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Foreign Language Learner Identity: A Sociocultural Perspective

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Foreign Language Learner Identity: A Sociocultural Perspective

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Dedication

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, without Whom I could do nothing. It was an answer to an unspoken prayer to study at the University of Texas at Austin.

To my dear mother, Doriene, who always knows when I need her to hold on to me and when I need to be let go.

To my siblings, who stand by me even when distance separates us.

Abstract

Foreign Language Learner Identity: A Sociocultural Perspective

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Second language acquisition has seen a shift toward sociocultural approaches over the past fifteen years (Block, 2007). Sociocultural theory (Offord, 2005), language socialization (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986), and "communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991) highlight how language learner identity, like language itself, is both socially and individually constructed. As learners acquire a foreign language, they also gain a new awareness of who and how they are—they develop a second language (L2) self (Granger, 2004). How language learners identify themselves depends on contextual factors (Norton, 1995). This report focuses on how language learner social identity is negotiated in three contexts: the foreign language classroom, the study abroad setting, and in face-to-face interactions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The last fifteen years have seen increased interest in sociocultural approaches to second language acquisition (SLA). Traditionally, SLA research has focused on learner linguistic development by examining individual proficiency and competence (Block, 2007). Firth and Wagner (1997) offered a seminal critique of this individualistic, positivist approach to language learning research. They proposed a three-fold reconceptualization of SLA that would 1) extend beyond the formal classroom, 2) be of more relevance to learner-participants, and 3) demonstrate an awareness of context and interaction. Sfard (1998) echoes this analysis by describing two metaphors for learning: the acquisition metaphor (AM) and the participation metaphor (PM). Under the acquisition metaphor, knowledge is a commodity which can consumed or possessed by learners. The participation metaphor casts knowledge as part of an activity or discourse in which learners take an active role. She concludes that both metaphors are valuable because together they encompass ideologies about how knowledge is created, shared, and transferred. They also underscore the complexity of the human mind and the learning process. Experimental linguistic studies which yield largely quantitative data have yielded ground to qualitative studies that examine offer a glimpse of the learning process from the perspective of individual learners as they are immersed in a particular social context.

Recent theoretical developments in SLA have responded to these calls for a closer examination of social factors. The concept of a "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which has been applied to many fields other than SLA, marked the introduction of a new metaphor for the learning process. Wenger (1998) clarifies how this concept applies to human activities in social settings, drawing attention to the genesis of

thought and presenting a framework for managing this dialectic view of learning. This model describes group dynamics and how engagement in social activities affects individuals, but it provides less support for the stance that learners themselves are also dynamic and agentive. It provides a foundation for understanding new contexts, both physical and virtual, and for navigating the interactions among participants. Norton (1995) also punctuates the need to set aside the traditional view of the language learner as inert or somehow deficient and consider the reciprocal effect of the social context on the learner during the language acquisition process:

> …many have assumed that learners can be defined unproblematically as motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited, without considering that such affective factors are frequently socially constructed in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways in a single individual. (p. 12)

This poststructuralist view of the language learner-context relationship allows for an expanded description of the learner as a participant rather than a recipient, as dynamic rather than stagnant, as active immediately in response to a context rather than reactive. This flexibility can be seen in language learners at all levels of fluency. The reciprocal and variable relationship between learner and context underscores the idea that learners identify themselves and others around them as changeable.

Norton (1995) describes the motivation of language learners as an 'investment,' which calls to mind a transactional framework where the incidence of risk, gain and loss are possible. This theory exposes overtones of power inequalities and offers an overview of the larger context. This view, however, does not investigate the effect of specific contextual details or the various positions learners occupy over the course of a single

interaction. Also, although an individual holds several social identities, not all of them are enacted to full degree in all contexts. It is through language that learners receive or reject the identities assigned to them, as well as establish and maintain the identity they wish to present.

What does language have to do with identity?

Identity is a broad topic that encompasses how people situate themselves in the world and is of interest in many academic fields, including second language acquisition. In this report, a small aspect of identity will be explored, namely social identities in a particular context. Since the publication of the Firth and Wagner (1997) article, researchers have work to build a more extensive view of the learner inside and out of the classroom. This new conceptualization has allowed for studies of learner impressions of language education. These more recent studies acknowledge the importance of individual experience in the form of narratives (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Ros i Sole, 2007), interviews (Norton, 1995; Norman; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004), and discourse analyses (Anderson, 2009; Gutierrez, 2008; Kinginger & Belz, 2005).

> "Identity at one level or another is central to all the 'human' or 'social' sciences, as it also is in philosophical and religious studies, for all these areas of investigation are primarily concerned with the ways in which human being understand themselves and others. (Edwards, 2009, p. 20)

Granger (2004) takes a psychoanalytic approach to the interrelation of language and identity. She describes how language offers individuals a tool for expressing their inner self to the world. For children, the emergence of the first language (L1) identity is intertwined with self-awareness and the onset of language use. She compares this process

to second language acquisition, where the learner is limited in presenting the inner self. For adult learners, it is especially frustrating to have a mismatch between the developed, fully aware L1 psyche and the emergent second language (L2) self. She argues that this mismatch leaves learners silent as they mourn the loss of their L1 communicativeness and negotiate a functional L2 self. So, in terms of 'investment' (Norton Peirce, 1995), it is not a far stretch to claim that one's identity is what is left subject to social forces during the language learning process.

Many studies of emergent language learner identity focus on English learners, perhaps because of the ubiquity of this language worldwide. They tend to be studies of individual experience which set contextual factors as a background for the activity of language learning. Sociocultural approaches provide a closer look at contextual factors in full complexity to offer a broader interpretation of how language identity develops. Socially-oriented views of language learning, such as sociocultural theory (SCT) and language socialization, highlight the importance of interaction among language learners and the influence of contextual factors. Foreign language learners study a language that is not commonly spoken in their surrounding environment. This report is an evaluation of foreign language learner identity construction and negotiation in three different contexts: the foreign language classroom, the study abroad setting, and in face-to-face interactions. I take a sociocultural perspective of how social identity development and foreign language acquisition are intertwined, with special attention to identities claimed and rejected, defended and relinquished.

Chapter 2: Sociocultural Perspectives

Sociocultural perspectives are those which respond to the need of SLA to account for the influence of social interaction and contextual factors. Theorists from the human sciences have generated models to explain how people learn. The Russian psychologist L. S. Vygotsky (1931-1997) laid the theoretical foundations of sociocultural theory (SCT). It focuses on the sign systems used in a particular cultural context and how those signs impact both interactions between individuals (socially), and changes within individuals (psychologically). Connections between language acquisition and acculturation, known as language socialization, rose from the work of linguistic anthropologists Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), who studied how language denotes participation in a particular community and how language supports certain social identities. Finally, situated learning stems from the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) who describe communities of practice where the learner-novice becomes increasingly familiar with the discursive demands of a particular context. Each of these approaches gives the learner a prominent position as an active member and co-constructor of the social context.

Fundamental to sociocultural theory is Vygotsky's concept of the mediated human mind. The natural mind is organized into the higher mind as symbolic, culturally-shaped artifacts are introduced and incorporated into thought processes. "Higher, or "cultural" mental functions, e.g. abstract reasoning, logical memory, language, voluntary attention, planning, decision-making, etc. have their origin in human interaction and appear gradually during the process of radical transformation of the lower functions" (Offord, 2005). The artifacts employed by the mediated mind are passed down from generation to generation, and transform to match the psycho-social demands of the new

generation. Language evolves in this way, creating the need for such immediate sources as the Urban Dictionary (2011), which allows visitors to instantly submit contemporary slang entries. The psychological tools which mediate culture, including such artifacts as music, art and numeracy, help humans to establish and manage meaning in both psychological and social activity.

Vygotsky categorized knowledge into spheres of activity called genetic domains. His idea of sociocultural evolution explores the dialectical relationship between artifacts (language, music, art, inventions, etc.) and their culture of origin. Ontogenesis describes how children internalize mediational tools and learn to regulate their own physical and mental behavior. This presupposes that mediational tools are introduced externally and later appropriated for self-initiated purposes. Finally, microgenesis highlights mental development over a later period in life, as in the case of second language acquisition.

Vygotsky conceived of development as a progression through three stages of regulation. The first stage, object regulation, behavior is deferential to objects in the immediate environment. This is well-illustrated in the conduct of young children, who have not learned to respond appropriately to linguistic cues in disciplining their own behavior. This is followed by other-regulation, where behavior can be managed with external linguistic mediation. The last stage is self-regulation, where the individual has full control of mediational tools and can purposely appropriate them. Moving from stage two to three is characteristic of ontogenesis where the internalization of mediational tools marks maturity. Self-regulation is also where such phenomena as private speech and self-talk also come to the fore. These mediational tools are not meant for communication with others, but rather, speak to the psychological needs of the individual.

A final tenet of sociocultural theory is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). This refers to a developmental stage where the learner interacts with a mediational tool or with someone. It is within this externally supported zone that the learner can achieve beyond his or her unmediated capabilities. The ZPD is marked by collaborative contact and negotiated meaning. When two individuals pose themselves as expert and novice, the event can be viewed as scaffolding; when the two are on more equal footing, they work together to reach intersubjectivity.

As with Vygotsky's concept of higher mental capabilities being shaped by cultural artifacts, language learner identity is shaped by the cultural artifacts of the target culture, including language. Learner identity emerges out of language presentation and use, the conditions of the learning context and a developing history of experience. Learners progress to self-regulation in the target language by appropriating linguistic signs for their own communicative purposes. A Vygotskian view of this process highlights learner agency, which gives rise to goal orientation, perlocutionary acts, intersubjectivity. "Thus, for Vygotsky, linguistic signs are never arbitrary. They are created, used borrowed, and interpreted by the individual for the purposeful actions in which he/she is engaged. Language emerges from social and cultural activity, and only later becomes an object of reflection" (Kramsch, 2000, pp. 133-134). The preferred tools and communicative goals of each learner influence the development of both their collective and individual identities.

In the first phases of acquisition, the learner displays more dependence on mediational tools provided by the context. Many foreign language learners begin by acquiring more concrete lexical items which can be represented by pictures and/or sound, physically demonstrated, or manipulated in some way. This externalized, sensory

mediation gives way to other-mediation, where social encounters redirect both language and identity emergence. Selinker's (Gass & Selinker, 2008) definition of interlanguage approaches the linguistic uniqueness of learner speech in noting that the system of language signs shares some features with both the L1 and L2, but also displays its own distinctive characteristics. Learner sign systems, then, are shared by their social activities. It is also in interaction with others that learners may test their hypotheses about the L2 and expand their competence. Advanced learners internalize the target language such that they are able to communicate inwardly though processes, discuss abstract concepts, and evaluate themselves. Sociocultural theory offers a framework for understanding learners as they move from object regulation to self-regulation. When learners face challenging cognitive tasks, they revert to earlier phases of regulation, enlisting the use of more externalized mediational tools (Antón, DiCamilla, & Lantolf, 2003; Lantolf, 2006). U-shaped learning (see Gass and Selinker, 2008) refers to the mental reconfiguration of language knowledge, how the introduction of new functions and forms come to be incorporated in a learner's understanding of the language. It does not, however, account for the contribution of social interactions or contextual factors. Foreign language acquisition involves the recurrence of this progression to self-regulation and the advancement of learner communicative goals.

Language socialization offers a related perspective. Kramsch (2002) warns that the Vygotskian theory of SLA does not offer a break with the traditional input/output metaphor. Drawing from anthropology rather than psychology, Kramsch (2002) explains that this approach focuses on how sequences of interaction affect language change. It underscores the power of interpersonal relationships and context: "...learning is ubiquitous, there is no context-free language learning, and all communicative contexts

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involve social, cultural, and political dimensions that affect which linguistics forms are available or taught and how they are represented" (Watson-Gegeo, 2004, p. 340). Language socialization integrates the many facets of humanity expressed by language into an 'ecology' metaphor. Rather than describing a separation between the individual and society, it demonstrates the inter-dependence of these linguistic and social phenomena.

Chapter 3: Foreign Language Classroom

Many students first experience language education within the foreign language classroom. Some researchers have labeled the classroom as unauthentic and restrictive. Critics of foreign language classrooms claim an over-emphasis on grammatical accuracy as a marker of competence, the use of assessments that do not reflect language in use, and a lack of innovative use of new technologies and approaches. Progress in foreign language classes is often measured by grammar-based assessments rather than functional-pragmatic ones. Learners' view of language acquisition as mastery of progressively 'difficult' grammatical forms is directly related to institutional curricular organization and prevalent theories of acquisition order, as well as the general layout of textbooks in use.

However, learning a foreign language also offers individuals access to the artifacts of another culture. The classroom provides a training ground where learners examine the structure and function of the target language. Because language learning is both individually and socially oriented, the characteristics of each factor influence identity development.

Learners who begin studying a second language bring their own attitudes and beliefs about language, culture and general learning to the classroom. Their pre-established first language (L1) identity is reinforced, re-negotiated, or reformulated along with the L2 identity as they move through the succession of lessons and graded assignments. Block (2007) concludes that minimal identity work occurs in a foreign language classroom because learners do not necessarily encounter formative moments unmediated by the L1 self. Kramsch (2000), however, remarks on the ability of learners to create their own community of practice. As with international English varieties being

suitable for their dedicated contexts, the target language variety expressed in a classroom context also find its base in the interactions of the learners.

In appropriating target culture 'signs', learners create a new context for its practice. This "third space" (Bhatt, 2008) is where foreign language learners develop communicative competence. Communicative competence has two requisite conditions: Learners need to develop an awareness of their own language. And, they need the impetus to apply and compare that knowledge to the target language culture (Gutierrez, 2008). Learners begin to understand the complexities of their own language through classroom study of the target language. They also begin to select and use functional language that supports their new communicative needs. The process of integrating a new language into one's cognitive and psychological base requires time. The reinforcement and validation learners experience inside the classroom encourages a shift in their self-assigned/ claimed identity.

Identity, though constructed from within, also responds to external, cultural influences. Race, gender, and socioeconomic status mark individuals in their home context, but language learners are somewhat at liberty to choose which markers best define them in the target language once they develop linguistic confidence. The idea that classroom learners ultimately plan to travel abroad to interact with native speakers neglects the multilingual resources available in the local context. Classroom learners may indeed engage with native speakers, heritage speakers, and bilinguals in their own neighborhoods. Depending on immigration trends, population growth and other demographic shifts, learners may find themselves preferring to engage in the communities of practice around them rather than imagining a far-off context.

Donato and McCormick (1994) focus on the emergence of language learning strategies within a language classroom. Their work supports the idea that cultural institutions (e.g. religion and education) and social interactions contribute to cognitive development. The researchers suggest that strategy selection is not individual or arbitrary, but is influenced by instruction and social forces: "Rather investigations of learners' growing use of strategies during their language learning experience emphasize the classroom and the interaction that constitute it as the legitimate domain of study rather than the independent, solitary activity of the learner" (Donato & McCormick, 1994, p. 453). The use of strategies, as mediational tools, can reflect the character of the learning environment and help learners claim or disclaim identities which take up the values of the classroom. In her study of four university female English language learners in China, Gu (2010) points to how identities are constructed in contrast to the target language culture. The learning experience served to reinforce L1 identity construction in terms of gender, locality and nationality. Evidence of L2 identity construction appeared in the learners' report of encounters with native speakers and in comparison to other learners.

Pomerantz (2008) offers a glimpse into the Spanish learner classroom, and details how lexical choices legitimize good language learner identity. Her study data are particularly telling; they capture the negotiation of identities during small group classroom exchanges. The instructor may set the conversation topic, but how the dynamics of the small group play out is certainly dependent on the mediational tools employed by the group members. Young learners in an immersion setting used their L1 to build solidarity with their peer group, but used the L2 to construct their classroom identities (Tarone & Swain, 1995). As the learners matured, L2 use pervaded social

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interactions outside of the classroom, signaling a shift in their comfort with the L2 and in presenting themselves as L2 users.

In a 2004 article, researchers conducted an in-depth investigation on the effects of context for university students of Spanish (Norman Segalowitz et al., 2004). The learners who stayed at home did not show as much linguistic gain as the study abroad group. They had fewer weekly contact hours and no information was given as to the class content. The researchers mention that the classroom interactions were generally short and limited to greetings and other formulaic speech. One can infer that the classroom identity valued in this situation aligned more with institutional and academic goals in grammatical accuracy.

The classroom environment can play a crucial part in the development of a learner's L2 identity. Van Lier (2008) offers an analysis of identity work that holds agency as a central concept. This idea focuses on the learner as an active participant in the language learning process, and by extension, identity construction. "…[A]gency requires that the learner invest physical, mental and emotional energy in the language produced…L2 development is the development of agency through the L2 (or the enactment of an L2 identity)" (van Lier, 2008, p. 178). Learner involvement in the acquisition process harks back to Norton's (1995) idea of "investment." Identity construction occurs whenever learners are engaged cognitively, emotionally and physically. This view considers the degree to which learners accept the values of the classroom context inclusive of possible interlocutors and mediational tools.

Gutierrez (2008) offers a microgenetic analysis of a Spanish language classroom. She compared the outcomes of three tasks which were conducted in either a computerized or paper-based format. The participants engaged in collaborative problem-

solving tasks. As the learners focused on strategies selection, they also negotiated language forms—reconciling their interlanguage forms with the target language forms given during instruction. Gutierrez (2008) examines how discourse markers indicate other-regulation, where the group interaction encourages learners to take up co-constructed L2 forms and internalize them. The internalization of forms is both a linguistic and cognitive activity propelled by the social interaction. In terms of social identity, participants who employ these negotiated forms display solidarity with their learning group.

Each of these studies displays how the classroom provides unique access to mediational tools, interactional encounters, and identity construction. It lies at the intersection of institutional goals, social identities and self-presentation. Although the foreign language classroom defines a boundary between itself and the target language community, learner interactions within this context still influence the development of their L2 identity. The classroom itself is a rich environment where learners display evidence of academic and social orientations. Whether interested in earning a particular grade or preparing for interactions in the target culture, identity work is part of the foreign language classroom. Identity is constructed through external mediation and internal integration. So, the acquisition process is dialectical. The learner discovers, deconstructs and analyzes both the L1 and L2 simultaneously.

Chapter 4: Study Abroad Context

Study abroad is often an important part of foreign language learning, especially in university programs. The study abroad setting offers a new set of social and contextual details. Foreign language students find themselves surrounded with opportunities to express themselves in the L2. Physically distant from the home institution, but still subject to its expectations, study abroad participants are nevertheless poised to flourish linguistically and pragmatically. The imagined encounters of the foreign language classroom are replaced by concretized, lived experiences. Learners discover how to negotiate their identities as legitimate L2 users and as socially competent individuals. Mediational tools learners may encounter in this setting include: increased exposure to media in the L2, varied situations for activating L2 vocabulary and functional language, and more frequent occasions for negotiating L2 identity.

The study abroad setting provides direct contact with the L2 culture and potential conditions for language socialization. The experience for language learners stands to be either positive or negative, depending on how favorably they perceive their interactions in the target culture.

"The gradual process of taking on new roles and identities, of managing activities, and of presenting oneself in terms of knowledge and attitudes has to be accomplished without the active attention, tolerance, and long stretches of informal and relaxed interaction which typifies child language socialization" (Sarangi & Roberts, 2002, p. 199)

A range of studies embody the process of joining, at least temporarily, a target language community and the goal of performing competently, confidently, and appropriately. Among these is a study of university-aged Spanish learners who spent a semester at the Universidad de Alicante in Spain (Norman; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004) .

Tests conducted at the end of the semester showed gains in oral fluency, though not necessarily in grammatical accuracy. The students were able to speak for longer periods of time without unnecessary pauses or hesitations, which implies they did not feel the need to monitor their speech as they conveyed their ideas. Also, they tended to use fewer communication strategies when compared to their at-home counterparts. Study abroad participants in this study seemed better able to manage the pragmatic and linguistic demands of L2 Spanish because of increased language exposure in a variety of micro-contexts. The researchers found a correlation between gains in cognition and fluency; participants became more efficient processors of the L2, perhaps through familiarity with discourse structures and interactional experiences.

Bacon (2002) details the experiences of a British exchange student in Mexico. She describes the Mexican university context as one that values professionalism and internationalization, yet promotes traditional Mexican hierarchical structure in education and society at large. The interviewee designated as "Lily" discovers how to reconcile her assumptions and preconceptions of Mexican university culture during her semester-long experience. Her attitudes toward Mexican culture restricted which roles she was willing to take up and which she rejected. During her time at the university, she negotiated an L2 identity that made her reflect on her national identity and discover strategies for navigating the society of university student culture in Mexico. Particularly, she shifted her perception of her peers when they displayed or discussed material wealth. She learned how certain social values and positions could not be transferred from her home context to the Mexican university context. She also learned to align more closely with her Mexican peers in her interpretation of gendered roles.

"Through the act of expressing their thoughts and ideas, learners constantly organize and reorganize their sense of self and how they see their position in the social world they inhabit" (Jackson, 2008, p. 38) This process of reorientation is well-documented in learner narratives. They present a view of how learners process interactions in the target language culture, cognitively and psychologically. Jackson (2008) shares the excerpts from the narrative of Elsa, a Hong Kong-born Chinese girl who travels to England. She recognizes her linguistic deficiencies and her position outside of the host culture, which she interprets as racism. She objects that the Westerners she encountered in England did not seem to recognize her self-identification as a Hong Konger, rather than a general Chinese or Asian. She engineers a positive relationship with her host mother early in her stay and has ambivalent feelings about her usage of English. Upon her return to Hong Kong she can accept her Cantonese-English bilingualism more readily. Her L2 identity develops as she takes an active role in acquiring appropriate language for communicating with her peers and interacting with her host family. She begins to feel that she can truly invest herself in her L2 identity and move from being on the linguistic periphery to a position of participation.

Kinginger (2003) conveys the poignant narrative of Alice, a young woman who spends about four years in France. Her extended stay forced her to reconsider her approach to language learning and her basis for L2 identity construction. Alice overcomes a series of personal hardships to put herself through school and finally study abroad in France. She imagined an idealized version of France, a place where she would be accepted and where she could participant alongside native French.

When Alice first began studying in France she was hopeful and enthusiastic. She had worked hard to save money and she had sacrificed by working long hours to pay for

per trip. When she arrived in France she was placed in advanced level intensive courses, which increased her confidence in her language skills. Because of her success on the placement test, she was viewed by instructors as competent. Still, she was unsure whether she could handle being in France. In the months prior to her trip, she redoubled her efforts to improve her grammatical accuracy and gain as much language practice as possible. She had imagined that France would be a place where people would be cultured, at least in comparison to Americans. She had an idealized concept of French people as sophisticated and cultured, and she intended to join in the cultural conversations. However, she found that members of the French speaking community in Cannes and Lille were closed and cold and aloof. She seemed unable to gain access to friendships with peers in her university classes. In fact, she found her identity recast by the people she was not given the opportunity to interact with. She felt herself and outsider, ineligible to build relationships with her classmates, largely because of extralinguistic reasons. The negative experiences with the French university students changed her perspective on language learning. She had hoped to belong to a community of cultured, welcoming peers, but found that she was often excluded.

Alice also had to adjust to a new institutional context. She felt somewhat frustrated at the differences between university classrooms in France and those in the United States. French students had multiple conversations around her and did not include her. She could not hear the professor during the lecture, nor did the professor attempt to interact with her. She had hoped to develop her competence in French among French people, perhaps her French classmates. But, when they didn't welcome her into their midst, the L2 identity she hoped for was shattered. There even was a time when she felt suicidal, but she managed to create her own community by socializing with people in

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bars and at parties. She made friends with her neighbors and created an atmosphere of positive energy around herself. Where the French university classmates made her feel unwanted and somehow unworthy of studying French, she carved out her own story of success, her own brand of culture, and her own version of France.

The study abroad context gives language learners the opportunity to interact with expert-participants in the target language culture. Over the duration of study, study abroad participants are able to discover which facets of their L1 self can be transferred to the L2 culture. They also learn what new roles the need to take up in order to participate more fully within the context. Learners must also acknowledge, and perhaps shift, their attitudes toward the language culture, the language learning process, institutional authority, and peer-peer interaction. They become observers and practitioners. They learn to anticipate patterns of discourse and modify their language production to fit the expectations of their interlocutors. They come to realize that their sense of L2 self is co-constructed as they negotiate their complexity with the individuals, groups and institutions they encounter.

Chapter 5: Face-to-Face Interaction

Many learners gain a great deal of metalinguistic knowledge of the L2, but experience anxiety at the prospect of actually speaking it. In intimidating idea is the concept of having a conversation with a more experience interlocutor. A face-to-face interaction requires the learner to engage every aspect of his communicative, linguistic and pragmatic resources. The interactional context varies by the moment, forcing bother interlocutor to adapt. Learner performance in an interaction can help build their confidence in their command of the L2, reinforce their understanding of L2 discourse rules, and encourage them to initiate encounters thereafter. Unsuccessful interactions can deflate a learner's confidence and cause hesitation at later occurrences. Ultimately, any interaction will help learners to self-evaluate, generating a view of their competence in relation to situational demands. Learners can take advantage of formulaic language in this context and look to their interlocutors to supply appropriate functional language.

Wantanabe (2008) investigated differences in the interactions of L2 learners of different proficiency levels. This was an investigation of how intermediate learners managed interactions with high and then low proficiency task partners. The six exchanges were coded to account for language-related episodes and to determine the patterns of interaction. Wantanabe found that the learners felt more comfortable in completing the writing task when they could exchange ideas with their partner. When the intermediate learners dominated the process with less proficient partners or became passive with more advanced peers, they were less satisfied. Worthy of note, is that the female triad seemed to complete the task with the most successful patterns of interaction. In such tasks, identity reinforcement, or deflation, results as a function of task management and partner evaluation. Similarly, Huong (2007) investigated how beneficial

the addition of a more experienced peer might be to a learner group. The older, more knowledgeable peer helped to organize the group work and keep the other members on task. This social identification as a leader within the group made task completion more efficient. For students who value collective identity, there may be some conflict in arriving at operational goals during small group work.

A study of identity negotiation during French service encounters delineates how identities are interpreted and asserted (Riley, 2006). Data compiled from semi-structured interviews reveal how identities are constructed and maintained. Riley (2006) explains, "By laying claims to membership of a particular social category, speakers aim to establish their competence (knowledge, experience) in the relevant domain, thereby confirming their credibility" (p. 308) . One way language learners may compensate for linguistic deficiencies is to preface the interaction by alerting their interlocutor of their status. The learner may indeed by competent, but as a courtesy, they provide additional information to their interlocutor. Self-identification can be accepted or rejected depending on whether or not the interlocutor is sympathetic, and ultimately support or threaten the learner's L2 identity.

Piller's (2002) study of advanced foreign language learners who, on occasion, passed as native speakers examines how L2 performance can adhere to the local social norms. She collected information on multinational couples who had acquired one another's dialects and slang. In limited instances, native speakers could not detect a foreign accent until a few minutes into the conversation. She makes two interesting conclusions: First, L2 achievement may be audience-specific, often likely to occur in service situations. In service encounters, both interlocutors can expect that a request of some kind will be made by one party, and then the other party will respond in a certain

fashion. Perhaps the linguistic predictability and limitation allow advanced learners to expertly manage the interaction. Second, Piller notes that L2 creativity may be misinterpreted by native speakers as an error. So, when puns or jokes in the L2 fail, it may be because native-speaker interlocutors assume the learner-speaker has gotten confused. One participant reported, however, that she felt most linguistically creative in the company of her husband and a close friend of theirs. She was willing to take risks and try out more advanced constructions with this more intimate audience. She indicated that she felt more at ease, which made her less self-conscious when speaking her second language. Piller ultimately concludes that passing as a native-speaker is an identity claim. It can be construed as a dishonest claim, but it is supported by a mastery of the sociolinguistic norms of a locality. In such instances, the L2 learner can fully express meaning before battling linguistic form during the interaction.

Young and Miller (2004) detail a situated learning process between an ESL writing instructor and an adult Vietnamese learner. The learner moved from the periphery of the discourse toward the center, taking up a more and more active role. At the onset, the instructor gave explicit instructions on the order and expectations at each step in the discourse pattern. At the end of six weeks, the learner had become familiar with the process and felt confident enough to act as an autonomous agent for a few of the steps in than the discourse order, improving the composition he created with little assistance from the instructor. The repetition of this discourse gave the learner an overview of the process that he was able to bring with him to the next encounter. As his knowledge and comfort with the discourse pattern increased, the number of self-originated corrections increased.

Hall (2009) describes how language learners familiarize themselves with classroom interactional practices. The Initiation-Respond-Feedback (IRF) process allows

learners to predict the next stage of discourse and prepare their language production to fit the model. The enactment of this interactional process allows learners to attend to forms and anticipate the sequence of demands. All the students who are present during the interaction benefit from this process because they can internalize new linguistic forms, witness the construction of coherent units of thought, and evaluate their own ideas about how the language works. After having been presented with the new grammatical form and in observation of the teacher's feedback, students in later turns seemed to use the new form with little additional assistance from the teacher. Hall questions, however, whether or not the learners have truly learned the new form. She inquires: How might these learners perform outside of the classroom? Her query underscores the importance of learner agency- that learners need to be active participants in the language learning process.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Because language learner identity is socially constructed, the characteristics of the learning context can affect the development and negotiation of L2 identity. The foreign language classroom, the study abroad setting, and face-to-face interactions contribute to how learners to develop and regulate their L2 identity. A sociocultural view of identity construction emphasizes the importance of social context, interpersonal interactions and learner attitudes. Sociocultural approaches allow for a denser interpretation of exchanges between language learners and more experienced interlocutors. Viewing learners as learner-participants also endows them with agency and recognizes their individual goal orientations.

In the classroom context, learners are encouraged to pursue grammatical accuracy. It is not that communicative skills are unimportant, but rather that academic expectations often override students' interest in forging a viable L2 identity. Learners are constantly moving between stages of other-regulation and self-regulation as they receive instruction on forms and engage in grammar-related tasks. Identity is co-constructed as learners operate in the zone of proximal development, the dynamics of the group catalyzing more complex performance in the L2. Learners negotiate a balance between individual goals, academic goals and institutional goals, as well as maintain rapport with their peers. Gains in L2 proficiency stand to earn learners increased authority within the learner group, but this achievement will not likely topple the learners' allegiance to the social group. The classroom itself is a complex context. Its resources can be evaluated for cultural value and prestige; for instance, classrooms with technology may afford the possibility of engaging in electronic correspondence with native L2 speakers. Likewise, contextual details such as the classroom atmosphere, textbook and materials availability,

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and seating arrangement all contribute to the conduciveness of the learning environment. The language learning classroom is a place where learner subjectivities must be recognized.

The study abroad environment challenges learners to truly consider their stance in relationship to their nationhood, ethnicity, gender, social position and core values. Identity construction in this arena is also co-constructed. Learners are in full contact with the target language culture, norms, and ideology. They learn to adapt their language, gestures and other behaviors to conform to the norms of the target language culture. Becoming a more active participant may require learners to set aside preconceived notions of the cultural system, idealized conceptualizations of target culture inhabitants, and uninformed estimations of their linguistic and pragmatic abilities. The study abroad experience allows learners to adapt their L1 identities and negotiate functional L2 identities. Not only can they imitate the behavior and language choices of those around them, but also carve out a new space for themselves within the boundaries of the target culture. The study abroad environment allows learners to develop linguistic competence in formal and informal situations, to understand discourse patterns present in media and social interactions, and to build pragmatic skills by interacting with native speakers. Also, learners need to manage social relations with other language learners with whom they are familiar. At the same time, study abroad students must stay cognizant of the institutional goals.

In face-to-face interactions, learners (re)position themselves over the course of an exchange. A single conversation can reveal a plethora of stances. Learner confidence in face-to-face interactions may improve as they practice the discursive structures of the target language and improve their intelligibility. In face-to-face interactions, interlocutors

must co-construct meaning, clarifying and repairing where communication breaks down. Even over a short exchange, ideological stances, political positions and cultural norms are evident. Learners gain new awareness of the similarities between themselves and their interlocutors as they position themselves as active participants in a conversational sequence. Even in instances of pragmatic failure, learners can contribute to the shared meaning by asking questions, asserting the propositional content of their utterance or reorganizing their approach to the topic. When language learners have unsuccessful communicative experiences, they still capitalize on an opportunity to improve listening comprehension and oral production skills. Learners who are concerned about these particular skills can benefit from exposure to at-speed exchanges to develop an ear for the ways more experienced speakers link words and employ colloquialisms.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

Language learner identity is socially and individually constructed. Learners position themselves relative to the situation at hand and take an active role in perceiving themselves and others around them. Sociocultural approaches examine the importance of interpersonal interaction on the negotiation of L2 identity. Van Lier (2008) suggests that language learner identity develops as learners participate more fully in the target language culture. He explains that:

> …every perception of the target language is simultaneously an act of self-perception. Learning an L2 and becoming engaged in a new culture thus involves adjusting ones' sense of self and creating new identities to connect the known to the new. (van Lier, 2008, 177)

In the foreign language classroom, learners negotiate a sense of self that reflects their level of comfort within the learning environment. Learners can engage with the target language individually, as in private speech (Anton, DiCamilla and Lantolf, 2003), or as part of a pair or group. Private speech is a type of self-regulation in which learners direct language at themselves, by talking through a new or difficult grammatical form or by repeating what they notice in the input. During group work, students can operate in the ZPD where they contribute to and benefit from the knowledge co-constructed during the interaction. Instruction that addresses the characteristics of the particular foreign language classroom context and responds to the goals and interests of the individual learners can help learners become more autonomous agents of their own language acquisition process. Learners who display agency, an important concept in van Lier's (2008) interpretation of SCT, set and evaluate their own and goals in relations to their classroom interactions and even in imagined encounters beyond the classroom. Van Lier

(2008) recommends several pedagogical approaches that may encourage learner-initiated, rather than teacher- or institution-initiated, activity among language learners. They include project-based, task-based, and content-based approaches; these approaches reinforce learners' use of the L2 as a tool rather than an end. Similarly, situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Young and Miller, 2004) acknowledges how language affects learner identity and motivation; in the foreign language classroom, these approaches may offer additional information on language learner agency and initiative rather than merely grammatical accuracy (Firth and Wagner, 1997; Block, 2007).

Sociocultural approaches to L2 identity address current concerns in SLA, by providing emic views of learner processes. They erase the boundaries between the individual and the group, between the agent and the context. Sociocultural approaches display how each component of an interaction is dynamic, multiple and varied. Interlocutors take up multiple positions, contextual factors shift, and social environments change. Examining how language learners identify themselves and others sheds light on the content, quality and quantity of their language output. In this way, the poststructuralist framework can work alongside the ecological perspective for noting individual learner agency and demonstrating different spheres of social identity.

Identity work occurs during the process of language acquisition, no matter the context. Language emerges along with cognitive and emotional development (Granger, 2004), and learning a foreign language gives learners a new sense of who and how to be in the world. Various contexts provide models for learners to imitate, and, if they choose, appropriate. The encounters language learners have with other interlocutors, whether they be experts or novices, help them to monitor their own linguistic development, evaluate their communicative competence and (re)define their identity within the context. "Thus

individual agency is a situated, negotiated experience and identities emerge in the interaction between students' experiences and their social interpretations, over time"(Murphy, 2008, p. 162).

Future studies can take an in-depth look at L2 computer mediated identities. Internet environments are variable and digitally co-constructed by the participants in the community. The digital context redefines how identities are constructed over space-time and how selves are (mis)represented. The modality of interaction could also reveal degrees of confidence in the L2 identity. Some learners may feel comfortable in a strict written chat, but may find themselves somewhat challenged during audio- and video-based interactions. In this context, social identity can be constrained by a language learner's digital literacy. A study of how software and Internet capabilities influence the performance of L2 identities would be very interesting.

Also, further information on multilingual language learners is needed. Many studies focus on monolingual native speakers of English, but the perspectives and strategies of multilinguals can add to the body of knowledge. Bhatt (2008) discusses how code-switching between Hindi and English creates an identity suitable for an alternative context which is neither local nor part a foreign community. A similar idea is echoed in Rell and Rothman's (2007) study of how Spanish defines Mexican-American identity. Of particular interest is how languages are prioritized, how social environments are analyzed, which strategies help them to establish and maintain rapport, and how the identify themselves within the milieu of multiple languages.

A final area for further study is how motivation is related to language leaner identity. Dörnyei has presented a revision of his theory of L2 motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). Rather than seeing integrative motivation as a desire to join a target

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language group, it has been reconceptualized as an internal identity negotiation process. Dörnyei's (2009) "L2 Motivational Self System" extends from a multiple poststructuralist view (Pomerantz, 2008) of the individual to offer three defining concepts: First, the *Ideal Self*, refers to individual goals and aspirations. Next, the *Ought-to Self,* refers to the socially-constructed sense of duty or responsibility a person feels. Thirdly, the *L2 Learning Experience,* is the impact of the immediate learning environment. This includes the social and contextual factors which have also drawn attention from sociocultural approaches. Successor studies may seek to test and integrate this theory of L2 motivation in a variety of contexts, especially as it relates to identity construction. Such studies may seek both cognitive and sociological evidence for the construction of motivation and social identity. As suggested by Block (2007), continued study of psychoanalytic approaches to identity negotiation may reveal a more salient connection between individual and social identities. Dörnyei's (2009) theory may succeed in serving as a bridge between psychoanalytic (Granger, 2004) and sociocultural approaches.

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