2001—Ivan's Story Still Resonates

During the 1998–1999 school year, I was living in central Pennsylvania and completing my doctoral degree. I have since left that state and now live and work in New England. Unfortunately, the story of Ivan and the reindeer is not an isolated event; his story continues to resonate as I see and hear of similar incidents that take place in U.S. public schools.

Reading Bonny's article and trying to bring issues of identity and power into my teaching helped me to ask different kinds of questions about language learners and language teaching. One path of inquiry, as

evidenced by the opening vignette, has been on the socially constructed environments in which language learners find themselves. While seeking to understand the subject positions available to students in their particular classrooms, I have also tried to understand these particular classrooms as situated within larger sociohistorical and political contexts.

Ivan's story occurred within the context of a state that did not have teacher certification in ESL/bilingual education and thus did not require that teachers such as Tom have any background or education in language acquisition theory or language education curriculum design. It was also a state that was trying to place ESL/bilingual education under the umbrella of special education. Using my interest in media literacy, I created a collage of English language learners and teachers as depicted in popular media texts. A recurrent theme in those texts is the English language learner as buffoon and English language teaching as a non-profession that anyone (i.e., native English speakers) can do. When I locate Ivan's story within a broader context that promotes and maintains the ideology of English language learners as remedial learners, I understand why Ivan's story is not an isolated event. It is, in fact, a manifestation of the unjust policies and practices that sustain the asymmetrical distribution of power.

In my current work as an ESOL teacher educator, I ask my students to analyze the curricula they design for the assumptions they make about learners and then to imagine what the consequences of those assumptions might be. I also ask students to examine the attitudes toward ESOL teachers and their work that are tacitly promoted through the local and state policies under which they work. Although some students resist this type of critical questioning, I have found that most students use this questioning to become more effective advocates for their students and themselves.

LING SHI RESPONDS: FROM RESISTANCE TO CLAIMING THE RIGHT TO SPEAK

Early Assumption

I still remember the excitement I felt when I started to teach adult English as a second language (ESL) in 1992 for a city board of education in Canada. Having previously taught English as a foreign language (EFL) in China, where a lack of the target language environment was one of the greatest challenges, I excitedly anticipated working with immigrants who were not only motivated to learn the language in order to integrate into the new country, but also immersed in English outside the classroom. I believed that I would easily be able to help my students achieve high proficiency levels in English, and I started my career as an ESL instructor with confidence in my ability to succeed. However, as my experience unfolded in the next few years, teaching ESL turned out to be the most memorable experience of my life, not so much because of the success, but because of the challenges my students encountered in the "ideal" English-speaking environment.

Resistance to Speaking: The Story of Wong

My experience with Wong, a student from China in my first high-beginner evening ESL class, completely changed my previous assumptions about the relationships between ESL learners, their motivations, and the learning environment. Wong was in his late 30s and had studied EFL in an evening school in China before coming to Canada. As a new immigrant, Wong was extremely motivated to learn English. He even envied homeless people; when the class passed some on the way to a downtown museum, he said, "I wish I could speak English like them." Several students who heard Wong thought it was a joke and laughed. I, however, pondered his words, sensing a strong feeling in his voice. It was a mixture of anxiety to speak on the one hand, and sadness or humiliation at being handicapped by the inability to speak on the other. It must have been this strong desire to speak that kept Wong coming to class for almost 2 years, even after he had found a job in a factory making boxes. Most students stopped coming to class once they had found a job, a sign of achievement of one of the goals of learning English. But Wong explained that, though little English was required for the kind of job he had, he wanted to learn to speak English well in order to make friends with his fellow workers and, later, to switch to a better job.

Not only was he motivated, Wong also appeared to be extroverted. Taking advantage of all available opportunities to practice speaking English in class, Wong seemed to be the ideal student that I had dreamed of teaching. I was anxious to maximize his progress, so I reminded him that his workplace was a perfect language learning environment. All he needed to do was to talk to his fellow workers just as he talked in class. Wong's reply surprised me: "I never talk to people at work because I am afraid that I would make mistakes and embarrass myself." He told me he would hide himself during lunchtime and coffee breaks to avoid talking to people, even though he longed to make friends with them.

Wong grew sad and quiet as he talked, and it dawned on me that there was a side to him that I had never seen. I could hardly imagine how such an active learner could ever keep silent and avoid chances to talk to native speakers, but Wong explained that his fear of embarrassment started after he heard a story about another Chinese immigrant who spoke very little English. While shopping in a supermarket, that immigrant noticed cans with pictures of dogs and cats on them. Coming from a region in China where dog and cat meat was popular, the immigrant thought the cans contained dog or cat meat and bought some. He liked the taste, so he went back to get more every week. One day the cashier asked him whether he had many dogs and cats. Realizing that he had been eating animal food, the Chinese man felt like a fool. Wong said that he dreaded embarrassing

moments like this, so he would rather not speak, especially in the workplace.

I sympathized with Wong and was not sure how to help him overcome his fear of speaking at work, so I encouraged him to find other opportunities to practice English outside of class. Wong did not seem to take to the idea at first, but one day, after missing several classes, he called to explain that he would not be coming to class anymore because he had decided to practice English elsewhere. He said he had started going to church, not for religion, but to practice speaking English with senior citizens. He had also offered to work in some people's houses and gardens for more opportunities to speak English. He said senior citizens spoke slowly and did not laugh at his mistakes, so he was not nervous when talking to them. I was glad that Wong had finally found ways to take advantage of the target language environment. Wong's humorous words, "I would do lots of things and even be the prime minister of Canada if I could speak English," uttered during a conditional clause practice session, echoed every time I wondered how ESL learners might be empowered by the target language.

Bonny's Article: An Enlightenment

The story of Wong left me wondering why an ESL learner such as Wong would envy a homeless person just because that person could speak fluent English, why he would do gardening and go to church in exchange for English practice rather than talk to people at work, and why he would resist talking to his fellow workers even though he longed to make friends with them. I found myself struggling with these queries until the publication of Bonny Norton Peirce's article in 1995. I read the article several times and identified Wong with Eva in Bonny's study. Like Eva, Wong was eager to work with English-speaking people but resisted speaking with them for fear of making mistakes. Just as Eva grew silent when people commented on her accent, Wong was concerned about his mistakes, and chose only to talk to people who did not seem to care about his language problems. Just like Eva, who felt neglected as an immigrant or "illegitimate" speaker of English, Wong associated himself with homeless people and felt even less acknowledged than those begging in the streets.

On the basis of her study of immigrants such as Eva, Bonny argues for defining the language learning process in terms of negotiation of one's social identity. From a poststructuralist perspective, social identity is "multiple, a site of struggle and subject to change" (p. 9). This notion of social identity, as Bonny argues, could integrate the learner and the learning environment and explain the complex relationship between the two. She proposes "the conception of investment rather than motivation to capture the complex relationship of the language learners to the target language" (p. 9). According to Bonny, learning to speak another language is an investment in which learners put their social identity at risk for later gains. From this viewpoint, language is seen as a powerful tool that

structures social relations as it offers or denies individuals access to social interactions. In other words, language learners, even when situated in the target language environment, could be deprived of opportunities to speak as a result of the power relationships in society and their unwillingness to invest their identity.

Reading Bonny's reconceptualization of SLA in terms of a complex relationship among power, identity, and environment was one of those moments of enlightenment that enabled me to understand the experiences of ESL students such as Wong. Though immersed in the English-speaking environment, Wong chose to speak or not to speak in various contexts on the basis of his willingness to negotiate his identity and his judgment of how risky it was for his identity if he made mistakes. Enlightened by Bonny's article, I decided to help my students "develop insight into the way in which opportunities to speak are socially structured and how such relations of power are implicated in the process of interaction" (p. 27). I followed Bonny's suggestion and asked students to discuss in class various opportunities to speak and their decision to speak or not to speak. By doing so, I hoped to help students claim the right to speak and, through speaking, to define a sense of self in relation to the target language and the social structure in which they chose to live.

Claiming the Right to Speak: The Story of Mary

It was 1996, my final year teaching that ESL class. All of the students who had studied with Wong had moved on, and newcomers had taken their places. Among the new students was Mary, a middle-aged Chinese immigrant from Indonesia. Unlike most students, who had recently arrived in Canada, Mary had been in the country for more than 10 years. She had worked in a clothing factory where the boss and workers were all Chinese. As a result, she had never gone to ESL classes and could speak very little English. Compared with Wong, Mary was shy and would blush every time she spoke. However, each time she did speak, something in her voice reminded me of Wong and told me that she was determined and motivated to learn English.

My speculation about Mary was proved right one day when I asked the class to talk about their choices to speak or not to speak English outside the class. A Chinese student started the discussion with his experience in a big department store. He was on an escalator when two teenagers tried to pass him and said, "Stand on the right, you stupid Chinese." He then realized that he was the only person standing on the left blocking the way for those who were in a hurry. He wanted to move, but he was so angry at the racist remark that he remained on the left as a protest. The incident triggered a heated discussion. Most students said he should have spoken out against the racism. Mary, however, said that she would also have kept silent. Had the Chinese student protested in nonfluent English, she explained, he would have confirmed the image of a "stupid Chinese."

Mary's reaction to the escalator incident caught my attention. When I asked her to share more of her thoughts, Mary poured out the story of why she had decided to attend ESL classes after so many years in Canada. Mary told us that, in the clothing factory where she worked, workers were paid the lowest hourly wage and were often made to work overtime without pay. A few weeks before Mary decided to come to the ESL class, one worker was so angry that he sued the boss. When the lawyer came to investigate the case, all of the workers, including Mary, kept silent for fear of losing their jobs as well as having to serve as witnesses in a court where they could hardly speak or understand English.

"Is this why you decided to study ESL?" I asked. "Yes," said Mary, with a voice full of pain and longing for change. Suggestions then flowed from the other students. Some said she could find a lawyer who could speak Chinese; others said she should ask for help from social workers in the community center. The classroom turned into a caring and sharing space for these immigrants claiming the right to speak. As I organized more such discussions, I felt the confidence to speak developing among the students. Several months later, Mary told me she had found a job in another factory. "I called the lawyer and agreed to be a witness in court," she told me, her eyes shining and alive. Mary's words stayed with me long after she left. There was in her words a hope for change and a belief in the future.

Concluding Remarks

Bonny's proposal that social identity is multiple and subject to change has fueled my development as an ESL instructor. I found myself consumed with the frustrations of my ESL students as they struggled with the decision to speak or not to speak outside of class. Bonny's article helped me construct these experiences in meaningful ways. Though I have since become a teacher educator, I still feel that my role as an ESL instructor is never off to the side of my life. The stories of Wong and Mary reside in my memory and lead me to a great deal of reflection on the complex relationship between language learners and the learning context.

BETH THOMPSON RESPONDS

> *When I try to speak English, some people just say they don't understand, and they won't let me try anymore.*

This statement was expressed in Spanish by a student during a session of a 6-week internship that was part of my course work for an MATESL degree. On the board was written, "Obstacles to Learning English." Under this phrase I taped three large sheets of paper. The first had "personal" as a heading, the second had "life," and the third had "society." Though I began by asking about personal obstacles to learning English, this comment about obstacles faced in society came almost immediately from Ramona, a woman who rarely spoke in class. It was the catalyst for a lively discussion about

discrimination, feelings of powerlessness, and assertiveness in the face of unequal power relations.

The previous session had included a problem-posing activity in which the students had developed a dialogue for a hypothetical employee, Rajan, who asserts his right to speak when interacting with a boss who would not speak slowly and make his speech comprehensible (see the Appendix for the lesson). The next step was to move from a discussion about obstacles toward students' ideas for solutions.

The inspiration for this series of lessons was Bonny Norton Peirce's article, "Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning." Through case studies of five immigrant women in Canada, Bonny shows how issues of social power and inequity determine when, where, and how often a learner will have opportunities to speak. Decisions to speak or not speak are not dependent on motivation but on the individual's perception of personal investment. Armed with this new understanding of how L2 learners' identities evolve within social contexts, Bonny suggests that teachers could conduct classroom-based social research (CBSR) and use the results to develop new teaching methods.

When I was outlining the goals and objectives of my internship, I decided to explore how I could use the problem-posing approach (Auerbach & Wallerstein, 1987; Wallerstein, 1983) to lead students to discuss their dynamic, multiple identities as language learners, to reflect on why they were investing time and energy in learning English, and to discover how they could assert their right to speak even if they had not attained communicative competence as defined by the dominant culture.

However, before applying what I learned from Bonny's article to teaching, the first step was to understand how to situate SLA within critical research. Central to Bonny's discussion is *poststructuralism*—a term that was foreign and intimidating. Though I struggled with unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts, thanks to courses I had taken in SLA theory, I was well acquainted with the literature cited in the article. I understood the contrasts Bonny made between her ideas of multiple and dynamic social identities, investment, and the right to speak, and the SLA concepts of a fixed learner identity, motivation centered in the individual, and communicative competence. According to Bonny, SLA researchers' analyses of social issues that could affect motivation and the affective filter do not adequately describe the paradoxical interdependence and estrangement between the learner and the target culture (TC), nor do they explain SLA success or failure.

I reread Schumann's (1978) article on his theory of *social distance*, developed as a result of his case study of Alberto, a Costa Rican who did not acquire English because he was "socially distant from Americans" (p. 36). Schumann concludes that if a learner perceives that his group is socially inferior to the target language (TL) group, he may be unwilling to

acculturate to the target group. The result is that the learner is cut off from or fails to take advantage of TL input to continue language learning.

Although Schumann acknowledges that both U.S.-born citizens and Latin American immigrant workers might perceive social distance between their cultural groups, he considers Alberto's failure to acquire English to be a result of his lack of motivation and his choices:

> He made very little effort to get to know English speaking people . . . [He] stuck quite close to a small group of Spanish speaking friends. . . . Also, he chose to work at night (as well as in the day) rather than attend English classes which were available in Cambridge. . . . Alberto's lack of acculturation toward the TL group stands as the best argument for his minimal acquisition of English. (Schumann, 1978, p. 36)

Schumann justifies his conclusion by comparing Alberto with the other five subjects in the study, who were more successful in acquiring English: "The second adult baby-sat for American children, studied English on her own and tried to get to know and speak with Americans" (p. 36).

This discussion of Schumann's work may seem off the topic here, but it was an important text in my SLA education, and reading Bonny's article—16 years after I had first read Schumann—gave me the words to challenge his interpretation of social distance. Bonny's article led me to two questions:

1. Can it be assumed that the TL group of Schumann's second adult subject is the same as Alberto's?
2. Could acculturation be a two-way street between the language learner and the target culture?

According to Schumann, the difference between his two adult participants is that one is motivated and the other is not. Bonny, however, maintains that "[SLA] theorists have not adequately addressed why . . . in one place there may be social distance between a specific group of language learners and the target language community, whereas in another place the social distance may be minimal" (p. 11). Even with high motivation and different choices, if Alberto's target community did not consider him as a potential equal member, how could he acculturate? Did he have adequate opportunities to speak? Did he choose to work at night, or were his wages so low that he needed two jobs to survive? Through her data, Bonny shows that "motivation is not a fixed personality trait but must be understood with reference to social relations of power that create the possibilities for language learners to speak" (p. 26).

In this way, Bonny's article prepared me for the possibility that the students in my internship class might have limited opportunities to practice speaking English with native English speakers. A brief intake interview revealed that their lengths of residence in the United States ranged from 6 to 16 years. Yet all of the students reported that they spoke English poorly or not at all.

Another instrument for gathering information about the students' lives was an evaluation questionnaire, written in Spanish and English, on which they could write their responses in Spanish or English. Some questions were formulated to elicit students' evaluations of the lessons: What words were new to them? What had they learned in general? What had they liked or disliked about the lesson? Other questions addressed language use in Spanish and English, asking, for example, how many times during the past week and with whom they had spoken English. The most vocal student indicated that she had some opportunities to speak some English. Those who rarely spoke in class would often write that the only time they had spoken English all week was with me, their English teacher.

This information helped me plan the problem-posing activities. After developing a dialogue for the fictitious Rajan and his boss, the students were ready to talk about their personal, life, and societal obstacles to learning English. Ramona's statement that native English speakers did not wait for her to speak prompted others to volunteer their experiences. One student said that she spoke English with native-English-speaking coworkers, but that outside the plant other native English speakers did not seem to understand her and would not wait for her to make herself understood. Another said that when she was injured at work, the nurse, who had not attempted to talk to her, reported to the supervisor, "I don't know what is wrong with her. She doesn't speak English."

To elicit solutions, I taped sheets of papers next to each of the three obstacle sheets, labeled "Solutions to Personal Obstacles to Speaking English," "Solutions to Life Obstacles," and "Solutions to Obstacles in Society." I also put up two sheets of paper labeled "Reasons to Learn and Speak English" and "Reasons to Learn and Speak Spanish."

To get the students started on the list of reasons to learn and speak English, I told a story (which was repeated in Spanish) about Bonny's participant, Martina, who had stood up to her landlord when he was trying to cheat her. I embellished the story by describing how the father and children were watching Martina argue on the phone, their mouths open in wonder, asking each other, "Is this Mama?" I explained that Martina used her anger to push herself to speak English to the landlord, even though she was afraid and was making mistakes. A lot of money was at stake, and she had to speak English for the sake of her family. This incident was a turning point for Martina; now it was much easier for her to assert her right to speak.

After students gave their own reasons for investing time and effort to learn English, we reread the obstacles and discussed solutions. One solution for the personal obstacle of shyness was to find kind, patient native English speakers with whom they could practice speaking English. One student described how she found conversation partners: When she moved to her neighborhood, she saw how well everyone kept their yards. She decided to work outside in her yard, thinking that maybe people would

come and talk to her. Neighbors came over with food to welcome her. Thus, through problem-posing activities, I was able to follow Bonny's advice and "help students understand how opportunities to speak are socially structured and how they might create possibilities for social interaction with target language speakers" (p. 26).

Although students indicated that they understood the concepts of the right to speak and investment, I never had the opportunity to find out if they were able to implement solutions, except in the case of Isaura. Isaura lived in a small town where there were few Spanish interpreters. During a visit, Isaura told me that the only interpreter for social services, a Mexican-American who grew up in the area, was trying to prove to the head of social services, Mrs. Smith, that Isaura was a neglectful mother. Summer daycare was over, and school had not yet started, but Isaura still had to work, so her children were alone at home. Her oldest daughter was 12, the youngest was 5, and Isaura's workplace was a few minutes away by car. She would leave her children alone in the house to go to work, but she would call them between breaks, and during break time she would go home to check on them. Somehow the interpreter found out that Isaura was leaving the children at home alone, and Isaura came home on her break one day to find the interpreter and Mrs. Smith questioning the children. This was the first time someone from social services had come to the house without an appointment. Isaura tried to tell Mrs. Smith her side of the story, but she spoke in Spanish, which had to be interpreted. Isaura understood enough English to know that the interpreter was misrepresenting her and that Mrs. Smith was not hearing the true story. Isaura felt powerless and angry.

After Isaura had related this story, I asked her, "What language are you and I speaking together?"

"English," she answered.

"I know that it is much easier for you to talk to me in English than to Mrs. Smith because you know me. You know it's okay to make mistakes because you are learning to speak English. It takes us awhile to get our ideas across, but we always manage."

I then asked Isaura if she was angry at the interpreter, and she responded that she was. I asked what she thought she could do about this. She suggested that a young woman from a nearby college who had helped her once before could interpret for her at social services. I reminded her that the young woman was often unavailable. I again told her Martina's story. Maybe she could use her anger in the same way Martina had.

The next time I visited Isaura, she was pleased with herself. She had gone to Mrs. Smith's office and informed her, in English, what had happened at her home, and that she wanted her file closed with social services, now that she was working and was self-sufficient. Happily, she said that Mrs. Smith had agreed.

Isaura's communicative competence improved. She still made mistakes, but she spoke with more confidence. She had asserted her right to speak

with Mrs. Smith, and had redefined her identity. She was no longer a social services case. By investing her time in finding opportunities to practice speaking English, she had attained autonomy over her social identity. Eventually, her investment paid off at work when she was given supervisory duties over native English speakers.

Bonny's article helped me develop the teaching approach for my internship lessons, but her stories inspired Isaura, and perhaps other students, to discover their own strengths to assert their right to speak.

BONNY NORTON RESPONDS: ON CRITICAL THEORY AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE

In her presentation at the 2002 TESOL convention in Salt Lake City, Angel Lin gave a compelling account of her attempts to develop a critical pedagogy curriculum in the MATESL program at the City University of Hong Kong. One of the many challenges she experienced included student teacher frustrations with the inaccessibility of critical pedagogy texts. Students struggled to understand the ideas conveyed by critical theorists, and often felt disempowered, rather than empowered, in the learning process.

Having myself struggled to understand some aspects of critical theory, occasionally growing frustrated with terminology that seemed to confuse rather than clarify, I realized that much critical theory, powerful though it might be, suffered from a lack of illustration and specificity. For this reason, when I wrote my 1995 article, I made every effort to illustrate my ideas with highly specific examples drawn from research with particular language learners in a given time and place. My rationale was that if the theory I found so compelling could not help me make sense of the experiences of language learners I myself had worked with, then there was little I could offer to a wider audience. This is particularly true given my interest in identity and language learning. Questions of identity are not abstract and sterile, but only make sense in the context of grounded experience within particular sociocultural contexts.

When I read the responses of Judy Sharkey, Ling Shi, and Beth Thompson, what struck me forcibly was their interest, not only in the linguistic progress of their students, but in their broader engagement in their wider communities. Although each teacher was working in a very different context—Judy in a U.S. public high school as well as a Japanese college campus, Ling in a Canadian adult education program, and Beth in a U.S. adult education program—they each sought to address learners' needs both inside and outside of the classroom. Like many other teachers, they appreciate that teaching language learners to interact with native speakers is a much more complicated process than classroom role plays would suggest. When a language learner speaks to a member of the target language community, she is not only searching for words, phrases, and

idiomatic expressions, but asking to what extent she is able to impose reception on her interlocutor. Will the listener take the time to understand what the language learner wishes to communicate? To what extent, indeed, does the listener wish to interact with the language learner? Similarly, when a language learner writes a poem, a letter, or an academic essay in the target language, he may question how much of his background and history would be considered relevant to the target language community. Would memories of the past, experiences of the present, or desires for the future be well received by readers in the target language community? Or would his expressions, as Hoffman (1989) suggests, be simply lost in translation?

Judy, Ling, and Beth, like me, are seeking a better understanding of the conditions under which language learners speak, the extent to which they are marginalized, and the opportunities they have for the future. We all wish to investigate the multiple ways in which power operates in society, whether at the national, institutional, or personal level. At the same time, however, we are interested in the human agency of learners: How learners act on their social worlds, claim spaces in conversations and social relationships, and sometimes resist the subject positions available to them. Judy explores Ivan's ambivalence toward his English classes, Ling describes the ways in which Wong and Mary sought to claim the right to speak in alienating workplaces, and Beth describes the compelling case of Isaura, who struggled to preserve the integrity of her family despite difficulties in communication. In essence, we are all interested in identity, language learning, and social change—an interest that extends to the persistent question, "What can we do to address inequities in society?" What I sought to do in my 1995 article was to disseminate the powerful insights that my research participants had shared with me, and to locate those insights within a theoretical framework that might prove productive for others. Judy, Beth, and Ling have provided encouraging evidence to suggest that the written word remains an important instrument for social change.

What struck me most forcibly in Judy's response to my work was her comment that the article gave her "the language to reexamine past experiences and practices." In these words, Judy eloquently and succinctly captures that quality of language that I find so compelling: Language helps us make sense of the world—indeed, language helps to structure how we make sense of the world. Further, as I have suggested in recent work (Norton, 2000), how we come to name the world is of crucial importance to how we act upon it. Thus it was very significant to me that, in naming the world differently, Judy also began to reflect on how she acted upon it. She began to reconsider how she conceived of her students and engaged in classroom practice: "I started having different conversations with students," she explains. The activity, "The Fourth Student," constructed with Carolyn Layzer, was a simple but highly effective classroom exercise that produced rich and meaningful discussion with her students. This was not a trivial writing exercise, leaving students struggling to find a topic worthy of their

time and energy. Judy's lesson was successful, I believe, because it took seriously the complex identities of her students, located in a particular sociocultural institution at a given moment in time.

A similar comment could be made with reference to Ling's attempts to support Wong and Mary, students in two different classrooms in Canada. Although Wong was highly motivated to speak English, his investment in the language was compromised by feelings of inadequacy, particularly in the workplace. When Ling encouraged Wong to seek other opportunities to practice English outside of class, Wong found that gardening and going to church helped put him in touch with older target language speakers, who "spoke slowly and did not laugh at his mistakes." In another class, Ling had a more targeted discussion with students on the opportunities they had to speak English outside the classroom. In this way, she learned of Mary's frustration with her inability to negotiate for improved working conditions in her clothing factory. By addressing students' challenges in speaking outside the classroom, Ling found that the classroom "turned into a caring and sharing space for those immigrants trying to claim the right to speak."

Caring and sharing classrooms do not just happen, however. As Beth's commentary powerfully demonstrates, teachers have an important part to play in creating safe spaces in which students can engage in critical reflection on language learning and social interaction. Beth went to great lengths to learn about the students in her class, making effective use of interviews and questionnaires in both English and Spanish. This enabled her to prepare problem-posing activities that gave students the opportunity to explore their investments in English and Spanish and discover ways they could engage more productively with native speakers of English. It was humbling to read how Beth had encouraged Isaura to draw on Martina's story (from my 1995 article) for inspiration. Thus, when Isaura was threatened with the loss of her children, she was inspired to take action with social services. Interestingly, it was the experience of another language learner that proved especially effective as a model. By providing spaces in her curriculum for stories like Martina's, Beth created a wider range of possibilities for her students.

Equally interesting was that Judy's, Ling's, and Beth's understanding of power and identity influenced not only how they engaged in classroom practice, but also how they conceived of themselves as participants in a wider social world. They demonstrate convincingly that if we are to think of our students differently, we also have to think of ourselves as teachers differently. Grappling with our own power, and our own powerlessness, is not an easy task. Like Judy, I have often reflected on those instances in my life, as a student, teacher, scholar, and graduate advisor, in which, for better or worse, power relations have structured my interaction with others. As Judy says, although being aware of power does not guarantee access to power, it is nevertheless an important condition for educational and social change. This is the lesson that Mary learned so effectively in Ling's

classroom. Mary realized that she did not have to remain silent for fear of losing her job or having to serve as a witness in court. Her fellow students helped her learn that she had the power to seek a variety of solutions to her problem, from finding a lawyer who could speak Chinese, to asking for help from social services. Access to resources is crucial for access to power.

At the same time, however, Judy, Ling, and Beth demonstrate that reflecting on the relationship between power, identity, and social interaction is highly productive for theory as well as practice. In this regard, Beth's discussion of Schumann's theory of social distance is particularly apt. Whereas Schumann had assumed that Alberto's failure to acquire English was the result of lack of motivation, Beth's opportunity to rethink notions of motivation led her to question some of Schumann's findings. As Beth notes, "Even with high motivation and different choices, if Alberto's specific target community did not consider him as a potential equal member, how could he acculturate?" Beth's questions echo my own reservations about such theory (Norton, 1998). Further, I have advanced similar arguments about such notions as *natural language learning* and the *affective filter* (Norton, 2000). Theory that suggests that living in a target language community will necessarily provide opportunities to learn a language naturally is not always supported by research—as Ivan, Wong, Mary, and Isaura well know. Further, if theory suggests that such learners may have high affective filters, a sympathetic discussion with these learners may suggest that those filters are social constructions rather than invariant personality traits.

So what is to be done about Tom, Ivan's social studies ESL teacher? I could not help but make comparisons between the Christmas exercise that Tom set for his students and the "Fourth Student" exercise that Judy set for hers. These exercises provide a window into the contrasting visions that Tom and Judy had of themselves and of their students. Whereas Judy wished to explore with her students their histories, identities, and investments in language learning, Tom required that Ivan meet his expectations of the compliant ESL student. Ivan, however, saw the Christmas task as childish, and there was no possibility for student-teacher negotiation; the only avenue open to Ivan was one of resistance. Further, when Ivan subverted the exercise, Tom did not take the opportunity to reflect on his pedagogical goals, saying, with dramatic irony, "I don't know, Ivan, I think we'll have to redo that."

There are two points here that I would like to explore. First, even though Tom's actions are disturbing and his conclusions about Ivan troubling, I think it would be too easy to dismiss Tom as a bad teacher. This would be as unhelpful as Tom's dismissal of Ivan for his subversive portrayal of Santa and the reindeer. For me, the challenge is to better understand Tom's identity as a teacher and the sociocultural practices of his educational community. What assumptions did Tom hold about teaching, learning, and ESL learners? How did the sociocultural practices in his particular workplace, at a particular time in North American history, structure his pedagogical goals? While my research has focused on the identities of language learners, it would be constructive, I think, to complement such research with a focus on teachers and the contexts in which they work. As Duff and Uchida (1997) suggest, teachers, too, are caught up in conflicting discourses that have sociocultural implications. Further, the work of scholars such as Toohey (2000) provides new insight into the ways in which communities of practice structure classroom activities. Without an enhanced understanding of Tom's identity as an ESL teacher, given his location in a specific place and time, it would be difficult to conceive of transforming his practice.

The second point I wish to make concerns the nature of student resistance, an area of research that is becoming increasingly interesting to me. In an article I wrote several years ago (Norton, 2001), I explored the nonparticipation of two immigrant language learners in their ESL classrooms. The central point I made, drawing on Wenger's (1998) conception of imagination, was that, when students enter the four walls of an ESL classroom, they simultaneously envision a community outside that classroom that transcends both time and space. This "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991) is the community to which a student would most like to belong; it is the kind of community that would give the student a sense of self-worth at a time of intense sociocultural change. I note further that different students have different imagined communities, and that resistance and nonparticipation in ESL classrooms is most likely to take place when the teacher's curricular goals and methods are in conflict with a student's investment in a particular imagined community.

In this regard, Ivan is perhaps a case in point. Although the data are not extensive, it is tempting to infer that Ivan's imagined community was that of the aeronautics world. As Judy says, "His passion for aeronautics is evidenced by his membership in the civil air patrol and the ease with which he talks about the capabilities and specifications of the latest Russian fighter jets." Given his investment in this imagined community, Ivan's Christmas assignment may have seemed not only childish but a cruel caricature of his visions for the future. With this interpretation, Ivan's show of resistance when asked to present a picture of Santa leading his reindeer and shouting "Now dash away, dash away, dash away all!" takes on added significance.

While Judy, Ling, and Beth have initiated different kinds of conversations with students, they have also initiated an enjoyable and interesting conversation with me. I hope that our exchanges, in turn, will generate other conversations in the classrooms and corridors of our readers. I thank them for the opportunity to revisit my earlier work, and to reflect more thoughtfully on work to come.

APPENDIX: PROBLEM-POSING LESSON FOR BETH THOMPSON'S ESL CLASS

Code

I drew the code for this problem-posing lesson from Auerbach and Wallerstein (1987), Unit 3, Lesson 3. In the Auerbach and Wallerstein lesson, Rajan's boss is giving orders too fast for Rajan to understand. However, when asked if he understands, Rajan says, "Yes."

Activity

After discussing why Rajan did not tell the boss that he did not understand, the class considered what options Rajan had and what the consequences would be for each option. They then dictated the following hypothetical dialogue in which Rajan attempts to convince his boss to speak more slowly and to explain himself.

Rajan: Excuse me, Mr. Smith. Can you explain again please more slowly?
Mr. Smith: pftappfta habada blablabla chachacha . . .
Rajan: Can you explain to Mr. Gomez what you want because I don't understand what you do.
Mr. Smith: Learn more English!
Rajan: If you have someone show me, I will learn.

The words in the dialogue are exactly as dictated by the students. I asked questions designed to uncover the challenges that minority language speakers often face. For example, after Rajan asked the boss to speak more slowly, I asked what Rajan should do if the boss were to repeat what he had said at the same pace, and Rajan still did not understand. The students decided that a solution would be to ask to bring in a supervisor to help. I asked what Mr. Smith would say to that. One of the women responded with, "The boss says, 'Learn more English!'"

Extension

After the dialogue was written, I asked the students to come up with other solutions to the problem of not understanding what native English speakers say to them. One student said that when she did not understand her supervisor in group meetings, she would take her aside after the meetings and ask her to explain what she had said again "one on one so that I can do my job."