Identity Formation in Globalizing Contexts
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edited by
Christina Higgins

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Preface

Through engaging with the new millennium contexts of transnationalism, intercultural global contact zones, and the consumption of globalized media and technology, this book explores how the globalizing contexts of the early 21st century are affording people with new opportunities for identity formation as they acquire and use additional languages. More people are experiencing increased connectivity as a result of technology, migration, travel, educational opportunities, and global business. Accordingly, this volume examines how people identify with additional languages and communities under these new conditions. As the chapters show, globalizing conditions make languages increasingly difficult to compartmentalize or locate with reference to particular, bounded communities or cultures. Many transnational individuals do not simply emigrate or immigrate in a linear fashion, but instead frequently shuttle between communities. Other transnationals remain within transnational communities, even after “relocating” across national borders, thus calling into question key concepts in applied linguistics such as language socialization, acculturation, and identity reconstruction. Those who study abroad or live as expatriates locate new, intercultural spaces, rather than necessarily acquiring additional identities through language acquisition. Similarly, learners who engage intensively with globalized popular culture and technology are forging new spaces for additional language use and identity formation. Across the volume, the authors explore how language learners negotiate their sense of self as they experience these new contexts and how they integrate these experiences with their previous subjectivities.

This book grew out of a colloquium titled “Negotiating the self in another language: Discourse approaches to language learning as cross cultural adaptation,” presented at the International Pragmatics and Language Teaching Conference, a conference at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa in 2007. All of the papers presented at that conference appear in this volume, in more expanded form, in addition to six additional chapters. At a more personal level, this book has its origins in my own identity as a “rootless” person – I have no hometown, having grown up in a military family in the U.S., which means my family moved frequently – and in my experiences with language learning and use. I organized the colloquium in 2007 after having spent several consecutive summers doing research in Tanzania, where I had begun to recognize firsthand the prospects of developing an additional self as a result of learning and using an additional language. In my case, I first learned Swahili as part of
my graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and as a graduate student, I had the opportunity to spend a summer living with a family in Arusha, Tanzania, where I could immerse myself in language learning. I then spent concentrated periods of time in Tanzania carrying out fieldwork, starting in 2001. Despite these relatively short periods of immersion into Swahili language and culture, I felt tremendous encouragement from Tanzanians to think of myself as mswahili (‘a Swahili person’), rather than as a visitor, but I often resisted this idea since I felt too much like a rootless global citizen, not connected to any one particular place. In my university context in Hawai‘i, I teach in a global contact zone – a context familiar to many academics – where graduate students hailing from many different backgrounds develop intercultural points of view about themselves and others, and frequently research these very processes in their course papers. These experiences led me to pursue an organized approach to the topic of negotiating the self through language learning and allowed me to look for common ground with other scholars working on these topics.

This book is in large part influenced by the work of scholars who have examined language and identity in applied/sociolinguistics for many years. Aneta Pavlenko’s work has long stimulated my interests in exploring the discursive construction of the self in relation to language learning, power relations, gender identities, and cross-cultural differences. Bonny Norton’s research has also played a central role in encouraging me to explore how language learners can experience agency as they learn and use their additional languages, and her work has highlighted the importance of paying attention to the ways that language is symbolic capital. David Block’s work has opened the door for me to relate theories of globalization to second language identities, and Jan Blommaert’s contributions in the sociolinguistics of globalization have inspired me to focus my interests more sharply on globalizing contexts and identity.

I gratefully acknowledge the patience of the contributing authors as they endured the long process that edited volumes sometimes require. I also want to especially thank Richard Watts, series editor, for his kind reassurances and his help in keeping the book on track.
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Chapter 1
The formation of L2 selves in a globalizing world

Christina Higgins

1. Introduction

Additional language (L2) learning in the current, globalizing era provides opportunities for people to develop and enact new identities that are no longer necessarily tied to traditionally defined ethnolinguistic, national, or cultural identities. Instead, and in line with theories of globalization that place *hybridity* as a central feature of new millennium globalization (Nederveen Pieterse 2009), the contributions in this volume strive to document how individuals learn and use additional languages in the contexts of cultural mélange and new identity zones afforded by globalizing flows of people, ideas, and technology. While the topic of L2 identity has been explored by researchers in applied linguistics for more than a decade now (e.g., Block 2007; Miller 2003; Norton [Peirce] 1995, 2000; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004; Toohey 1998), this volume specifically aims to explore how L2 identity construction relates to learners’ engagements with contemporary trends in globalization and their experiences as increasingly transglobal, transcultural individuals.

While globalization has been with us for centuries, this book explores L2 users’ identity construction within the context of the *new millennium*, a phase of globalization that “entails a radical unsettling of the boundaries of social life” (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 83) which is characterized by the intensifying movement of images and symbols across borders and the increasing importance of global terms of reference (Castells 2000; Held et al. 1999; Spring 2001). The exchange of material goods has characterized many scholarly discussions on globalization, but it is the prevalent exchange of symbolic cultural forms, including language, that is the hallmark of new millennium globalization.

The contributions in this volume show that changes in the world such as increased movements of people across borders, globally shared forms of popular culture, and the development of new literacy practices afforded by the Internet require new ways of theorizing identity formation vis-à-vis language
learning and use. Due to large-scale changes in the ways that people move within and between cultures and languages, the book challenges views of language learning as invoking a linear process by which individuals acquire additional languages and are socialized into corresponding communities where they undergo some form of cross-cultural adaptation. Consequently, the terms “target language” and “target culture” often do not relate clearly to the experiences of many transcultural, transnational people as they negotiate identities through learning new languages. Instead, and because of new millennium forms of globalization, new possibilities for self-making have emerged which produce hybrid, in-between, and transcultural identities. These identities are fashioned at the interstices of local and global flows of people, linguistic resources, and space, and they call attention to the need for research on language to examine the fluidity, rather than fixity, of language in the context of globalization.

Rather than linking identity tightly with clear-cut nationalities, ethnicities, or cultures, new millennium globalization requires us to take a deeper look at how identity is formed in relation to mobility and the transgression of modernist boundaries. Following Blommaert (2010: 102), we should be paying attention to the “sociolinguistics of mobile resources,” which emphasizes the ways that people acquire and use their sociolinguistic repertoires within new spaces and forms of cultural production afforded by globalization. As Nederveen Pieterse (2009: 144) argues,

[the moment we shift lenses from sedentary to mobile categories the whole environment and the horizon change: hunting, nomadic pastoralism, fishing, trade, transnational enterprise, and hyperspace all have deterritorialization built in. Why should identity be centered on sedentary rather than mobile categories if mobility defines the species as much as settlement does?]

A focus on mobility and mobile resources, rather than stable categories and boundaries, thus requires a re-conceptualization of the social contexts in which language learning takes place and calls into question the monolithic use of fixed labels such as “native” and “nonnative speaker,” and “target language community.”

The chapters in this book illustrate how new kinds of identities have become available to L2 learners and users as a result of the alternative identity zones provided by increased flows of people, technology, and ideas across cultural, national, and linguistic borders. While the concept of alternative identity zones may conjure up a sense of liminality that is removed from
normative practices, it is actually the case that many “mainstream” contexts have become increasingly hybrid due to these flows. For example, universities in English-dominant nations are now being seen as “global university contact zones” (Singh and Doherty 2004) in which teachers must navigate various cultural orientations to western higher education, sometimes choosing to adapt their practices toward their international students rather than imposing a west-based model for learning. In the United States, school-aged children and adolescents are finding places for belonging on the Internet, where they mix their L1 and L2 when communicating with others who share their linguistic repertoires (cf. Lam 2004; McGinnis et al. 2007), and where they find common ground with others who share their interests in fan fiction, anime and other globally popular cultural forms (Black 2008; Lam 2000). And, in many contexts around the world, lyrical artists draw on the global resource of English, appropriating it to speak for their experiences in their local contexts while simultaneously claiming membership in a shared global hip hop nation (Alim et al. 2009; Pennycook 2007).

2. Intersecting scapes as new contexts for identity construction

New forms of hybrid and alternative identities are possible because of an increasingly interconnected set of scapes, described by Appadurai (1990, 1996) as: 1) ethnoscapes (flows of immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and tourists); 2) technoscapes (the rapid movement of technology across boundaries); 3) finanscapes (rapid flows of money via stock exchanges and other resources); 4) mediascapes (flows of images and information via consolidated media); and 5) ideoscapes (flows of ideas largely emanating from the west which typically espouse an enlightenment worldview). These scapes create new identity zones, but it is not the case that transcultural and new hybrid identities necessarily replace traditional ones. Instead, when these scapes intersect with local languages and well-established cultural practices, a greater range of identities is made available for people, including identities that operate at the tension between traditional and late modern cultural confluences. Appadurai (2000: 5) explains the disjunction that can often result from intersecting scapes:

The various flows we see – of objects, persons, images, and discourses – are not coeval, convergent, isomorphic, or spatially consistent. They are in what I have
elsewhere called relations of disjuncture. By this I mean that the paths or vectors taken by these kinds of things have different speeds, axes, points of origin and termination, and varied relationships to institutional structures in different regions, nations, or societies. Further, these disjunctures themselves precipitate various kinds of problems and frictions in different local situations.

With regard to language learning and identity, one consequence of disjuncture is that L2 users may choose to resist particular identities associated with an additional language, as was the case for Nadia, a teen-aged Arabic-speaking Egyptian girl who was living in Cyprus and used Cypriot Greek as her second language (Skapoulli 2004). Though Nadia’s Cypriot friends encouraged her to wear “sexy” clothes, go to discotheques, and date boys, she chose not to participate in these practices, adhering instead to her Coptic parents’ expectations to be a “moral” girl. Alternatively, language learners may identify with transcultural flows (Pennycook 2007) to fashion new identities, as was the case with Almon, a teen-aged boy from Hong Kong who immigrated to the United States (Lam 2000). Though he described his English abilities as poor with regard to his experiences in high school, Almon designed a new identity for himself outside of school by creating a much-admired J-pop website, which allowed him to connect with peers around the globe who shared his interests.

Of course, L2 users can respond to global cultural flows in a myriad of ways. This volume explores the range of selves L2 speakers express as a consequence of their engagement with social-discursive practices that take place in, and sometimes create, transcultural spaces. Divided into three parts, the volume draws attention to three aspects of globalization which have become increasingly salient in people’s lives: 1) the blurring of ethno-national boundaries due to greater degrees of transnationalism, multiple belongings, and shuttling between communities (e.g., Canagarajah 2005; Warriner 2007); 2) the development of intercultural awareness, and third spaces that result from border crossing and language learning (e.g., Byram 1997, 2008; Kramsch 1993, 2006); and 3) the impact of globally distributed popular culture and increased participation in cyberworlds (e.g., Black 2008; Lam 2004; Thorne 2008). In looking at these three areas, it becomes clear that there is need to complexify the concept of community in L2 research. This construct has been central for investigating whether and to what degree learners affiliate with particular groups, and hence, with particular L2 identities. However, new millennium contexts expand how we conceptualize learners’ communities, and in turn raise new questions about the formation of L2 identities.
3. From members of communities to global citizens of the new millennium

Rather than asserting that the world has become a “global village,” the chapters in this volume show that language learning has created, and been created by, the opportunity to forge new kinds of communities due to the intersecting scapes of globalizing social life. In Appadurai’s (1990, 1996) terms, changing ethnoscapes increasingly produce transnational communities, rather than nation-bound identifications; mediascapes and technoscapes provide people with new worlds that may only exist in cyberspace and in the imagination; and movement across the globe for travel, education and work alters people’s ideoscapes, challenging one-to-one correspondences between linguacultures and communities.

Still, much scholarship on language learning often references a target community, a term that refers to the idea of a mostly cohesive group of people who speak a (standard) language in relatively homogeneous ways, and whose cultural practices likely differ significantly from those who study the target language of that community (cf. Doerr and Kumagai 2010). Accordingly, categories and descriptors related to the construct of community are dichotomous in much applied linguistics literature. Learners who are labeled “non-native speakers” are described as desiring access to this (often mythic) community, and their linguistic and social competencies are compared with idealized members of the target community, who are described as “native speakers” (of standard language varieties).

The point to be made here is that the assumptions underlying these visions of language learners and the communities in which they use their additional languages do not relate well to the contexts of actual L2 use, particularly in the era of new millennium globalization. Next, I review three broad areas of research in applied linguistics that have recognized this mismatch and which provide several points of departure for this volume.

3.1. Motivation, identity, and possible L2 selves

Within social-psychological approaches to language learning, a significant amount of attention has been paid to integrative motivation, a concept described by Gardner and Lambert (1972: 132) as “a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group.” Successful L2 learners who exhibit integrative motivation are “willing to identify with
members of another ethnolinguistic group and take on very subtle aspects of their behaviour” (1972: 135). This vision of the relationship between learners and success in L2 learning constructs target communities as clear-cut groups of people who are identifiable and potentially knowable to the learner. However, researchers studying motivation have recognized for many years now that much language learning takes place in contexts where learners do not have a clear picture of who they will use the language with, thus making it difficult to define the target community in concrete ways. This is especially true for individuals learning and using English as an additional language, particularly in multilingual contexts such as South Africa (Coetzee Van-Rooy 2006), and among other multilingual and L2 communities which use English as a lingua franca. As Sridhar and Sridhar (1992: 97) argue, the sociolinguistic realities of languages and community affiliations demand that “the whole aspect of integrative motivation should be re-examined in terms of a desire among learners to join an indigenous group of English language speakers or a vague international one rather than a group of foreign native speakers.”

In consideration of these points, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) relocates the concept of integrativeness (and community) to the realm of the self in his L2 Motivational Self System framework. Moving away from concrete and bounded notions of community toward which learners are assumed to develop aspirations of belonging, Dörnyei advocates looking at integrativeness with reference to the possible selves a learner might experience. In other words, instead of integrating with a specified community, learners can develop ways of more consciously identifying with their Ideal L2 Selves as a way to motivate their own learning. As Dörnyei explains, if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, then the Ideal L2 Self is a powerful motivator.

One possible characteristic of some learners’ Ideal L2 Selves which directly relates to the learning of English in globalizing contexts is what Yashima (2002, 2009) calls international posture. Yashima uses this term to describe how Japanese learners of English in Japan express their motivations to learn and use the language as a way to connect to the world outside of Japan. Importantly, learners whose Ideal L2 Selves embody an international posture do not necessarily desire to connect (only) with communities in English-dominant nations such as the United States or Australia. Instead, such learners are more likely to have an interest in foreign affairs relating to many nations, to desire intercultural contact with various groups, and to express a willingness or interest in living and working outside their home country. The concept of international posture thus moves away from strict linkages between language, community, and culture in language learning,
and it aligns well with the new global contact zones and multicultural spaces that individuals operate in.

3.2. Communities of practice (CoP) research

Within social approaches to language learning, models for language learning and use have also drawn on relatively concrete notions of community with regard to language learning. One of the most influential paradigms in this work comes from Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s (1991) work on communities of practice (CoP), which theorizes learning as a situated activity that must take into account newcomers’ access to new communities as well as other factors that may constrain their participation as full members. Learning is a situated activity in which newcomers may be apprenticed to specific communities and become fuller participants in these communities through exposure to the new communities’ norms. In this view, learning is an “evolving form of membership” in the target community (Lave and Wenger 1991: 53).

In research on L2 learners, the CoP model has most often been used in longitudinal studies that explore how learners’ access to and membership in academic communities affords them opportunities for academic success (e.g., Duff 2002; Hellermann 2008; Morita 2004; Toohey 1998; Zuengler and Cole 2005). The bulk of this research focuses on how L2 newcomers acquire linguistic forms and interactional routines alongside specialized kinds of knowledge in order to participate more fully in academic practices. As these researchers show, however, learners’ engagement with new CoPs is usually dependent on degrees of access and acceptance by the L1 speakers in these communities, and newcomers often struggle to find ways to legitimize their own forms of participation, often because of the failure of L1 speakers to create inclusive atmospheres for them to operate in as legitimated participants. Immigrant language learners are often marginalized in school contexts by other students, who may ignore them entirely (Miller 2003) or who may single them out for exhibiting “fresh off the boat” characteristics (Talmy 2008). Teachers may unwittingly marginalize L2-speaking students as well by reifying their “foreign” status through class activities that require them to act as cultural experts and to report on aspects of their home languages and cultures (e.g., Duff 2002). Adult immigrants often experience social exclusion as well (Norton 2000; Vitanova 2010), and, in spite of living in the “target community,” many immigrants often struggle to find opportunities to use their L2 in interactionally rich environments (Warriner 2007).
Researchers interested in the social contexts of language learners have increasingly drawn attention to the reality that many L2 speakers may not identify as “newcomers” who aspire to belong in new communities, but instead may affiliate more strongly with other transnationals who share similar experiences. Block’s (2006) study of immigrants in London demonstrates how some Latino immigrants maintain identity ties to diasporic populations of Spanish speakers, rather than identifying with the “target” language speakers of their new communities. This can be due to unappealing identity options that transnational migration can lead to, in conjunction with the availability of various communities to identify with. For example, Carlos, an immigrant from Colombia, found himself placed into a lower socio-economic class when he arrived in London, which led him to disaffiliate with the L1 English speakers who shared his newfound working class status. Carlos had been a university lecturer in philosophy in Colombia, but in London, he worked as a porter. He had little in common with his white working-class co-workers, and he found a much stronger sense of belonging among Spanish-speaking professionals who had also immigrated to London. Similarly, in the context of Toronto, Canada, Goldstein (1996) found analogous responses to opportunities to acculturate among Portuguese women working at a factory. Though the women were offered English classes prior to taking their jobs, they did not attend them since the classes conflicted with the gendered hierarchy in the Portuguese community in which women are expected to look after their families and contribute to the family income, rather than seek opportunities to improve their own lives. Moreover, the women developed a strong sense of community through working together at the factory, where they maintained their Portuguese identities not only through language, but also through gendered identities ascribed to them by their (patriarchal) Portuguese culture.

In addition to research that shows a preference to affiliate with “alternative” and transnational CoPs are studies which demonstrate how L2 speakers’ engagements with new languages and new cultures disrupt bounded perceptions of cultures, nations, and languages. Rather than moving in a linear fashion from the first culture toward the second as a result of socialization, many L2 users move between cultures and languages to find new ways for belonging. For example, Duff (2007) discusses a study of Korean undergraduate students in Canada, whose access to L1 English social networks was limited by their affiliations in Korean networks in British Columbia. These networks were often considered to be more significant to the undergraduates since they would influence their future careers in Korea. Furthermore, in spite of their
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original intentions to form friendships with Anglo Canadians during their university experiences, the undergraduates became more socially networked with 1.5 generation Korean-Canadians who spoke both Korean and English. This generation appealed more to the Korean undergraduates because they could act as language and culture brokers and because they shared more social interests with the Korean students. Since the Korean-Canadians were “both/neither Korean and/nor Canadian/American” (Duff 2007: 316), they provided a more comfortable, transcultural zone for the undergraduate Koreans while studying in Western Canada. Duff’s study illustrates very well how L2 learners’ experiences in border crossing often result in the formation of new, transcultural CoPs, rather than increased participation in existing practices tied to dominant forms of culture.

Similarly, Sánchez (2007) discusses her work with three transnational Latina youths that involved producing a bilingual children’s book which documented their experiences about moving back and forth between California and Mexico. Sánchez found that the young women’s narratives were interwoven into family practices such as collaborative retellings of visits to Mexico, and that the practice of returning to Mexico for important purposes such as visiting a saint’s shrine, attending a quinceañera, or visiting one’s grandparents were dominant themes in the families’ lives. While literacy practices involving bilingualism in Spanish and English and the writing of narratives about living a transnational life were not part of the young women’s educational experiences as sanctioned by their teachers, the project afforded the participants with a new, out-of-school space to express their transnational and translingual selves. Furthermore, the bilingual book offered a countertext to the more prevalent discourses of assimilation and acculturation that typically promote forgetting about one’s past. The project fits well with other research on immigrants that reveals the importance of their ties to their country of emigration and to their new identities as transnationals, rather than identification as acculturating newcomers (cf. Kouritzin 2000; Menard-Warwick 2005).

3.3. Post-structuralist perspectives on L2 subjectivities

Another important strand of identity research takes post-structuralist approaches to theorize how L2 users develop a sense of self through finding their voice in their L2. In contrast with CoP approaches that investigate how newcomers gain access to networks of “target language” users and practices, post-structuralist approaches focus on the processes by which L2 selves are
formed discursively. These L2 selves are often imposed on learners, due to dominant discourses, othering, or hegemonic processes, but learners can and do choose to resist these ascribed positionalities, developing subject positions based on their projected visions of who they are. In other words, the formation of subjectivities is an ongoing negotiation between the self and other, as mediated through discourses, resistance, and human agency. Rather than creating fixed identities for learners, including the identification of a specific “target community,” post-structuralist researchers typically view learners as negotiating their identities in “sites of struggle” (cf. Norton 2000). It is clear that researchers who embrace a post-structuralist stance treat L2 learning and use as a highly multidirectional and multidimensional process. What most of this research has yet to engage with, however, is the role of globalized identities in these sites of struggle.

Central to this line of research is the scholarship of Aneta Pavlenko (1998, 2001a, 2001b; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Pavlenko and Norton 2005), who has drawn on positioning theory (Davies and Harré 1990) to theorize L2 learning and use as “discursive assimilation,” “self-translation,” and the “re-positioning” of the self in a new language environment. Pavlenko explains that different languages and cultures provide different subject positions for individuals to take up, and because subjectivities are not entirely shared across cultures, learners often must undergo discursive assimilation in order to find ways “to ‘mean’ in the new environment” (2001a: 133). Focusing on the loss and reconstruction of new identities among immigrants in the United States, Pavlenko’s work illustrates how some L2 users, particularly women, find the L2 subject positions they experience to be more appealing than the gendered discourses that shaped their L1 identities. Similar research shows that women often struggle to find a sense of belonging in another culture and another language if their gendered subjectivities clash with their self-concepts. Karen Ogulnick (1998) expresses this clash in her autobiographic diary study, in which she documented her own struggles of her own struggles with her positioning as a western woman in Japan. Ogulnick writes about her experiences with her Japanese female friend (Pavlenko 2001a: 160):

Satoko and I seemed to find ourselves in a more marginalized social space. Whereas single men in Japan are referred to in a more positive light, as becheraa [bachelor], Japanese expressions for single women portray them as “old” and “unwanted”: old Christmas cake [furui kurisumasu keiki], “unsold merchandise” [urenokori], and “spinster” [orudo misu] (Ogulnick 1998: 90–91)
Conversely, Armour (2001) provides an example of affiliation with the subject positions offered through L2 learning and use that aligns with a specific target language and culture more than any new spaces afforded by global transcultural flows. In his study of Anglo-Australians studying in Japan, he found that some of the participants were able to re-constitute themselves as more Japanese than Australian because of their sense of belonging in their new setting. He describes Lola’s experience with *identity slippage*, a term with post-structuralist origins that he uses to describe the phenomenon of shifting from one’s enculturated identity to showing characteristics of an acculturated identity that has been activated by L2 learning and use:

They [her parents] noticed her shuffling walk from wearing scuffs in the home; the way she covered her mouth with her hand when she laughed, because Japanese women think it unladylike to laugh aloud; her clipped accent and lack of colloquialisms, which she avoided because they confused her Japanese hosts. Her parents were also surprised at the way she “slurped” her foods, but this is quite acceptable to the Japanese, accustomed to eating with chopsticks (2001: 10–11)

Other participants in Armour’s study did not identity-slip. One of the male sojourners, Boris, resisted acculturating to a Japanese self by rejecting polite forms of language, and he cited Japanese people’s low expectations of foreigners as the key reason for his behavior (Armour 2001: 14, italics in original):

I use plain forms all the time. *I couldn’t care what type I use* and nor do they [his Japanese colleagues]. I think that’s the biggest crock I ever learned in Japanese. All those -masu and keigo forms are really important to understand but *I don’t think Japanese people ever expect a Westerner* that is half good at Japanese to be able to deal with all those nuances perfectly. I think if anything they just like the fact that you can speak Japanese [. . .]

Post-structuralist work such as Pavlenko’s and Armour’s illustrates that L2 learners are always subject to discourses that position them in certain ways. However, these discourses are often characterized rather dichotomously as emanating from either the L1 or the L2 context, rather than from any new, transcultural spaces or intercultural perspectives that may result from the processes of globalization. While it may be the case that many discourses do construct L1 and L2 contexts with reference to rigidly defined ethnolinguistic and national boundaries, it is also the case that some L2 learners are able to
transgress these compartmentalized associations among language, culture, and identity.

Clear examples of such transgression are found in Ibrahim’s (1999, 2003, this volume) research on African immigrants in a secondary school in Ontario. Rather than acquiring mainstream Canadian English, male students strongly identified with Black stylized English, which they accessed through the global resource of hip hop and rap music. Ibrahim (1999) views their acquisition of “Black ESL” as a form of resistance to their positioning as outsiders in Canada, and he describes their choice as a “deliberate counterhegemonic undertaking” (1999: 365) which provided the boys with a voice in a world where they were often positioned as problematic immigrants who needed to assimilate, yet were simultaneously not welcomed into mainstream Canadian culture. Their use of a language associated with a global popular culture arguably afforded them a space to belong to that was not tied directly to Anglo-Canada nor to their immigrant identities, but to an alternative identity option.

It is clear that post-structuralist work on L2 identity has been a very productive approach for exploring the agency that learners exhibit in responding to their new contexts, and it is also an insightful framework for analyzing the powerful and often hegemonic discourses that constrain learners. Importantly, post-structuralism also offers researchers with the conceptual apparatus for theorizing how L2 learners transgress boundaries — whether linguistic, cultural, and national — through forging new identity zones within transcultural flows. The chapters in this book seek to further establish what new discourses and subjectivities are made possible in the hybrid and alternative spaces afforded by globalizing contexts.

4. The consequences of global flows and shifting scapes for identity formation

Language learning and use in the new millennium call for reconsidering how the links between language and identification are mediated by symbolic aspects of globalization. Rather than only conceptualizing L2 users as “newcomers” who acquire a language in order to communicate with L1 speakers for integrative and instrumental purposes, we need to consider that additional language learning and use may also provide individuals with resources for the re-fashioning of identities in response to global forces. From a post-structuralist perspective, then, language learners are presented with a wider range of subject positions, as Giddens (1991: 5) explains:
The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice filtered through abstract systems. In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options.

Among the various phenomena that could be discussed on the topics of globalization and L2 identities, three recurring themes have emerged which shape the content of this volume. Each of these themes refers to an increased degree of fluidity within and across *scapes* (Appadurai 1990, 1996) that yields a diverse set of opportunities for globalized identity formation.

4.1. **Forming identities within (trans)national ethnoscapes**

The global phenomenon of migration and the dislocation/relocation of refugees and asylum seekers has led to an increasing degree of *transnationalism*, a key characteristic of the late 20th and early 21st century’s ever-changing ethnoscapes. The increased flows of people in search of education and work opportunities, as well as the dislocation of people due to war, famine, and political strife, have had tremendous implications for language learning and identity development. While immigrants and other dislocated/relocated people are often under pressure to adapt to their host countries’ mainstream cultural and linguistic norms, their ties to other migrants from their home countries, or to those who are still living in their home countries, frequently lead them to identify equally, if not more, with others who share affiliations with their home cultures (cf. Block 2006: 16–17; Goldstein 1996). As Fouron and Glick Schiller (2001: 60) explain, transnationals “organize daily economic, familial, religious, and social relations within networks that extend across the borders of two nation-states.” The transnational identifications of such L2 users thus calls for research that engages with how such populations manage their dual and/or in-between status.

At the same time, this research draws attention to the challenges that L2 users face in their daily lives when confronted with perspectives that valorize nation-based identities and literacy practices that tend to promote homogeneous visions of language use. Often, transnationals are expected to use language and to desire cultural affiliations that conform to modernist – and
typically monolithic — conceptions of language, ethnicity, and national identity. For example, in the United States, immigrants in states such as Arizona are increasingly under pressure to speak only English in matters related to state business and in public education (Cashman 2006). However, in the globalizing contexts of late modernity, many transnationals develop what might be called “truncated multilingualism” (Blommaert 2010), a term that refers to multilinguals’ competence in certain registers that serve particular functions, rather than mastery on a par with monolingual L1 speakers of standard varieties. These individuals may be described as resistant language learners, unpatriotic, semilingual, or worse, as “not having a language” due to the mismatch between transnational, translingual realities and modernist ideologies.

The first part of this volume investigates how transnationals and dis/relocated speakers find ways to negotiate these tensions. Analyzing the narratives of Etienne, a Vietnamese-Cambodian refugee living in Canada, Matthew T. Prior shows how narrative positioning can be a powerful tool for inscribing empowered identities in the face of opposition, as it allows L2 users to create their own discursive constructions of belonging. Another response to these tensions may be to maintain stronger ties with contacts in their former locations and with transnational communities, as Dawn Allen illustrates in chapter 3 in her exploration of identities among newcomer adolescents in Montreal, Quebec. Transnational individuals may also find alternative ways to participate in contexts that impose modernist discourses on L2 learners. In chapter 4, Jane Zuengler examines how immigrant adolescents in the United States may choose to explicitly not participate in social activities and practices that they identify as overtly nationalist. She also explores adolescents’ out-of-school practices as a site for transgression of fixed ethnolinguistic and national identities at a community center where many immigrant children spend their free time. Finally, Julia Menard-Warwick focuses on the literacy practices among Spanish-speaking women living in California whose social interactions are primarily located within transnational Spanish-speaking networks. Her ethnographic study shows that the women continue to use Spanish for many of their meaningful literacy practices, while their engagements with English-medium texts remain relatively peripheral to their identity construction.

4.2. Identifying with third spaces among ideoscapes

The second theme emerging from recent studies that engage with new millennium globalization is the importance of intercultural awareness and the
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relevance of *third spaces* (Bhabha 1994; Kramsch 1993) that result from border crossing, study abroad, and intercultural communication (e.g., Byram 1997, 2008). Intercultural awareness is the ability to relativize one’s own value systems, beliefs, and behaviors and to develop the ability to see one’s own culture from the perspective of an outsider. It is an increasingly significant concept in the fields of intercultural communication and peace education, in addition to L2 learning and teaching, all of which are increasingly relevant areas of study for a globalizing world. Language learners who are successful at developing intercultural awareness frequently inhabit a third space, a vantage point from which they can decenter their identities from both their “home” culture and from their “target” culture. Being in a third space allows one to see that all cultures are social constructs shaped by historical events, rather than natural or taken-for-granted entities.

In studies on long-term sojourners, the ability to decenter oneself from any particular culture has led individuals to identify as *global citizens* rather than citizens of any single nation (Kramsch 2009; Piller 2002), and to feel more at home with others who also identify as intercultural. This identification relates well to how Roland Robertson and Habib Haque Khondker have described globalization, which “involves the compression of the entire world, on the one hand, and a rapid increase in consciousness of the whole world, on the other” (1998: 29). Of course, such individuals may encounter difficulty when interacting with others who do not share intercultural or globally conscious perspectives. As Kanno (2003) shows, Japanese students who studied abroad in Canada experienced a great deal of difficulty when they returned to Japan, for they were expected to fit into Japanese cultural norms, which often meant that their proficiency in English was not entirely welcomed. The returnee students in her study often sought one another out in Japan, thus creating a third space to feel at home in.

The second part of this book examines these issues by focusing on the development of a global citizenship perspective through study abroad experiences and expatriate living. Jane Jackson explores how an English language learner from Hong Kong on a study abroad program in England found it necessary to locate herself in a third space as a result of finding it difficult to feel comfortable with her home stay and with people she met through her social networks. In contrast, Celeste Kinginger shows how intercultural awareness can be actively avoided by documenting how Americans in France actively policed the boundaries of their ideoscapes by adhering to U.S. nationalist discourses even after having crossed national borders for the purpose of cultural exchange and language learning. Finally, Christina
Higgins provides a narrative analysis of global citizen expatriates in Tanzania whose global affiliations limit their ability to strongly identify with their local context.

4.3. Constructing identities in mediascapes

Finally, engagements in certain forms of globalized popular culture and cyberworlds have created new kinds of communities for L2 learners and users in which participation is not constrained by nationality, region, or ethnolinguistic community. While a fair amount of recent sociolinguistic work has examined language and globalized popular culture, with perhaps the most attention paid to how hip hop nation language has become a global resource for local identification (cf. Alim et al. 2009; Pennycook 2007), little research thus far has examined how the ever-widening mediascape relates to the development of L2 identities and the implications for language learning. The mediascape is an increasingly central component of people’s lives, and it affords language learners with opportunities to tap into liminal identities that may not be made available to them in traditional language learning contexts.

The third part of the volume begins by exploring how language learners engage with global youth culture and language via the mediascape of hip hop. In chapter 9, Angel Lin and Evelyn Man show how working-class youth in Hong Kong are drawn to hip hop as a way to more strongly identify as English language learners, an identity that is not usually available to them in their mainstream classrooms. In chapter 10, Awad Ibrahim discusses how Black immigrants in Canada align with the racial identities that are attributed to them in part through global hip hop culture and North American racial ideologies about the consumption of popular culture. Chapter 11 turns to the role of anime and manga in the learning and teaching of Japanese. Yumiko Ohara shows how novice Japanese speakers use these resources to fashion new selves that are connected to a transglobal community of like-minded individuals. Finally, Steven Thorne and Rebecca Black extend some of their earlier research on L2 learning in digitally mediated environments (Internet-mediated communication and fan fiction) to focus on the conditions and affordances that L2 participants mobilize in new media contexts.

A common theme across the chapters in this final section is that learners are often engaging in liminal and hybrid varieties of language, in addition to forging new identity zones. Through their use of non-standardized and code-meshed language, the learners display their interest in taking on identities that
are connected to realms of social life that are far removed from those linked to the “standard” varieties that typically fill the pages of language textbooks.

5. Closing discussion

The chapters in this book analyze learners’ experiences across a variety of geographic settings, including Canada, France, Hong Kong, Japan, Tanzania, the United States, and the United Kingdom, and across a number of different additional languages (English, French, Swahili, and Japanese). While much research on globalization in applied linguistics focuses narrowly on English, this volume’s inclusion of languages other than English seeks to demonstrate that global forces are not limited to the world’s most widely spoken language, and that new millennium identities are not strictly tied to English. In fact, a focus on English alone would wrongly perpetuate the homogenization thesis (Holton 2000) of globalization theory in which all cultures are marching steadily toward cultural convergence based on US norms, including the acquisition of mainstream varieties of English. In contrast, the contributions in this volume seem to indicate that the new millennium is providing L2 users with resources for more identity options in a greater range of language varieties, modes, and contexts.
Part I. Forming identities within (trans)national ethnoscapes
Introduction to Part I

Part I addresses identity formation among dis/relocated and transnational people who live amidst and between nations, cultures, and languages. Through exploring the effects of the increasingly fluid *ethnoscape* on L2 learning and use, or the “landscape of persons who constitute the world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals” (Appadurai 1996: 33), we can see how the new social spaces and networks of people wrought by movement and displacement help to create opportunities for identification, and for language learning. Transnationalism is an important common focal point for these chapters, as each one deals with identity formation among immigrants and relocated people who experience some degree of *transnationalization* (Soysal 1994), that is, identity construction that refers both to their points of origin and to their current locations. Transnationalization requires mobile and relocated people to negotiate their identities at the intersection of a three-way relationship between their sending state, their host state, and their network of fellow transnationals.

Studies on transnationalism have typically sought to understand the effects of increased fluidity in the movements of people on societies, economies, and cultural practices. The majority of scholarship on transnationalism is arguably rooted in cultural studies, where scholars have established now widely-circulating terms such as *third space* (Bhabha 1994) and *deterritorialization* (DeLeuze and Guattari 1983), terms that point to a dismantling of conventional borders and boundaries. Though transnationalism, like globalization, is not a brand-new concept, it has reached a new level of intensity over the past few decades, as evidenced by the number of publications dedicated to the topic, with the majority appearing since the late 1990s (Vertovec 2009). The proliferation of academic work in this area has led to the development of an interdisciplinary scholarly field devoted to the multi-sited, multilingual, and multicultural nature of transnationals’ lives, as discussed by Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999: 217):
While back and forth movements by immigrants have always existed, they have not acquired until recently the critical mass and complexity necessary to speak of an emergent social field. This field is composed of a growing number of persons who live dual lives: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders.

At the same time, transnationals intermingle with those who live less “fluid” lives and hence must negotiate the fluidity of transnationalism along with the fixity of nationalism, bounded notions of culture, and clear-cut expressions of ethnolinguistic identity. Hence, how learners navigate this tension is one aspect of identity construction that needs further exploration. In truth, it may be the case that more attention to the effects of mobility and relocation on all populations is needed. With reference to the idea that some people’s lives are not influenced by transnational flows, Appadurai asserts that “the warp of these stabilities is everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move” (1996: 34).

Though applied linguistics has examined the language learning experiences of transnationals for decades, studies that focus on language and language learning in contexts of transnationalism and transnationalization have only appeared in the past decade (e.g., Lam 2000, 2004; Whiteside 2006). Notable contributions include Kanno and Norton (2003a), an edited volume of the Journal of Language, Identity and Education which explored how learners’ imagined communities (Anderson 1983) can shed light on language learning and identity construction. Discussing Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of community of practice (CoP), Kanno and Norton point out that CoP theory provides too concrete a conceptualization of learners’ actual communities of practice. They explain that when individuals learn and use additional languages, they also affiliate with communities “that exist only in the learner’s imagination as well as affiliations – such as nationhood or even transnational communities – that extend beyond local sets of relationships” (Kanno and Norton 2003b: 242). Another significant contribution is Warriner (2007), a special volume of Linguistics and Education dedicated to ethnographic explorations of literacy practices and identity among transnational youth and adults in the United States. The volume explores how learners make use of informal, L1, hybrid, and multimodal literacy practices as they learn and use English as an additional language. The contributions show that learners’ transnational literacy practices are just as implicated in existing inequities experienced by the transnational individuals as they
are in providing the learners with transformative pathways for empowering identification and fuller participation, both in and out of educational contexts.

In accord with these existing studies on transnationalism and language learning, the four chapters that follow challenge the “modernist” relationships between language, culture, and nationality (Blommaert 2010). Modernist visions of the nation-state posit a coterminous boundary of language, culture, and identity alongside geopolitical borders, and they often fail to recognize the wide range of identities that people have developed as they move across national boundaries. As scholarship on transnational communities shows, however, L2 users frequently do not identify as newcomers who aspire to join a target, native-speaking community. Instead, some may find little about the majority culture that is urgent, or even appealing, to invest in (Peirce 1995), including the language used by the majority. Or, learners may feel in-between languages and cultures, identifying with no one particular place, but rather with members of similarly transnational communities that share comparable identifications. Finally, some may develop a transcultural identity, which “blends the preservation of the affective ties of the home culture with the acquisition of instrumental competencies required to cope successfully in the mainstream culture” (Suárez-Orozco 2004: 193).

Through studying learners in the context of North America, these four contributions explore how transnationals experience varying levels of belonging in their new communities, and how the sense of membership and legitimacy in new contexts relates to opportunities to use the L2 in meaningful ways. In Chapter 2, Matthew T. Prior draws upon a longitudinal ethnographic and narrative-based study of Etienne, a Vietnamese-Cambodian former refugee to Canada, and his lifelong struggle for self-identity, agency, and belonging in communities that “Other” him based on such factors as language and mixed-ethnicity. Prior shows Etienne’s discursive and social transformation as he moves from initially positioning himself as “nothing” and unable to “speak up,” to using L2 narrative space to negotiate agency, self-worth, voice, and the power to reject negative positionings and reconnect with his linguistic and ethnic communities on his own terms. In his narratives, Etienne is able to find a comfortable place for belonging through his retellings of past events, and through his transformations of what those events meant to him over time. Prior’s study goes beyond examining narratives as data to demonstrating the transformative potential of narrative inquiry as a space to facilitate new ways of being and becoming, not just in a single interview setting, but over time and in interaction with others, including researchers.
In Chapter 3, Dawn Allen draws on theories of identity construction to interpret the integration experiences of newcomer adolescents in Montreal, Quebec, and to describe some of the relationships between L2 learning and integration for those youths. She explores the experiences of five adolescent newcomers over a 15-month period and focuses on the students’ experiences during the second part of the study when they were re-enrolled (held back) in the intensive French (*accueil*) program. Her chapter theorizes identity construction as a way of expanding the concept of integration to include a reconstruction of one’s identity, that is, a recognition of the ways in which newcomers make sense of themselves in response to the discourses they encounter in the host society. Rather than reconstructing their identities as newcomer members of Quebec society, however, several students identified more strongly with the community they had left before arriving in Canada. In addition, some of the students continued to measure their academic progress with friends they maintained contact with in their home countries, and so they viewed the *accueil* program as delaying their education and their lives. Others struggled with forming friendships in the program, finding it difficult to establish comparably deep relationships with their peers they had prior to living in Montreal. Allen argues that too much attention to the students’ linguistic success, and a failure to acknowledge the importance of the students’ identities in the *accueil* program, kept the students from experiencing linguistic, academic, and social integration, and for some, even led to eventual withdrawal from the program.

Next, Jane Zuengler examines immigrant and minority youths’ performance around practices with an American “national” focus in Chapter 4. What is especially noteworthy about her data examples is that while clear national orientations are established in the contexts of language use and identity formation (in one case, performing the “Pledge of Allegiance,” and in the other, planning a party with “American Girl” dolls), to categorize the youths’ performance as “national” would not only give a simplistic account, but an erroneous one. Instead, in analyzing data from a longitudinal microethnographic study of a multicultural high school and an ongoing microethnographic study of immigrant, refugee, and minority children’s communication in an after-school community center, Zuengler focuses on the ways that children and adolescents who are learning English as an additional language often find ways to resist discourses of nationalism, in spite of their relatively powerless status in society as young people and as immigrants. By drawing attention to the multiple communities the learners are negotiating their interactions with, both interpersonally and ideologically, Zuengler’s
chapter adds to the question of how learners’ communication constitutes and is constituted by transnationalism, but endeavors, at the same time, to consider the “territorial”/local/national meanings and identifications that are co-constructed as well.

In chapter 5, Julia Menard-Warwick draws on an ethnographic study at an adult English as a Second Language (ESL) program in California, involving interviews and other forms of data collection with six Latina immigrant women who were students in the program, to delineate the connections and discontinuities between the second language (L2) literacies participants were beginning to acquire in ESL class, and the first language (L1) literacies they had developed in childhood and continued using as adults. She shows that for many of these women, L1 literacies are used not just for meeting practical needs, but are also important to their ongoing (often gendered) constructions of identity. However, although many ESL classroom literacy practices are familiar to participants from previous schooling experiences, their classes do not connect much with their out-of-school literacies or identities, either in Latin America or California. The participants do not seem to use L2 literacies for the range of purposes, including identity development, for which they employ L1 literacies. In addition, many are able to rely on their transnational networks in California for instrumental literacy needs in English. Although critical literacy educators have at times problematized connections between identities and literacies by warning of the power of texts to interpellate readers, Menard-Warwick nonetheless concludes by arguing that L2 literacy teachers need to respect learners’ choices about identifying with particular texts and genres in order to build upon the full range of their L1 literacies in adult education for second language learners.

In summary, these four chapters provide an array of responses among language learners who are all situated in North America, but whose transnational contexts and affiliations shape their opportunities for identification in different ways. Significantly, none of the chapters provides hard evidence that the language learners are forging deep connections with members of what might be considered a canonical “target” community. Instead, each of the contributions shows that the learners are finding alternative zones for identity construction, including in-between identities and transnational identities that are more closely tied to others who share their experiences.
Chapter 2
“I’m two pieces inside of me”: Negotiating belonging through narratives of linguistic and ethnic hybridity

Matthew T. Prior

I’m two pieces inside of me. Half here … half there. You can never be one whole one with one side.

(Etienne¹, study participant)

1. Introduction

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship on transnational movements across geographic, sociocultural, linguistic, and political borders speaks of “fluid social spaces” (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007: 6) where self, place, and belonging are simultaneously interconnected, hybrid, contingent, and shifting (e.g., Bhabha 1994; Block 2007; Blommaert 2005; Croucher 2004; Hornberger 2007; Kramsch 1993; Ong 1999; Warriner 2007). Porous borders, diasporic communities, and “in-betweenness” are concomitants of an increasingly transnational era, contributing to a de-centering and destabilization of the boundaries separating us – them and global–local. While belonging “neces-sitates and implies boundaries” (Croucher 2004: 40), a focus on “human motion” (Appadurai 1995) is giving way to an interest in spatial identities (e.g., Benwell and Stokoe 2006; Collins and Slemrouck 2005) and an examination of the dynamic processes and performances through which identity, place, and belonging are constructed in and through discourse (e.g., Blommaert, Collins and Slemrouck 2005; Dixon and Durrheim 2000; Massey, Allen and Sarre 1999; Pavlenko 2001; Pennycook 2004, 2007). Making explicit the discursive links connecting identity, place,² and belonging, Taylor (2003: 201) argues, “That particular way that a place is characterised by a speaker carries implications for the identity of a person who claims to be of or not of that place, or, in other words, to be the kind of person who belongs there or the kind who does not”.

¹Etienne
²Place
What characterizes much contemporary applied linguistics and second language (L2) work on identity and multilingualism is a rejection of assimilation models (see Baker 2006; Fishman and Garcia 2010; Hornberger 2003) that seek to explain or predict linguistic attainment and social success as largely determined by an individual’s desire or ability to integrate. Turning to situated and ecological approaches, scholars are increasingly arguing the need to understand language learners and users first as people, and “as people who are necessarily located in particular cultural and historical contexts” (Ushioda 2009: 216). Along with this attention to context is a concern with the ways in which people simultaneously inhabit multiple spaces while redefining and being redefined by their social roles, relationships, and language practices (Canagarajah 2005; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004).

In this chapter, I focus on the discursive construction of belonging in narratives on migration, multilingualism, and new citizenship. Drawing upon ongoing longitudinal ethnographic and narrative-based work with an adult “border crosser” (Anzaldúa 1987; Giroux 1997; Kramsch 1993), I examine the layers of his multiple selves in his talk-in-interaction for insight into the construction and location of linguistic and ethnic hybridity and cohesion. While contributing to discursive investigations of identity, place, and belonging, this study goes beyond examining narratives as data to consider also their dialogic nature and transformative potential. In particular, I will show that narrative can be seen as a discursive space that facilitates new ways of being and becoming (Rodriguez 2002), not just in a single interview setting but across time and in interaction with others.

2. Theoretical framework: Narrative and dialogic understandings

Qualitative research in L2 studies has increasingly shown the promise of narrative-based inquiry to contribute to an investigation of the dynamic learning processes, trajectories, and lived realities of multilinguals (e.g., Kinginger 2004; Menard-Warwick 2005a, b, 2006; Pavlenko 2001; Vitanova 2005), particularly for liminal and marginalized individuals or those whose voices have been previously unheard or silenced because of such factors as socioeconomic or political status, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender, or sexual orientation. This recent appreciation of the dynamic potential of autobiographic and dialogic approaches has perhaps been facilitated by what many scholars refer to as the “discursive” or “narrative turn” (Denzin and Lincoln 2003; Phillips and Hardy 2002) in the humanities and social sciences.
In L2 studies and applied linguistics, an accompanying shift has taken place from “viewing ‘the learner’ as an abstract or universalized construct to considering actual learners and their historically and contextually situated experiences of learning” (Benson 2004: 18; see also Block 2003, 2007). In this study, I seek to add to previous L2 autobiographic research by examining narratives as interaction and transformation, in addition to addressing the relative lack of attention to the lives, stories, and experiences of immigrant men and multiethnic transnationals (notable exceptions include Menard-Warwick 2006; Teutsch-Dwyer 2001).

For present purposes, I employ the term narrative somewhat broadly to refer to autobiographical talk, whether life-stories, self-reflections, or elicited interview responses, through which speakers construct accounts of their actions and experiences across time. Thus, I examine narratives as modes of representation and contexts for social interaction and making meaning. This constructionist approach to narrative accounts and interview talk as discourse and performance (e.g., Abell, Stokoe and Billig 2000) provides a means to examine how speakers make use of their linguistic and interactional resources to “do” identity, public remembering, storytelling, and sense-making.

I draw upon narratives for insight into hybrid transnational identities and the trajectories of language use, social participation, and possibilities for belonging, being, and becoming, not just across time and place, but also through the resources used in the organization and representation of experience. Discursive tools I focus upon include reported speech (Goffman 1981), including quotations, “past talk”, and/or constructed dialogue in narrative retellings; interactional positioning (e.g., Gergen and Kaye 1992; Wortham 2001), by which narrative tellers position themselves in relation to their interactants as well as particular versions of social worlds; rhetorical strategies such as stake inoculation (Potter 1997), whereby narrative tellers work to prevent the undermining of their talk by presenting it as disinterested; and interpretive framing, a term I use to refer to the ways in which speakers manage how their talk is to be understood by others.

A discursive, interactional, and longitudinal perspective expands a view of language learning to include not just ultimate outcomes, cognitive processes, or the acquisition of linguistic structures, but also the social conditions and processes involved in learning, using, and even losing one’s languages across the lifespan – and, just as importantly, the work that social members must do to carry out this sense-making for themselves and others. In other words, language learning and use are examined as human activity (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000). Although in applied linguistics this activity has been examined in
terms of particular contexts (e.g., second language, foreign language, classroom, workplace), I argue that transnationalism and hybridity are themselves emerging contexts for analysis (also see Warriner’s 2007 special topic issue of *Linguistics and Education* on transnational literacies).

3. The study

In this chapter, I examine data extracts from audio-recorded interviews conducted from 2004 to 2006, as part of a larger narrative-based study of Southeast Asian immigrants and transnationals in the US and Canada. The case study presented here centers on Etienne, a working-class Cambodian-Vietnamese man who immigrated to Canada as a teenager in the mid-1980s. I focus on Etienne because his interviews have been the most in-depth, thus allowing a rich examination of the past and ongoing accounts and practices of a multilingual linguistic and ethnic minority in North America struggling with the tensions surrounding language, identity, and belonging. I document here not just Etienne’s talk over time, but also his interaction, meta-narrative sequencing, and personal transformation in and through his narratives.

Born to a Vietnamese-Chinese mother and Cambodian father, Etienne grew up in a bilingual and bicultural family. When the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia, and targeted the Vietnamese and other ethnic minorities for special persecution, he and a few family members fled to Vietnam to live with his mother’s relatives. He later returned alone to Cambodia to search for his missing brothers, but learned they had been killed. Only a teenager, and against his family’s wishes, Etienne then made the decision to escape to Thailand and a better life in the West. He was arrested twice in his first few escape attempts, and he blamed being caught on his mixed accent. He was forced to work for several months in labor camps until he was released. Eventually, he joined a group of refugees escaping into Thailand. Etienne and a young cousin were among the few to survive the difficult journey. In the refugee camp Etienne learned Thai and some English, and after successfully immigrating to Eastern Canada, he began to learn French. He currently lives in Canada with his French partner and works as a supervisor in the service industry. Etienne states that English and French are the languages of his daily life, and for the most part, avoids interaction with Vietnamese and Cambodians.

Every year, Etienne spends part of the winter in Hawai‘i, where he was introduced to me in 2004 by his friend John, a previous study participant.
As Etienne had much free time and few local friends, John suggested that Etienne might be interested in talking with me. Etienne agreed and we began our interviews in 2004 and continued them for five years. This increased interaction over time led to a shift from the interviewer–interviewee relationship in the beginning, to a continued friendship that we maintain through email, telephone, and yearly visits. I have also spent time as a guest in his home in Canada where I had the opportunity to observe him in private and social settings with his partner and friends. Our extended interaction has no doubt influenced the topics, structures, and production of Etienne’s talk as well as enabled his narratives to be shared resources in our ongoing interactions.

The primary data discussed in this chapter are drawn from a larger corpus of approximately 40 hours of audio-recorded informal face-to-face interviews and oral narratives in English. Additional recordings and observations were collected during group mealtime conversations, language and cultural classes, and various social activities. Written data include email correspondence touching upon topics such as immigrating, English learning, work, hobbies, friends, family, as well as solicited and unsolicited reflections on his narratives and interviews.

4. Data and analysis

Initially, I was interested in Etienne’s narratives for what they could reveal about language learning, use, and self-perceptions of the various degrees of challenge and success that immigrants experience over time. However, based on the interviews, reflections, and social interactions, we both began to observe that something was changing within and through our narrative-based work together. To examine this change meant that I needed to shift my focus from structure and content to the interactional telling and sense-making in the talk. In this section, I narrow my focus on the resources and strategies through which Etienne articulates and makes sense of belonging in terms of ethnic and linguistic hybridity.

4.1. Possibilities for participation and belonging

Chronicling his life as a mixed-race child growing up in two countries at war and trying to survive before and after immigrating to Canada, Etienne’s narratives of the physical and emotional trauma from mistreatment and
rejection based on language, ethnicity, skin color, age, origin, sexual orientation, and legal and socioeconomic status, demonstrate the significance of these factors in the storying of his life. Many of his narratives invoke emotional talk of pain, sadness, and most often, anger, and he constructs these emotions as the normative responses of a victim of mistreatment. In an analysis of the following extracts I discuss how Etienne brings up language and ethnicity to account for his decisions to interact with others, and his resultant patterns of avoidance and talk of anger.

4.1.1. Linguistic “unbelonging”

This extract is part of a longer narrative segment in which Etienne speaks of feelings of isolation attributed to being rejected by his ethnic communities:

Extract (1): “I don’t belong” (2005)

E: I don’t belong to Vietnamese community. I don’t belong to Cambodian community because they always talk about me. Why? Ask me?

M: Why?

E: Because I been called name over and over in the past. And I become really paranoid and suspicious. Cuz I realize my accent. The way I speak. I carry an accent with the two languages. So it bound to be happen. I’m sure. I’m assuming. I’m sure they wonder what the heck exactly. Which I experience over and over. And so I feel I don’t belong to anyone. I don’t want to be involved.

(transcription conventions can be found in Appendix)

Speakers do not merely recollect their past experiences for others; they also attend to the structure and interpretation of their talk. In Extract (1), by providing an abstract (Labov 1972), the part of the narrative that encapsulates the story, Etienne sets off the interpretive framework for his talk (i.e., that it is about belonging) and enlists the interviewer’s help in its co-construction. After setting the scene through his claims of not belonging to either community, Etienne’s pre-sequence gambit (Schegloff 1980; “Why? Ask me?”) invites a response from his interlocutor while reserving his turn as speaker. It is formulated not as a conversational aside, but as a story that must be told in response to a question that must be asked. In other words, he is shaping the nature of our interaction by simultaneously constructing
our roles (e.g., interviewer–interviewee, teller–listener) and formulating his experiences as a tellable story.

His response to the prompted question displays that it is not necessarily his ethnicity that is the problem, but the talk (i.e., evaluative judgments) surrounding it: “because they always talk about me.” This serves as an example that ethnicity and language are social constructions, not static categories, with the power to define and index the desirability and belonging of social members. By speaking of the Vietnamese and Cambodian communities, Etienne is also constructing himself as an individual separate from these larger groups of belonging. Rather than complain about a few individuals that mistreated him, he directs the blame at the communities as a whole—in essence, laying out for the listener that the potential for belonging is not contingent solely on his individual desire, but stems from the linguistic and cultural norms recognized and enforced by the larger communities. In this way, he highlights his isolation and makes his hybridity or “in-betweenness” the topic that is relevant to the understanding of his talk within our interview interaction.

Again, a feature of interviews and narrative accounts is that speakers attend to the reception of their talk by their interlocutors by working to present themselves, for example, as believable and moral, or to avoid possible challenges to their claims. One common rhetorical strategy is stake inoculation (Edwards and Potter 1992; Potter 1997), whereby speakers downplay having a particular interest or stake in their versions of “what happened.” For example, in Extract (1), after inferentially blaming those that reject him, Etienne claims he is responsible for his own faults (e.g., by admitting that he is paranoid, suspicious, and has an accent that is “bound” to make others wonder).

This displayed willingness to admit one’s faults and take responsibility for events also makes available for the listener particular inferences about the character of the speaker—by presenting the speaker as someone who is reasonable, willing to admit when wrong, not disposed to complain or judge others negatively, and who is merely reporting “the facts” about mental states and events. While confessing to paranoia and suspicion, through the use of the verb *become*, Etienne ascribes these psychological states not to a preexisting mental instability, but to his unbelonging and the othering he endured (i.e., as emotional and mental consequences of the behavior of others). I suggest that by attributing his emotional “damage” to the repeated mistreatment by others based on his language and accent, Etienne’s statements such as “I don’t belong” and “I don’t want to be involved” indicate how he uses the causal chain (mistreatment→unbelonging→decision to withdraw) to rationally account for his current lack of social participation in the present.
4.1.2. Ethnic “unbelonging”

How others evaluate one’s social desirability is an acute concern in the talk of Etienne and other study participants. The following extract illustrates how Etienne forefronts ethnic hybridity and makes use of labels and their associated negative evaluations as a reason for his inability to belong:

Extract (2): “That’s the only word they can say” (2004)

E: “Oh you this. Oh you’re Vietnamese. You’re mixed. Oh” (.) then “You’re Cambodian. You’re not smart. Mean your country have so many problems. Your country ruined. You don’t have much chance to be a better person in life.” That true. “Those low-class Cambodian people.” That’s the only word they ((the Vietnamese)) can say.

By invoking categories such as Vietnamese, Cambodians, and half Vietnamese or “mixed,” Etienne constructs a hybrid identity caught between the two sides. This multiple positioning emphasizes that the issue of belonging is what is relevant. Again, it is not just being othered that is made responsible for his anger and negative emotions, but the evaluations that are attached to the hateful words. Extract (2) makes these evaluations (via reported speech) explicit: Cambodians are “not smart”; they’re “low class.” He also directly attends to the truthfulness of his talk (“That’s true”), but it is unclear whether he is referring to the truth of the reported event (i.e., that Vietnamese said such statements to him) or of the truth contained within the statement (“You don’t have much chance to be a better person in life”). In either case, through his epistemic stance, he is making an explicit bid to me as his interactant that what he is saying is an objective truth rather than his subjective version of events.

In this extract, by animating the voices of others through reported speech, Etienne gives a personalized account of being othered. Performing these sentences in an angry and mocking tone, he makes hearable the negative social evaluations from both the Vietnamese and the Cambodian sides, again positioning himself in the middle in a kind of hybrid in-between or *third space* (Bhabha 1994) of unbelonging. At the same time, by animating the “Other”, he allows the interviewer to not only hear the story but also to experience it as a participant. While displaying the wrongs he has suffered Etienne provides a space for himself to mock the animated speakers and position them as ignorant (e.g., “that is the only word they can say”), and through
using this double-voicing (Bakhtin 1984), he critiques how he was treated. At a discursive level (i.e., within the narrative world), this is a self-empowerment strategy (Vitanova 2005, 2006) that Etienne uses here and in his later talk, showing that multi-layered achievements are possible through strategic narrative structuring.

4.2. In Search of belonging

Working and living in North American society, it was necessary for Etienne to find strategies to facilitate participation in the workplace, service encounters, and other social situations. He made issues of agency and power particularly relevant in his talk of his experiences in work and public settings. The following narrative extracts illustrate a new (though not necessarily linear) trajectory across his narratives in which Etienne constructs himself as moving from being powerless to empowered and agentive.

4.2.1. Disempowered self

In narratives and interviews from 2004, the first year of our interaction, Etienne presented himself in his own words as “sweet,” “shy,” “innocent,” and unable to “talk back” to authority figures and power holders (e.g., employers, lawyers, banks). The following extracts illustrate his reported feelings of shame, intimidation, and his efforts to interact with others and cross participation barriers by working to present himself as polite and gentle to earn entrance into various social settings and relationships:


E: I’m shy. I’m very (. ) I’m so:: (. ) I’m so (. ) someday I feel so intimidated with my boss. I couldn’t speak out. I couldn’t speak. I’m shaking sometime you know.

Extract (4): “I’m very sweet and gentle” (2004)

E: I alway be kind. Be (. ) I’m very polite. I’m very gentle. I’m very (. ) how do you say (. ) I’m very sweet and gentle. And (. ) that’s how I get my way around. See? That’s how I get (. ) I (. ) I always lower myself. I always lower myself cuz (. ) in order to (. ) to get to (. ) to get to know people because I afraid people don’t like me don’t wanna talk to me. Don’t wanna be friend with me. But I
always please people. Pleasing people and (. ) try to (. ) try to do the best they can to be friend with people. Which very sad. To me sad because (. ) because I’m nothing. You see? Because I feel I’m nothing because I have to try hard.

Evaluations and emotion talk are useful rhetorical tools for speakers. In Extracts (3) and (4), through interational positioning (Gergen and Kaye 1992; Wortham 2001), Etienne portrays a particular version of himself through the use of adjectives such as shy, kind, polite, gentle, sweet, and nothing. While these personal descriptions are constructed as internal characteristics or dispositions (e.g., “I’m very polite”; “I’m very sweet and gentle”), they are also constructed here as resulting in external actions (“I always be kind”; “I always please people”). Intensifiers such as so, very, always, and hard serve to heighten the emotionality of his claims for the listener and emphasize the speaker’s emotional assessments (e.g., “Which very sad”) as understandable and rational, as well as creating inter-subjectivity by supplying the listener with the interpretive framing for this account (i.e., to treat the speaker as someone deserving empathy).

Emphasizing his helplessness (e.g., “I couldn’t…”) and explaining his strategy to interact with others through self-diminishing actions (e.g., “I’m very gentle,” “I always lower myself”), Etienne positions himself as the victim of unfair circumstances. This identity is not only locally constructed in the interactional present; it is also managed to create consistency across all his previous tellings involving discrimination and mistreatment by others. Positioning himself for the researcher as one who is marginalized, powerless, and “nothing,” Etienne is also creating an appeal for empathy and shared intersubjectivity (e.g., “See?”; “You see?”). This may also be significant because this took place in the first year of our interviews, when we were still getting to know one another, so achieving empathy and intersubjectivity may have been helpful in facilitating a friendly interview and social relationship.

Through the construction of his early narratives focusing on his lack of agency, the overall meta-narrative sequence is structured as a “struggling-against-the-odds” story. Because our interviews were ongoing, Etienne’s interactional positioning potentially lays a foundation for future narratives. That is, narratives build on what has come before and may foreground what is to come. By initially positioning himself and his experiences in this way, Etienne is able to construct the interpretation of the upcoming stories of the process of anger and agency as rational, understandable, and even celebratory when agency and “speaking up” are achieved. Thus, the consideration of autobiographic talk as both prospective and retrospective highlights the
necessity of examining individual narratives not just for their content, structure, or rhetoric, but also for their temporal-spatial placement in the larger narrative chain and interactional sequence.

4.2.2. Empowered self

Although many of Etienne’s early narratives established him as powerless and subject to the control of others and caught up in immigration and dislocation experiences not of his own choosing, later tellings construct a self that is agentive within those experiences. An empowered or agentive self, performed through strong emotions (particularly anger), began to emerge. These narratives exemplify Watkins-Goffman’s (2006: ix) claim that “[a]n important feature of narratives is the recognition of the similarity that human beings have in the effort to gain agency or control over their lives.” By “agency” I mean the “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001: 118), and where speakers “resist, negotiate, change, and transform themselves and others” (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 20). This transformation may take the place in the narrative (i.e., “storied”) world and/or in the social world of its telling.

Extract (5) gives the first of several examples in which Etienne began to “talk back” in the narratives to those whom he stated had wronged him in the past. After detailing successive experiences of being laid off from various restaurant and janitorial jobs, while those he referred to as “real Canadian” employees (i.e., native English-speaking Caucasians) were retained, Etienne, for the first time, expresses agency in his narratives:

Extract (5): “Why you lay me off?” (2004 data)

E: But (.) I have to (.) I have to (.) I have to (.) I must (.) I have to speak up (.) ask questions (.) something. You know (.) Let’s say (.) “Why they let me go?” Right? Like that I said (.)

M: You said that to your boss?

E: Yeah. I said (.) “Why you lay me off (.) because (.) because (.) Why? I’m not a good worker? Or (.) because (.) my English not very good? Because I’m inexperienced?”

M: And what did he say?

E: He said it’s slow. “Because it’s a slow season right now. That’s why we laid you off. You can come back here (.) in June and May.” But I was (.) ver- (.) I was (.)
very (.) very angry inside. I said (.) you know (.) but I don’t want to talk (.) I
don’t want to answer them. I said “No. In the summertime, I never come back
here. I go find another job.”

M: You told them that?

E: No. I (.) inside of me. I tell myself. I said “They don’t want me now. I’d better
go.”

M: So, what did you tell him?

E: (unintelligible) I said goodbye. (3.0) But I said goodbye (.) but I am very angry
inside. Very disappointed. I try. I really try my best shot to work there. I try
to get along with people. I do almost anything people told me. I do almost
anything. You see? Sweep the floor or whatever. I do all the dirty work for
them. (3.0) When I left (.) I left with (.) disappointment and (.) I feel really (.)
discriminate (.) and left out (.) cuz I feel like left out (.) because I’m immigrant.

This particular narrative of talking back to his boss signaled a notice-
able turning point (Mishler 1995) in Etienne’s talk and came after many
interviews and spending time getting to know one another. My surprised re-
sponses to his narrative in Extract (5) illustrate a shift as well. Although he
still represents himself as subject to the power of others, he emphasizes the
necessity for him to speak up for himself. This is made particularly salient by
his repetition of deontic modal verb phrases (e.g., “I have to (.) I have to (.)
I have to (.) I must (.) I have to speak up”). While indicating a pressure from
outside, this nonetheless creates a sense of urgency and necessity behind his
actions to question authority.

In his reported questions to his boss, Etienne highlights his own potential
weaknesses rather than directly accusing those in authority of wrongdoing
(another example of stake inoculation). He also demonstrates his willingness
to take responsibility for the layoff, proposing a candidate explanation that
he may be a bad worker or lacking skills. In this way, Etienne effectively
presents himself as reasonable within the narrative and to me as his audi-
ence. Anger is invoked here as a response to or a direct result of his unfair
treatment by his boss, rather than from a disposition to be angry. Finally, by
emphasizing his willingness to do anything that was asked of him and invok-
ing emotions of disappointment and anger, he attributes his lack of belonging
and rejection by others to his status as immigrant rather than his individual
actions or inactions.

Importantly, Extract (5) provides an illustration of the potential for narra-
tives to offer a space to “talk back” to the past. After questioning his boss and
receiving an unsatisfactory response, Etienne states that he rejected the offer
for future employment: “No. In the summertime, I never come back here. I go find another job.” However, my subsequent response (“You told them that?”) treats this as uncharacteristic (and perhaps economically foolish) behavior for Etienne. In response, Etienne reformulates this as an internal dialogue (“No. I (.) inside of me. I tell myself.”). By observing how Etienne shifts between performance, narration, and summarizing, we can see that while he tells his story for his audience (i.e., the interviewer), he also portrays himself as a particular kind of person (i.e., reasonable, marginalized, and self-controlled) and uses the narrative to organize the past, while opening it up for imagining alternative possibilities of being, belonging, and acting. This demonstrates the potential for narrative inquiry to open up a space for tellers to discover agency within linguistic, cultural, institutional, and societal constraints.

Indeed, this narrative marked a change in Etienne and our interviews. Following this turning point, he began to demonstrate more explicit claims and displays of agency (and anger) in his talk through, for example, invoking more narratives in which he fought against discrimination or mistreatment, making his talk more confrontational and performative (e.g., by employing more active voicing), and reformulating or elaborating upon previous tellings. Extracts (6–8) illustrate these changes in both narrative content and performance:

Extract (6): Confrontation story about the bank that treated him rudely (2006)

E: “By the way (.) you know (.) I’m so pissed off the way – the way your-your workers your staff treat me.”

Extract (7): Confrontation story about pedestrian who blocked the sidewalk (2006)

E: Suddenly he said (4.0) “Excuse me? Ignorant” Heh heh heh. And suddenly I-I said (.) “Go fuck yourself. You know how to move? Can you move?” (3.0) Haha

M: You said that?

E: Yeah, I said (.) “Can you move? Go fuck yourself! Ignorant what?” (3.0) Haha

Extract (8): Confrontation story about a dangerous driver who almost hit him and his bicycle (2006)

E: I said “I didn’t know what’s going on here. But you come and y-you harassing me. You yell at me. I dare you. I dare you-you walk one step close to me.
Y-You gonna get hit with the chain. Big lock on your head (.) or somewhere”
((slaps fist in palm))

Extracts (6–8) are part of a series of anger or confrontation narratives that illustrate his contention that his anger and angry actions are tied to the unacceptable behavior of others, not from an internal tendency to become enraged. Whether citing mistreatment by bank workers, a rude pedestrian that would not let him pass when jogging, or a careless driver that nearly hit him and his bicycle, Etienne makes it clear now that he is willing to talk back and even physically fight back (highlighted in bold) if necessary. Also striking is his use of direct reported speech, essentially performing the various scenarios for his listener. Through this series of narrative performances, he links the mistreatment by others to his anger and agentive actions.

In addition, we can argue that the change in his narrative tellings may also be attributed to his increased comfort with the interviewer, the interview setting, the narrative genre, the use of English as a neutral “third space,” and the fluctuating shift between our relationship as interviewer–interviewee and friends. It could be that over the many months of developing rapport and establishing trust, he may have felt freer to share more personal and emotionally charged information than at the beginning. Having a listener’s sympathetic ear may have facilitated Etienne’s ability or opportunity to tell agentive stories. There is evidence of this in our later interviews and correspondence, where Etienne suggests the importance that having someone “show interest” plays in the sharing of these experiences. In the following section, I consider the evidence of transformation within and through his stories.

4.3. Transformation

As described above, the topics of our conversations expanded over time to include more personal, sensitive, and emotionally-charged material. In addition, previously-told stories were also retold or expanded to recast Etienne as more agentive or long-suffering. Whereas in his early narratives he positioned himself as “nothing,” “sweet,” “gentle,” and “unable to speak,” in later narratives, he presented himself as strong, confrontational, and aware of his skills and knowledge as a multilingual. Animating the speech of others and thus providing strong evaluative content toward the characters in his narratives also created agency and empowerment, both within the narratives
and the interview setting. In addition, he began to shift from anger talk to speaking about finding peace and learning to embrace his past.

Evidence of transformation was also borne out in his non-interview talk and interaction. When we first met, it was extremely rare to see Etienne spend time with others or participate in group-oriented activities. In fact, several of our mutual acquaintances jokingly referred to Etienne’s anti-social behavior. As illustrated by previous extracts, much of his discomfort with social events was related to potential questions by others regarding his linguistic and ethnic identities. In the first year of our interviews, Etienne refused to speak Vietnamese or Khmer, even when asked. However, as time went by, he began to slowly seek out opportunities to speak both languages (with acquaintances, with strangers in the local market, and to teach me various expressions). I also observed that he began to make Vietnamese and Cambodian friends through local community events. Etienne even joined me in attending Khmer language classes and social events and began to accept social invitations by both Vietnamese and Cambodians that he met.

While he expanded his social activities, tension and cautiousness were still evident in Etienne’s interactions with others. He repeatedly told me that he did not want anyone to ask him about his accent or mixed ethnicity. However, on one occasion, he described how a Cambodian community member, upon learning where Etienne grew up, announced to the other Cambodians present that Etienne was not really Cambodian, but was actually part Vietnamese. When I spoke with Etienne right after that incident he expressed his extreme anger and disappointment, but when he brought up that incident a second time, his evaluative reaction was different:

Extract (9): “I learned to embrace” (2006)

E: To me now I learned to embrace. To embrace all the different ethnic group. Learn to accept people who they are. And you know you learn to tell yourself. It’s good to know other people culture. To accept them who they are. And not to judge people. And to have peace in your mind. Tell yourself it doesn’t matter where they come from. It matter who they are.

In Extract (9), there is an assertion of learning to embrace, not just one side or the other, but everyone, showing a shift from a focus on being Cambodian, Vietnamese, or even Canadian, to that of a more transethnic or multiperspectival belonging – not just someone in-between. While Etienne
initially presents this as an individual decision through the use of the personal pronoun I, he switches to the more inclusive you, indicating that this view is to be extended to others in his situation (i.e., that this experience is not his alone). Yet, rather than a decision that one makes or an end point in a journey, he describes this ability to embrace and accept others as a process (e.g., “I learned to embrace”; “Learn to accept”; “you learn to tell yourself”) of becoming and learning to recognize others for “who they are.”

In the following extract, Etienne speaks of the Vietnamese community in Canada and their negative assessment of him. This also shows a change in the way he talks about them:

Extract (10): “Maybe I know better than them” (2006)

E: That’s why sometime I go to-I went to a Chinese store (.) Vietnamese store I start to speak English. Hhhh (2.0) because they look at me like uh (.) ha ha ha. They look at me “You don’t speak good.” But at the same time (.) I know a lot, Matt. Maybe I have an accent. So they’re assuming. They’re judging me right away. They’re judging me. “Oh, because you’ve been here too long. Or because you’re not (.) you’re not Vietnamese.” Maybe they judging me. “You’re not Vietnamese. That’s why you spoke like that.” But sometimes I realize. You know (.) if I open the book. If reading and writing. Maybe I know better than them. Even John ((a mutual friend from Vietnam)), I’m not joking. Yeah. Even in Vietnamese.

In Extract (10), Etienne gives an account for why he speaks English (rather than Chinese or Vietnamese) when he goes to a Chinese or Vietnamese store – as a strategy to avoid negative evaluations of his Cambodian-accented Vietnamese. Although he concedes others may challenge his “Vietnameseness,” Etienne here redefines being Vietnamese as not just about accent, but also literacy skills, which cannot be negated in terms of skin color, upbringing, or accent. Moreover, he compares himself to John, the Vietnamese friend that originally introduced us. In other words, he is constructing authenticity by claiming to be even more Vietnamese than a typical Vietnamese, showing that he is now asserting his right to redefine such labels of belonging.

While some scholars have focused on the tensions and contradictions that hybrid identities raise for individuals who move between cultures and languages (e.g., Anzaldúa 1987; Block 2007; Blommaert 2005), in this study I suggest that that hybridity does not result in conflict between the L1 culture
and the L2 culture only. As Etienne’s narratives indicate, a lack of belonging and struggle can occur between one’s first language(s) and culture(s), and these tensions can even shift over time. In his case, the struggle is represented as greater between Vietnamese and Cambodian than it is between either of them and English (or French).

4.4. Self-realization

In terms of self-making, another component of narrative-as-transformation that Etienne makes relevant is that of self-awareness or self-realization. Further evidence of this came after the first year of our interviews and interactions, when Etienne sent me a long unsolicited e-mail reflection after he returned to Canada:

I think you’re the first person that I have told this story to. I think it was such a misfortune for people like me or the other had to go through, but that was life then, I had take that choice, the only way I knew was I had to tried, if I have fail perhaps I wouldn’t never be here, or I might leave behind my body somewhere in the deep jungle between Thai, Cambodia, or I should called no man land.

[several lines deleted]

I could not open myself up to anyone to talk about my past. to me it is private, personal. As I have mentioned above to me It was private I don’t think people want to know, unless you have encounter with someone. If they show their interest to know I guess you should tell. I don’t think all immigrants could never forget that life experients, even they had tried. it’s hard to forget, to me It was a deep scar for life. at the same time I should not dwell it up again and again. (Etienne, 2004 personal e-mail reflection, reproduced as originally received)

Again, through relational (e.g., “people like me or the other”), temporal (e.g., then and now), and locational (e.g., here and there; “no man land”) contrasts, Etienne invokes the image of journey, “in-betweenness,” and the associated “tensions, contradictions, conflicts, and predicaments” (Brockmeier and Harré 2001: 50) including talking, forgetting, and coming to terms with such experiences. There is also evidence here that through the references to the tellability of these experiences, there is the recognition that they cannot be told without a willing and interested audience – showing that “voice”
also requires “audibility” (Miller 2003) or the power to impose reception (Bourdieu 1991) – further evidence of the influence of the interviewer/listener on the content, shape, and activity of Etienne’s talk.

In later interviews and e-mails, Etienne continued to reflect upon his interview experience as one of self-awareness and transformation. This lends support for the view that the telling and hearing of narratives can lead to self- and shared-understanding, validation, and even healing8 for individuals and communities (Phillion and He 2004; Phillion, He and Connelly 2005; Trueba and Bartolomé 2000; Wiessner 2001). R. Atkinson (1998) provides an example of the healing potential of telling one’s life story: “And what could result is very much like what is implied in the Japanese story, ‘The Tale of Genji,’ when the character says, ‘Because you have listened to my story, I can let go of my demons’” (p. 65).

Although Atkinson’s example is hypothetical, I have found similar examples of this transformative aspect of narrative inquiry. The following extract is from an additional correspondence with Etienne. After I had transcribed several of our interviews, Etienne asked if I would read some of them to him. I agreed, and after I had read aloud some of his narratives, he became quiet and then said that hearing someone else tell his stories made them feel “real” to him because they were no longer just inside.9 This also marks his awareness that the story is one that I have (re)told, rather than merely a story that he has told. Shortly thereafter, he sent me an unsolicited e-mail regarding the experience, strikingly similar to Atkinson’s claim above:

I like listening to the story that you have wrote about my past. It’s made me feel sad, but I feel peace because I have someone like you to share with. (Etienne, 2005, reproduced as originally received)

While this suggests the transformative potential of telling one’s story and being heard, it is not the case that this process is linear. Etienne continually reports that negotiating self, place, and belonging is still very much an ongoing struggle. In addition, this transformational view of narratives does not undermine the fact that they can be used for data collection and analysis, and can indeed provide rich insight into the lives and practices of their tellers. Researchers such as Rodriguez (2002) and Pavlenko and Lantolf (2001) point out the contributions that narrative-based inquiry can make to our understandings of humans “being” and “doing” in society:
I believe that looking at narrative as simply a method of doing qualitative research—as a method that “allows us to impose order on the flow” of our experiences—depoliticizes our understanding of narrative, and, in so doing, helps undermine the evolution of new possibilities of being. (Rodriguez 2002: 1)

We are not going to argue that personal narratives should replace observational/experimental research; rather we believe they bring to the surface aspects of human activity, including SLA, which cannot be captured in the more traditional approach to research. (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000: 1)

I suggest that we must keep in mind the transformative as well as the rhetorical and structural, dimensions of narratives; otherwise, we may miss out on the opportunity to encourage, make visible, and document the action and change that can take place through and across narrative tellings and interactions.

5. Conclusion

As transnationalism, hybridity, and in-betweenness have become organizing metaphors for the modern era, an understanding of the lived experiences behind those metaphors is relevant to research located at the intersections of language, identity, and place. Rather than assume idealized language users and immigrants surrounded by cooperative interactants, we may benefit by expanding our focus to include issues tied to marginalization, conflict, anger, and rejection—and the strategies by which individuals manage and represent that dislocation and multiple ways of being and belonging in the world. For Etienne, this meant finding ways to define his hybrid or “trans” identities (Pennycook 2007) in his own terms. This is not to claim that belonging is merely matter of selecting among the various elements of identity to arrive at a cohesive and unproblematic whole. Rather, this is to suggest that identity and belonging may often be less a matter of determining who and what we are, but who and what we are not:

But as we know, talking about the Other is in many ways talking about ourselves. It is indeed the Other who tells us what we are, what space we take up in the world, and for many what role we play in it. Identity is only the result of the encounter with otherness (Burgat 2003: 21)

Throughout this chapter I have argued that narrative is a powerful resource for investigating and representing experience. Based on an analysis
of Etienne’s narratives over time, I suggest that in addition to their organizational, dialogic, performative, and agentive functions, we must recognize the transformative potential of narrative to lead to new ways of being and becoming in the world that are embedded in, but not limited to, the context of the telling. By attending to the dynamic sense-making processes by which people organize and reflect upon their hybrid lives we may gain a better understanding of the various trajectories of language use, social participation, and identity construction.

Appendix

Transcription conventions

( .5 ) timed pause
( . ) untimed micropause
( ( ) ) additional explanations or descriptions
- sharp cut-off of a word or false start
: sound elongation
( ) unclear fragment/best guess
. a stopping or a fall in tone
‘ continuing intonation
? a rising inflection (as in a question)
underline speaker emphasis
CAPS noticeably louder speech
“ “ quotative talk (i.e., as reported speech)
[ ] overlapping talk

Notes

1. Participant names are pseudonyms.
2. Not just a physical location, but also one’s various networks of belonging.
3. He explained that he chose the pseudonym “Etienne” for this study, from the name of a mixed-race child portrayed in the movie Indochine, because he was like that boy: “mixed, innocent, pure, and sweet.”
4. Etienne said that his many years in the company and friendship with the owner allowed him the freedom to take long vacations during the slow winter season. He also stated that the tropical surroundings reminded him of “home” (Vietnam and Cambodia) and helped alleviate his depression.
5. While not the focus of this study, I suggest the use of English allowed Etienne a kind of “third” or neutral space in which to talk about his conflict between his languages and cultures.
6. My focus here is on the function not the intentionality of talk.
7. Etienne later mentioned that he did learn Chinese as a child and can still speak a little.
8. See P. Atkinson (1997) for a healthy critique of the “recuperative role” of narratives.
9. I am making no claims of access to his “authentic” self or experience.
Chapter 3
Integration through the accueil program: Language and belonging among newcomer adolescents in Quebec

Dawn Allen

1. Introduction

Integration of immigrants and minorities into the province of Quebec only began in the late 60s when the provincial government started to assume authority for its immigration policies and practices, a privilege and responsibility previously ceded to Canada’s national government. Since that time, because of its minority status as one of two so-called “founding” peoples (the French and the English) in an overwhelmingly English-dominant North America, Quebec has struggled to strike a balance between preservation of le fait français (‘the French fact’) and the non-francophone diversity of its immigrant-origin population. This delicate balancing describes the Quebec government’s struggle to redefine its relatively young and vulnerable “national” identity as distinct, if not separate, from the rest of Canada.

Integration, as defined in Quebec policy, walks something of a tightrope between commitment to the construction of a pluralist Quebec and reinforcement of the distinctly French language and francophone culture of Quebec (MCCI 1990). On the one hand, policy defines integration as bi-directional mutual accommodation. On the other, it claims that integration can and should reinforce the distinct language and culture of francophone Quebec. The openness and flexibility demanded of any host culture which claims to embrace cultural pluralism are especially challenging for a “national-minority-gone-majority,” as is the case for “les Québécois de souche”. Therefore, exploring policies and programs for the integration of school-age immigrants and minorities in Quebec allows one to look more closely at the tensions inherent in Quebec’s commitment to the embracing of diversity (inclusiveness) and the promotion of the distinct society identity (exclusiveness).

This chapter begins with a description of the language-based integration policies and programs which target Quebec’s school-age newcomers.
I then provide a short synopsis of what we know about the integration of these newcomers from Quebec-based studies. Drawing on various theories of identity as socially, relationally, and discursively constructed (e.g., Gee 1996; Taylor 1998; Taylor 1994), I interpret the integration experiences of five secondary-school newcomers in Montreal who were held back from access to mainstream education in order to complete a second year of intensive French-language instruction. The data suggest that language-based integration programs which use the host language as a gatekeeper rather than a gateway for participation in the mainstream, risk alienating rather than integrating their newcomers. By way of conclusion, I argue that theories of identity (re)construction help us understand how host-language learning is embedded in, and not a precursor to, newcomer integration. The chapter provides insights into the role of belonging in newcomer integration, and specifically illustrates how a lack of belonging can result in alienation rather than integration.

2. Language-based integration policies and programs

While cultural and linguistic diversity is a phenomenon which challenges the traditional administrative and curricular boundaries of French-language public schools in Quebec, this diversity is largely the result of Quebec’s reliance on immigration to protect French against the dominance of English. Although host-language-based approaches to integration are common in most immigrant receiving nations, Quebec’s situation is somewhat unique given the ubiquity of English not just in North America, but in the world generally. Furthermore, Quebec is reliant on immigration to compensate for the negative birth rate of francophone Quebeckers and the resulting threat to Quebec’s economy as well as to French and francophone culture as the markers of Quebec’s distinct society. Therefore, Quebec not only needs its immigrants to embrace French as the language of communication, but to embrace and promote Quebec’s identity as a society that is culturally and linguistically distinct from the rest of North America.

To these ends, in less than a decade (1969–1977), the Quebec government passed several laws that dramatically changed the cultural and linguistic make-up of Quebec’s public school populations, especially those of Montreal. The most important of these was the French Language Charter (also referred to as “Bill 101”). Until 1977, when the French Language Charter established French as Quebec’s official language and legislated mandatory
French-language education for all new immigrants, most immigrant youths attended English-language schools.\(^3\) Since 1977, primary and secondary level English-language schooling has been accessible only to children for whom at least one parent received English-language primary school education in Canada.

As a result, all new immigrant youth for whom French is not a primary language are enrolled in what is known as the *accueil* (‘welcome’) program. In secondary school, this program is designed as a ten-month language-intensive prerequisite to the academic mainstream. In this program, newcomer students spend approximately 75 percent of their time together in small classes (maximum 20 students) studying the French language with the same French-language teacher throughout the academic year. The other 25 percent of the students’ time is divided among classes in math, physical education, and arts for which the students remain with their *accueil* cohort, isolated from their mainstream peers. Accueil students who are 17–18 years old are sometimes “pushed” into the mainstream through a program referred to as “partial integration” in order that they might graduate from secondary school before age forces them out.\(^4\) But students for whom French proves to be especially challenging (as determined through oral and written formal and informal assessments) can be held back in *accueil* for a second and sometimes third school year until their French is deemed strong enough to facilitate success in the mainstream. Students whose French is not strong enough to access the mainstream and who are too old to remain in the secondary school system must enrol in the adult school educational system to obtain their secondary school equivalencies.\(^5\) Although this particular model of integration is not the only one used in Quebec, it is by far the most common in Montreal, where the large majority of new immigrants settle. Figure 1 represents the various ways in which non-francophone newcomers might move through the secondary school system.

While the French-language Charter has been successful in promoting and protecting French as the official and dominant language of Quebec, English-language schooling remains something of a threat at the edge of the province’s educational system. Both English and French-language education are available through adult education programs which offer secondary school equivalencies and professional certificates for students 16 years or older. Cégep (*collège de l’éducation générale et professionelle* ‘college of general and professional education’) offers vocational and pre-university courses to secondary school graduates.
Figure 1. Newcomers’ movement through the secondary school system in Quebec
3. **Studies of newcomer integration in Quebec schools:**

**A short synopsis**

Current integration policies and public debates emphasize the importance of and need for openness to Quebec’s cultural and linguistic diversity (MEQ, 1998; Gouvernement du Québec 2006, 2007; Bouchard and Taylor 2008) and support the literature on newcomer integration, which suggests that adequate recognition, openness, and flexibility are what is missing in the integration practices of Quebec’s schools.

Studies on the social, linguistic, and academic integration of Quebec’s allophone student population suggest that Quebec’s language-centered approach to integration is limited for a variety of reasons: it fails to recognize and accommodate the whole student (Steinbach and Dufour in press; Steinbach 2008; Allen 2006, 2007; Fleury 2007; Messier 1997); it may contribute to the academic delays of older newcomer students (Conseil Scolaire de l’île de Montréal 1990; MEQ 1996); it inadequately addresses student concerns with interethnic and host-society relations (Perron 1996; MEQ 1996); and its teachers (mainstream and accueil) have inadequate understanding of newcomer students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Cumming-Potvin, Lessard and McAndrew 1994, 2001; MEQ 1996).

Likewise, a growing body of second language education (SLE) research speaks to many of these concerns by drawing on theories of identity construction to interpret the experiences of newcomer host-language learners. From studies conducted in a number of diverse linguistic and cultural contexts (Harklau 2000; McKay and Wong 1996; Olsen 1997; Leung, Harris and Rampton 1997; Thesen 1997; Heller 1999; Ryan 1999; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000), the authors of this body of literature draw on the writings of Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Foucault, Bruner, and others to theorize identity construction. I draw on this body of literature to explore how an identity-centered rather than language-centered approach to integration might address some of the challenges to integration in Quebec’s schools.

4. **Understanding newcomer integration through identity construction theories**

Broadly, discursive, dialogic, and narrative theories of identity construction describe the ways in which the above-mentioned SLE researchers interpret newcomers’ host-language learning experiences as they interact with and are
positioned in various discourses. Because definitions of “discourse” are variable and sometimes vague in these writings, I have drawn on Gee’s (1996) distinction between Discourses (beliefs, values, and practices, including language) and discourse (a connected series of utterances or written words) to interpret the authors’ conceptual orientation toward the former, broader understanding of discursive identity construction. On the whole, Discourses are understood in this body of literature to shape the ways that language learners understand and represent themselves both publicly and privately, inwardly and outwardly. Most of these researchers also suggest that discursive power does not eliminate individual agency and thus view identity construction as dialogic, negotiated or a “site of struggle” (Peirce 1995). While not as common a theoretical frame in the SLE literature, narrative identity construction is central in some of this literature (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Prior this volume; Thesen 1997) and is perhaps most obvious in first- and second-generation immigrant autobiographies such as those of Hoffman (1989), Rodriguez (1982), and Fong-Torres (1994).

In moving from theory to practice, I view discursive, dialogic, and narrative identity constructions in this literature as manifest in what I refer to as naming practices: institutional naming (of host-language learners), as well as the student practices of name calling, name claiming, and name resisting. Less common within this literature is what I refer to as renaming or narrative identity (re)construction. Institutional naming refers to the various labels assigned to newcomers (e.g., ESL, LEP, at risk, disadvantaged) through the language, beliefs, and practices of educators. They are norm-referenced markers which locate newcomers physically, linguistically, socially, and academically within an educational institution (see, for example, Olsen 1997; Harklau 2000; Thesen 1997). While common, institutional naming is not always explicit, it can occur through the mapping of stereotyped beliefs onto students with certain phenotypic and linguistic features (McKay and Wong 1996) and often tacitly references an “idealized native speaker” which permanently “others” host-language learners (Leung et al. 1997).

Name calling and name claiming refer to discourses of clothing, gender, race, ethnicity, language use, popularity, and music that students use to identify themselves and their peers (Talmy 2004; Miller 2003; Ryan 1999; Heller 1999; Olsen 1997). An interesting finding in the SLE literature regarding these discursive practices is that students claim names that are quite different from the ones they are called. Furthermore, the names they claim are generally more complex, multifaceted, and fluid than the names they assign to others (Thesen 1997; Olsen 1997). Name resisting refers to the practice of
dialogic identity construction, whereby students push back against the discursive constructions of their peers, educators, and/or school. Name resisting can be manifest as dropping out of a class that the student feels is inappropriate (Harklau 2000), employing mother tongue terms in a “target” language essay (Thesen 1997), or soliciting the help of a mainstream teacher to have oneself promoted out of ESL (McKay and Wong 1996). Renaming refers to the practice of narrative identity construction whereby autobiographical accounts of immigrant language learning and integration chronicle a “self translation” (Hoffman 1989; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). I understand self translation as a conscious act of reconciling the cultural and linguistic differences that reside within individuals whose home language and culture differs from the language and culture of the society in which they live (see, for example, Hoffman 1989; Fong-Torres 1994; Rodriguez 1982).

5. A study of newcomer integration in a Quebec secondary school

5.1. Methodology

To understand how newcomers made sense of themselves as they transitioned from one language, culture, and location to another, I worked ethnographically over 15 months with 18 newcomer students’ originally enrolled in the same accueil class. Through participant observation, open-ended interviews, and email exchanges with the students and Charlotte, the study chronicled the students’ changing understandings of themselves linguistically, socially, and academically and described the naming practices in which they engaged across two academic years at École Secondaire de Montréal (ESM).

Students were given the option to conduct their interviews with me in English, French, or Spanish (the three languages in which I am more or less comfortable). While some students generally chose English or Spanish as the language in which they were most comfortable, others chose French explicitly to practice their oral skills in that language. For a few students, French was the only language we shared.

5.2. The site

ESM serves approximately 875 students from a wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The school proudly claims a 95 percent
immigrant-origin student body, who together represent 85 different countries of origin and 50 different languages. This diversity is due in part to the school’s location in a culturally diverse neighborhood but also to the school’s focus on its *accueil* program. By offering *accueil* programs in only certain schools, Quebec’s education ministry ensures host-language programs that are large enough to offer several different levels of intensive language instruction under one roof. The result in the case of ESM is a school that not only has a large *accueil* program (9 classes) but has a mainstream population made up primarily of students formerly enrolled in *accueil*.

### 5.3. The participants

As a group, the 18 students featured in the study spoke 23 different languages,\(^9\) represented 15 different countries of origin,\(^10\) and practiced 5 different religions.\(^11\) I met the students in Charlotte’s *accueil* class, during the last three months of their first year at ESM. This chapter focuses on the experiences of those five students who were re-enrolled in the *accueil* program for a second year because their French was considered too weak for academic success in the mainstream.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age during study</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Mother tongue</th>
<th>Other languages</th>
<th>Education prior to study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashel</td>
<td>15−16</td>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Creole, French</td>
<td>sec. 3 in St. Lucia; 7 months in <em>accueil</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrissy</td>
<td>17−18</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>English, French</td>
<td>sec. 3 in Korea; 9 months in <em>accueil</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dani</td>
<td>16−17</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>sec. 4 in Lebanon; 7 months in <em>accueil</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>16−17</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>Hindi, Arabic, English, French</td>
<td>sec. 5 in India; 7 months in <em>accueil</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miglena</td>
<td>17−18</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
<td>English, German, French</td>
<td>sec. 3 in Bulgaria; 6 months in <em>accueil</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4. Biographical sketches of five accueil returnees

Elena

With varying degrees of fluency in five languages (Punjabi, Hindi, English, Arabic, French), Elena (17 years old upon arrival) was one of the classic multilinguals in the study. Punjabi and Hindi were the languages of her home and her religion; English was her first language of education, French was her second language of education, and Arabic was a language she had studied in school. Elena had finished her secondary education in her home country, but when she left India, she did not yet have her graduation papers and so was not eligible for cégep. When Elena’s family left India, they left behind a large home, an extensive social network, and her father’s successful truck mechanic business. They moved to Montreal, as did so many of the families of the participants in this study, according to family and friendship ties and in order that the children (Elena and her two sisters) receive a good education, specifically a degree from a North American university. Elena was concerned about her parents who experienced health problems and social isolation. Thus, while Elena recognized her parents’ decision to move to Canada as one of self-sacrifice for the good of their children, she frequently wondered about the wisdom of their decision.

Chrissy

Like Elena, Chrissy was 17 years old when she arrived in Quebec. She had not, however, completed her secondary education in Korea (her country of origin) and so was obliged to either complete her education in French at the secondary school or in the language of her choice in the adult school system. As was the case for many of the students, Chrissy did not view the adult school system as legitimate and so refused this option even though it meant her studies would be done in French, the weaker of her two additional languages. An important feature of Chrissy’s life outside of school was her work in her parents’ convenience store. Working four to five hours after school and large portions of the weekends, Chrissy tried to do her school work in the wee hours and often slept during class. When Charlotte intervened with suggestions to Chrissy’s parents that Chrissy’s work schedule could be jeopardizing their daughter’s education, the work load would lessen, but only briefly. When Chrissy and her younger brother moved to Quebec with their parents,
Chrissy believed they were doing it primarily for her education. Chrissy felt that moving to Montreal, where she would have access to both French and English, would be ideal for her career goals as a translator (she was considered quite proficient in English when living in Korea). Chrissy described her family as having sacrificed their life in Korea in order that she pursue her education in Montreal. For this reason, and because her younger brother (age 12 on arrival) excelled in acquiring French, Chrissy was devastated by her placement in *accueil* for a second year.

**Ashel**

A year younger than the other four *accueil* returnees, Ashel moved permanently to Montreal when she was 16. Prior to that final move, she had moved back and forth for three years between her home in St. Lucia (where she was raised by her grandmother until the age of 13) and her mother’s home in Montreal. Initially reluctant to accept her life in Quebec with her estranged mother, Ashel (fluent in St. Lucia Creole and English) struggled with learning French. With time, though, she turned her resistance into focused determination. Outside of school, much of Ashel’s time was taken with babysitting her infant brother. Because her mother was working irregular hours as a nurse and taking night classes toward a degree in nursing, Ashel spent most evenings and weekends squeezing homework in between her baby brother’s feedings. For Ashel, school was her haven; it was a place for interacting with peers, for learning new ideas, for learning French, and for forgetting about difficulties in her home life and the painful distance from her grandmother and friends in St. Lucia.

**Miglena**

Born and raised in Bulgaria, Miglena lived in Germany for the first five years of her education. While Bulgarian was her mother tongue, German was Miglena’s first language of education. With English as a strong additional language, Miglena was a solid multilingual upon arrival in Quebec. Having left a boyfriend and a very tight-knit group of girlfriends ("the tribe") in Bulgaria, Miglena struggled throughout the study with French specifically and life in Quebec generally. While Miglena almost desperately longed to be with her Bulgarian friends (she made two trips “home” during the study), she said that she would never want to be away from her sister and parents. Financial stability and a brighter future seemed to be the reason for Miglena’s
family’s move to Quebec. Education was considered by Miglena’s parents to be at the heart of that future for their daughters. While Miglena’s parents did not endeavor to learn French during the study (both worked in English), they strongly encouraged Miglena to stay with her studies at ESM in order that she become proficient in a fourth language.

Dani

Born and raised in Lebanon, Dani moved (at the age of 17) to Quebec with his parents and two siblings (a younger brother also at ESM and an older sister in cégep). Having studied French as a subject in school only, Dani considered himself to be a monolingual Arabic speaker upon arrival in Quebec. He was, however, perhaps less socially and linguistically isolated from the mainstream than were his accueil peers because he shared the common mother tongue of Arabic with over 20 percent of the school population. In his first year of accueil when no one in the class shared Dani’s primary language, Dani tended to keep to himself, doing his work quietly at the back of the class. Unlike most of his peers in that first accueil class, Dani did not speak any English and was therefore excluded from any interactions in the de facto lingua franca for that year. During his second year of accueil, however, many of the students in the class spoke Arabic as their first language. Dani became what Charlotte referred to as the class clown and frequently had his classmates laughing. While Dani admitted that he did not study much, he also emphasized that the only reason his family had come to Montreal was so that he and his siblings might have a good education. He felt strongly that the family’s immigration had not been good for him or his mother in the present, and believed that the time he spent getting his education in Montreal was strictly an investment in the future, assurance of a good job when the family would eventually return to Lebanon where North American university degrees are a highly valued form of capital.

6. Data analysis: Naming practices and acts of resistance

6.1. Institutional naming and discursive identity constructions

By categorizing particular students into particular programs, institutional names are not just labels given to students but actions taken which situate
students in particular roles in the school, roles that are associated with particular “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking” (Gee 1996: viii). These roles, and the constraints they place on the labelled students, are constructed through institutional naming both linguistically and structurally, both explicitly and implicitly. Non-French-speaking students are identified as linguistically deficient through their enrolment in the accueil program as a prerequisite to mainstream courses. Accueil students are also identified as not academically or socially normal by being excluded from régulier (‘mainstream’) courses and some extracurricular mainstream activities. For example, accueil students take field trips with students enrolled in the at-risk program, not with students in the mainstream. Furthermore, the accueil program’s emphasis on learning French to the exclusion of almost all other academic subject matter, suggests two things: first, that students are linguistically deficient, despite their multilingualism; and second, because of this deficiency, they are also academically incompetent. Ironically, the program’s isolation of accueil students from most core subjects creates a kind of academic disability by disrupting students’ ongoing development in the various subject domains. Finally, because of their physical isolation from their mainstream peers an implicit message is that accueil students either cannot or should not interact with those peers.

Some of these messages are reinforced in the attitudes expressed by even the most dedicated teachers and administrators. In discussing ESM’s long-term plans to develop various projets accrocheurs (programs designed to attract students who might otherwise enrol in neighboring schools which offer specialty programs), the director of ESM’s student life programs explains that newcomer accueil students would not likely be eligible to participate in such projects:

Un élève en accueil qui a déjà la difficulté au niveau de la langue ne pourrait peut-être pas [participer à un projet accrocheur qui permet aux élèves d’assister à moins de cours de français] … dès la première année; mais pourrait peut-être se joindre … quand il sera plus à l’aise avec la langue française. (Mr. L)

‘An accueil student who already has difficulty in terms of language couldn’t (participate in a projet accrocheur which allows students to attend fewer French courses) … in their first year; but (he) might be able to participate when he is more comfortable with French.’ (Mr. L)

While Mr. L suggests that inadequate language proficiency is what keeps newcomers on the outside of school community activities such as the
sports-camp style *projet accrocheur* on which he has most recently been working, Ms F (a French Language Arts teacher) believes that immigrants generally, not just newcomers, are “handicapped” academically because of their “lack of cultural referents”:

Moi ce que j’ai trouvé difficile avec des immigrants c’est qu’il leur manquait beaucoup de référents culturels. … On en a de plus en plus qui naissent ici, mais ils sont toujours dans le giron de la famille traditionelle, ils ne sortent pas beaucoup, ils ne se mêlent pas beaucoup à la population en général … Alors quand on enseigne le français c’est un grand handicap parce que les élèves, quand on leur demande de lire un texte, si on réfère à ce qui s’est passé la semaine précédente dans l’actualité, souvent ils ne vont pas le connaître. (Mme F)

‘What I’ve found difficult with immigrants is that they lack a lot of cultural referents. … Increasingly, they are born here, but they remain in the traditional family fold, they don’t go out much, they don’t mix much with the general population. … So, when we teach French, it’s a big handicap because when we ask the students to read a text, if we make reference to something that happened in the news the week before, often they won’t understand.’ (Mme F)

Discursive constructions of newcomers and immigrants reside not just in school policies and programs but in the belief systems of teachers and administrators who help shape the school community. It is the unquestioned “commonsenseness” of these discursive constructions that makes them so powerful.

By far the most remarkable example of discursive identity construction among the study’s participants was that of Chrissy. She consistently interpreted herself according to the “names” she was given in the school system:

In my country, it was just … usually I get the top, I was really, I think I’m strong, I think I’m smart myself. But I came here and it was not … it was not, I don’t know why. (Chrissy)

Chrissy views Korean-based interpretations of herself as “smart” as erroneous in light of her perceived failures in the Quebec education system, failures according to school discourses of what is normal (*régulier*) and what is not. Furthermore, she does not question the legitimacy of the labels she has received due to her low level of French proficiency. Instead, she sides with the institution, saying that she values the school and its decisions and does not value or like herself because she has performed so poorly:
Now I understand why I have to stay here [in accueil]. I like here now I like here really but I am always worry about can I go up to secondary five next year. ... Why I couldn’t get good mark, always bads ... that’s why I like here but I don’t like me. (Chrissy)

Chrissy’s identity claim, then, is that of a failure, a person who, despite what might be the best intentions of the educational system, has failed to learn enough French to be considered régulier, to be recognized as a member of the mainstream. She understands (and as a result dislikes) herself in this context through the discursive construction of an accueil returnee.

6.2. Name-claiming: Students’ academic, linguistic, and social self-descriptors

I turn now to the students’ name-claiming patterns that emerged in the data. While this section is neatly divided into three subsections (academic, linguistic, and social descriptions), it is important to note that these categories are somewhat arbitrary since each influences the other: language is central to both academics and social interaction, academic performance is related to self-esteem, and social factors play a role in language comfort, use, and academic performance.

6.2.1. Academic self-descriptions

Academic delay was a common concern across all of the participants. All of the students were concerned about being behind schedule as compared with their same-age peers both in their country of origin and in Montreal.

My friends are finishing school back home … and I’m not … And I don’t want to do secondary 4. I want to go to secondary 5, finish high school like my friends. (Ashel)

In the case of the five focal students, all but Ashel turned 18 in their second year at ESM. Elena had already graduated from secondary school in India; and Dani, Miglena, Ashel, and Chrissy all had expectations of graduating from a Montreal secondary school after two years in Quebec. They were in their second year of accueil at the time of most of our interviews and were well aware of the fact that while accueil might serve
their linguistic needs, it did not move them any closer to completing their academic requirements.

The delay in accessing the mainstream also affected their contact with content courses. The almost singular focus on language learning in accueil contributes to the students’ sense that they are not attending a “legitimate” academic program. Dani evaluates accueil as something less legitimate than secondary school and suggests that his re-enrolment in accueil resulted in his lack of motivation to study at all:12

En secondaire, je vais étudier plus que en accueil ici, parce qu’en accueil on a pas beaucoup de choses, je dis « oh, je m’en fous ; c’est pas grave… mais si j’ai beaucoup de choses, comme au secondaire: sciences physiques, mathématiques, français, en même temps histoire, tout en même temps. Là maintenant, je vais dire « OK, je vais étudier ». Pas comme maintenant, j’ai pas beaucoup de choses…. Je fais demain ou quelque chose comme ça. C’est ça le problème…. Il faut avoir beaucoup de chose pour réfléchir bien. (Dani)

‘In secondary I would study more than in accueil because in accueil we don’t have as many things, like in secondary: physics, math, Frnech, at the same time as history, all at the same time. Then I would say “okay, I’m going to study”. I don’t have a lot of things. I’ll do it tomorrow or something like that. That’s the problem. You need to have a lot of things to reflect well.’ (Dani).

Elena echoes Dani’s criticism of the French-language focus of accueil, which she feels makes her out of touch with other academic subjects. It is interesting to note that in both Elena’s and Dani’s comments, French is viewed as simply a subject (one of many) and not as the vehicle by which all other subjects will be communicated. While both of them understand that all of their academic courses will be taught in French, they do not see how the French they are learning in accueil will prepare them for the mainstream:

It’s just basic French, I feel … I haven’t got my subject, for instance, of history or science or, have to study a lot. It’s just the grammar or the French text or something. (Elena)

Although Charlotte worked hard to integrate mainstream material into her accueil curriculum, the reality was that she could only cover so many domains. Her area of expertise was the French language (as a subject) and not science or social science, so it is no surprise that many of the students experienced French as a subject and French as a language of communication as two
distinct phenomena. Finally, students described themselves academically as stuck, without options. In fact, all of them except Dani had the option of attending adult school in English, a language which all of the young women had learned prior to French and felt more comfortable using. However, for all of them adult school was stigmatized as a lesser form of education, for people not able to pass “real” secondary school:

When you show … what school did you finish, adult school, everybody going to be like… My mother she wants me to stay in a normal school, regular secondary school to finish. (Miglena)

6.2.2. Linguistic self-descriptions

Linguistically, the students generally described themselves as deficient by virtue of their “accueil” label and isolation from the mainstream. However, the students’ identification as linguistically deficient also comes from a failure, on the part of the school and perhaps the larger community, to recognize students’ multilingualism as an asset.

Elena, who was fully fluent in three languages prior to arriving in Quebec, expresses some frustration with this image of herself as a linguistic failure. She comes to resent French as a barrier to her educational progress and feels that what she has achieved in French, as well as her three other languages, goes unacknowledged:

I wanted to study French so I could speak … but at the same time I wanna continue my education too. I don’t like studying French … The first year, I said ‘yes I’m gonna put full efforts to my French’. I did. I did go through it; but the second year … I expect to do French but with my regular studies … It isn’t make me possible to do my main education in French … I didn’t even do it in my language in my country; I did it in English. So I wanna continue in English. You can’t change the language totally ’cause it doesn’t help me. (Elena)

Unlike Elena, Chrissy does not have multiple languages in her background. She arrived in Quebec speaking some English along with her first language, Korean, and found herself frequently caught between two languages in her second year in accueil. In the summer between her first and second years at ESM, Chrissy looked into taking summer courses to improve her French; but neither ESM nor other local secondary schools offered language support or
maintenance courses for accueil students. Because Chrissy needed to learn French in order to succeed academically and because she had little linguistic support outside of the accueil classroom, friendships became an important linguistic resource for Chrissy. It is not surprising, then, that Chrissy expressed a lot of interest in practicing French with her peers. However, because she also identified strongly with English, due to its linguistic capital both in the accueil class and in the world at large, she also felt very committed to maintaining her English-speaking friendships. Unfortunately, Chrissy discovered that with certain peers such as Elena, French-language friendships were viewed with suspicion and as a betrayal. Having to choose between the two languages put Chrissy in a particularly awkward position:

Now we have a Chinese girl in my class and she cannot speak in English, and she cannot speak [much] French but she want to try and I want to try with her… [but] Elena always say “why you stay with her? Why you don’t stay with me or Miglena or Ashel?” (Chrissy)

6.2.3. Social self-descriptions

While Chrissy seems in many ways very attached to the friendships she has established at ESM, she also described herself as socially isolated. Working both after school and on the weekends, she rarely sees friends outside of school. As a result, Chrissy’s mother, who is also both linguistically and socially isolated, becomes one of Chrissy’s closest friends:

Now me and my mother we’re good friends … [W]hen we came here, because even my mother, she doesn’t have here, no, she doesn’t have friend here. And me, I didn’t have a friend, like Korean people because my mother she need, can speak in Korean, right? … But she needs a people who talk with her in Korean so then I talk with her. Even last night, I talk with her until morning. (Chrissy)

It is for somewhat different reasons that Miglena feels socially isolated. For Miglena and Dani, “real” friends are located in their country of origin and the friendships formed in Montreal cannot replace the depth and history of those earlier relationships:

Now I can’t [imagine having such close friends here as those I have in Bulgaria] … because I spend with these girls 5 to 6 years of my life … this year that we try to
understand who we are, just the most perfect years, teenage years and sisters, with the
guys, and make-up and the clothes, and the problems in your home with your family …
These things you can’t share with somebody else who weren’t there. (Miglena)

After a full two years in Montreal, and despite the network of Arabic-speaking
friends Dani has been able to tap into via his father, he echoes Miglena’s
sentiments saying:

Mes amis, mais ils ne sont pas ici, [ils sont] au Liban … C’est comme des frères
maintenant, … Au Liban je sortais toujours avec eux, n’importe où on sort ensemble,
on vit ensemble, on va ensemble, … Ici on peut pas faire confiance à personne ici.
(Dani)

My friends, but they’re not here, they’re in Lebanon … They’re like brothers
now … In Lebanon I always went out with them, we went everywhere together, we
lived together, we moved around together, … Here you can’t trust anyone. (Dani)

The students’ sense of isolation generally and more specifically separation
from their “real” friends is likely aggravated by their sense of their lives as
boring. The students describe themselves as bored to the point of paralysis
while they “wait for the future to be much better.”

With feelings of isolation, separation, and boredom dominating these
students’ sense of themselves, it is not surprising that explicit references to
depression and even suicide punctuated my discussions with all four women
in this part of the study.

6.3. Name resisting and renaming: Dialogic and narrative
   identity (re)constructions

While all of the students who returned to accueil for a second year were
institutionally named in negative ways, most of them did not accept these
labels as entirely true or unquestionable. Miglena, Ashel, Dani, and Elena
all resisted the school discourses that constrained them to varying degrees
by talking back. It is in insisting on being part of a conversation, the other
half of a dialogue, that the students challenge the institutional names and
claim their agency or right to act in the world, their right to choose how they
engage with the world and their right to make sense of themselves in the
world. However, the students are not and never likely to be equal partners
in a dialogue with educational and school discourses. They have to hide the ways in which they talk back to those discourses. Moreover, sometimes, their acts of resistance do more to hinder their own educational path (e.g., dropping out or failing courses) rather than changing the nature or the effect of the discourses themselves.

Dani talks back by subverting the school rules about French-only by “stealing” some use of his mother tongue when the teacher is not in earshot:

Quand il [le professeur de sciences physiques] vient, on parle français. Quand il part, arabe [rire] … comme des voleurs [rire]. (Dani)

When he [the physics teacher] comes, we speak French. When he leaves, Arabic [laughter] … like thieves [laughter]. (Dani)

He also suggested to me in our last interview that he could have succeeded in the mainstream without the extra year of accueil. Yet, rather than working to prove that Charlotte and the administration made an error in his accueil placement, Dani talks back to the school discourses by ignoring his homework and failing the intégration partielle courses he was enrolled in mid-year. His response to the school’s failure to place him in what he thinks is a legitimate régulier program is to treat the intégration partielle program as not legitimate, and subsequently to fail. Though his actions can be seen as a form of resistance which challenge the misrecognition Dani says he is experiencing, they do not necessarily help him to achieve the higher education goals that he claims he desires.

Similarly, Miglena talks back by using French only when she has to. Like Dani, Miglena admits that if she studied more she would do better, but she chooses not to. Despite her sense that adult school lacks legitimacy, Miglena claims a bit more agency in stating the following:

I can’t stay here anymore in this school, but if I pass my exams, I going to try it here [at ESM]. And if I don’t like it in regular [the mainstream program], I going to go to other school [English adult school] that’s all. (Miglena)

Miglena lays claim to her right to attend the school of her choosing and complete her education in the language of her choice within the constraints of what is available. She also maintains strong ties with friends and family in Bulgaria, making two two-week visits “home” over the course of the study during the school year when she was expected to attend classes. Furthermore,
her commitment to her “real, real” friends in Bulgaria and her inability to imagine such friendships in Quebec suggest that Miglena is resisting social integration into the host society.

While Ashel believes her placement in accueil for a second year was probably appropriate in terms of her proficiency in French, she does not think it was appropriate given her academic abilities. Like the other participants, one of her greatest concerns is her academic delay and knowledge of the fact that her friends in St. Lucia are graduating from secondary school when she is only gaining access to it:

The language and all this stuff, for me it’s like, a must, you know. I can’t complain, you know, I am tired of complaining and I don’t want to complain anymore, I have to just accept ESM, accept everything, that’s how I feel you know. And, the only problem I have with that, … my friends are finishing school back home, high school, and I’m not. And I want to go back home for the prom and the graduation and maybe I’m going to get, how do you say in English, summer school. And I don’t want to really … I’m going to secondary 4, maybe, if I pass. And I don’t want to do secondary 4. I want to go to secondary 5, finish high school, like my friends. (Ashel)

However, other than hinting at the school’s failure to recognize her academic abilities, Ashel does not resist how she has been positioned in the school. Unlike Dani, she turns her frustration with the constraints imposed on her both at school and at home to an act of determination to excel. While Ashel initially resented the linguistic demands of school, she never missed class and completed all assignments on time and well. She even showed up for class projects that took place on the weekend, occasionally with her infant brother on one hip. When faced with these myriad constraints, Ashel claimed responsibility for her life. Thus, Ashel’s resistance was not one of pushing against the boundaries of the school, but more one of pushing the boundaries of her patience, her determination, and her concentration in order to subvert the depressing circumstances of her life by accepting them. She asserts herself in a conversation or dialogue with the constraints of her school and home life. One could argue that Ashel is constructed and constrained by her life circumstances; however, she is also a young woman with tremendous will and who, rather than adopting an oppositional identity, wilfully faces the constraints in her life with determination.

Elena had imagined that she would learn French by attending secondary school. Yet, Elena did not feel that the accueil program was really secondary school. For her, it did not feel legitimate. Therefore, staying in the program
for a second year made her feel like a failure. As a result, Elena actively pushes against the *accueil* program, which she feels confines and inaccurately defines her. In November of her second year in *accueil*, she decided that she could no longer stay at ESM and she began exploring her options. She requested that her graduation papers be sent from India so that she could obtain the equivalencies necessary to enrol in *cégep* (pre-university college). Even before those papers had been processed, though, Elena had decided she would rather drop out than complete the year at ESM. By January of that same academic year, Elena had obtained her equivalencies and enrolled in an English-language *cégep*. With more options available to her, she was able to take on more control of her identity.

7. Conclusion

The experiences of the newcomer participants presented above suggest that host-language learning does not, by itself, produce successful academic, social, or linguistic integration. On the contrary, when integration programs and practices focus on host-language learning as a prerequisite to and sole tool for integration, the host language can be experienced as a barrier to newcomers’ sense of recognition and belonging. With host-language learning as a gatekeeper rather than a gateway for participation in the mainstream, newcomers experience that language as inhibiting participation in the school community and inhibiting their engagement in the activities and social interactions that facilitate a reconstruction of their Self in the host society. Instead, the students in this study constructed selves that retained strong social ties to where they came from, and to transglobal English-speaking populations, rather than to French-speaking communities in Montreal.

When integration is theorized as a form of identity reconstruction, host-language learning becomes a tool embedded in that reconstruction rather than a precursor to it. In their exploration of immigrant autobiographies, Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) draw on the work of Sfard (1998) to offer a different lens through which researchers might broaden their understanding of host-language learning and teaching. They suggest that host-language learning, when understood as self-translation, allows us to view host-language learning as something other than language acquisition, whereby language (and knowledge, generally) are thought of as “a commodity that is accumulated by the learner” (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000: 155). In contrast to the acquisition metaphor, Sfard’s participation metaphor forces us to understand
host-language learning as integral to belonging through “becoming a member of a certain community” (ibid.). While the acquisition metaphor helps host-language learning researchers address “the study of the what in SLA … [the participation metaphor] stresses contextualization and engagement with others… in its attempt to investigate the how” (p. 156). The shift in metaphors (from acquisition to participation) extends the authors’ argument to signal a shift in SLA research paradigms, away from a view of language as a tool or skill and the mind as a container, and toward a view of language learning as “doing,” “knowing,” and “becoming” (ibid.).

My data support Pavlenko and Lantolf’s suggestion that host-language learning is better understood as participation rather than acquisition. However, my data also suggest that institutional discourses most often have the upper hand in this “site of struggle” (Peirce 1995) for identity construction that leads to a sense of belonging. Thus, while newcomers might display some individual agency in their acts of resistance against these discourses, those acts of resistance do little to challenge or change the homogenizing discourses which deny or ignore students’ identity claims. Worse still are those instances when students internalize those institutional labels as legitimate identity tags for themselves. Furthermore, the data suggest that host-language learning can conflict with rather than facilitate a sense of belonging among newcomers when that host language is used as a gatekeeper to participation in the host community. Therefore, rather than attending to the acquisition of language (as a discrete system, or even as a form of capital as is theorized by Bourdieu and others), host-language learning researchers and educators, I am arguing, should focus on language not as something we obtain in order to gain membership in a given community, but as something we learn and use partly as a result of being included in a particular linguistic community. It is through an emphasis on participation and inclusion that newcomers are likely to develop new relationships and engage in new activities that allow for the reconstruction of their identity (Self) in the host community. When host-language learning, rather than participation, becomes the focus of newcomer integration, those newcomers can end up feeling alienated and excluded not only from the host community but from the host language itself.

Notes

1. The phrases “Quebecois de souche” as well as “vieille souche” both roughly translate as “Old stock Quebeckers” and generally refer to French-speaking,
Quebec-born members of the Quebec society who trace their ancestry to Quebec’s French colonists (mid 1500s). Dominated politically and economically by British colonialists from the middle of the 18th century, old stock Quebeckers have long been a minority in Canada. However, a shift in political and economic power within Quebec (marked by the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s and sovereignty referenda in 1980 and 1995) has meant that French-speaking Quebeckers have achieved majority status within Quebec.

2. I use the term host language learning as an alternative to second, additional, or target language learning for several reasons: (a) French is rarely the second language for newcomers to the province of Quebec since most arrive speaking at least two languages, (b) the expression additional language learning masks the importance of the language being learned within the immigrant-receiving society, and (c) the expression target language learning presumes that learning the language of the receiving society is always a desired outcome, goal, or target on the part of newcomers.

3. It is important to note here that until very recently (1998), Quebec’s educational system was divided along confessional lines (Protestant and Catholic) with the large majority of English-speaking Quebeckers attending Protestant schools and the large majority of French-speaking Quebeckers attending Catholic schools. A small percentage of schools in the Catholic school board offered English-language education and a small number of schools in the Protestant school board offered French-language education. Because of the isolationist policy promoted by the Catholic church in Quebec, until the 1960s the Catholic school board offered no mechanism for immigrant children to be educated in French.

4. Partial integration is a program that incorporates older accueil students into two required mainstream courses (science and history) while they are still in the accueil program. Students begin these year-long courses during the second semester and are expected to catch up on the first semester’s material during intensive after-school sessions with the course instructor. Partial integration is offered mid-way through these students’ penultimate year of secondary school. It is offered only to students whose age requires that they leave the secondary school system at the end of the following academic year. Quebec law prohibits students who are 19 years old before a specified date of a given academic year from enrolling in secondary school. Students who are 19 years or older and who have not completed their secondary school education, are allowed to complete coursework for a secondary school diploma through the adult education system.

5. The adult education system offers vocational training and a secondary school diploma program. Open to students at least 16 years old, this educational system generally targets people for whom public secondary school programs are not accessible because of age requirements or scheduling constraints.

6. In Canada, people who speak neither French (francophone) nor English (anglophone) as their mother tongue are commonly referred to as “allophone”.
7. Names of all participants and the school in which the study was conducted are pseudonyms.
8. The pseudonym for the students’ first accueil teacher, and a key participant in the study.
10. Mexico, Sri Lanka, South Korea, India, Russia, China, Hungary, Bulgaria, Lebanon, Peru, the Congo, St. Lucia, Angola, Romania, Cuba.
11. Christian (including Jehovah’s Witness), Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist
12. All excerpts from French-language interviews are first presented in the original French and followed immediately by the author’s translation of that excerpt.
Chapter 4
Performing “national” practices: Identity and hybridity in immigrant youths’ communication

Jane Zuengler

1. Introduction

Influenced by developments in social sciences (see, e.g., Levitt and Jaworsky 2007), cultural studies, and literary studies (Ibrahim 2008; Kramsch 2008), as well as the earlier influence of poststructuralist, postmodern, and critical orientations in the field (e.g., Pennycook 2001), applied linguistics shows growing recognition that language acquisition and use, and the co-construction of selfhood, often occur within processes of global migrations of people as well as within the complicated contexts of postcolonialism. Attention to global “flows” and “flux” (Pennycook 2007) leads us to a view of language that requires a dismantling of global versus local binaries and other conceptual dichotomies and boundaries. Such an outlook can “take us beyond the global/local dialectic by opening up more dynamic relations between transcultural flows and local materialities” (Pennycook 2007: 94; see also Cooke 2008; Rampton 1995; Warriner 2007). Similar arguments are raised by those who urge a reconsideration of our bounding of language in general. To Makoni and Pennycook (2007), problematizing fundamental beliefs about language is necessary, as these beliefs are social constructions that have long been normalized. Though addressing issues surrounding policies of language in education in particular, Canagarajah (2005: 196) takes a similar view of the need to break down boundaries and question categories of language:

Even the practice of planning the place of languages as discrete and autonomous in education can be questioned. Multiple languages now jostle together in many domains of communication, functioning in a complementary, integrated, and fluid manner. The Internet is engendering hybrid texts where languages and symbol systems interact in dynamic new ways.

Recent applied linguistics research that takes as fundamental the phenomena of global migration, fluidity, boundary-blurring, and complexity refers
to the “transnational identities” of Dominicans in New York (Utakis and Pita 2005), the “transnational literacies” of Mexican adolescents in the U.S. (Bruna 2007), or the “transnational youth” who create identities online (McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg and Saliani 2007). Warriner’s (2007) special issue on transnationalism, language learning, and identity in Linguistics and Education brings together a cluster of studies addressing this orientation.

In introducing the studies, Warriner writes that in suspending binary categorizations of “the local” and “the global” (or, for that matter, “micro” as opposed to “macro” analyses of data) and developing more nuanced examinations, we can strive to explain how ideological processes influence social and interactional practices (and vice versa), how hegemony works in specific “local” contexts, and how individual actors and their practices are not only interpolated by but further act upon larger historical, political, cultural, and social relations and events. (2007: 207)

In taking this theoretical and conceptual route, we find renewed recognition of language and identity formation as hybrid. There are well-established traditions in language research that view language fundamentally as hybrid; these include the work on creolization and creole languages, conceptions of nonnative/World Englishes, and research on code-switching. However, current use of the term “hybrid” increasingly comes with an invocation of the theory of Third Space (Bhabha 1990, 1994; see also the review in Kramsch 2008; Ibrahim 2008; Bhatt 2008; Doran 2004; Giampapa 2004, on the importance of spatial metaphors; and Block 2005, for “third place identity”). Though Bhabha (1990, 1994), the most-cited theorist of Third Space, focused primarily on former colonial contexts, the concept of Third Space resonates with those considering sites of immigration as well. To Bhabha, Third Space is an added “space” or use of interstices for the construction and performance of one’s selfhood within contexts of multiple, contested, and hegemonic discourses.1 Applied linguistic researchers who invoke Third Space understand it as the enabler or driver of hybridity as a construction of identity (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). In other words, the alternative space offers affordances for the immigrants to create selves from their complicated mix of past and current cultures and languages. It enables them to situate their hybrid selves in the new, often unsettling and alien target community. Doran (2004), for example, describes Verlan, a form of communication among immigrant adolescents in France, as a Third Space-enabled hybrid that serves to mark the youths’ identities of difference. In his research
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on African adolescent immigrants in Canada who acquire African-American features in their language and hip-hop influenced dress, Ibrahim (1999, 2008) argues that a Third Space can be considered an “ethnographic performance of two or more languages, cultures, and belief systems” (2008: 239). While other research, as pointed out, has identified and described hybridity in language forms and communicative uses, it is by invoking a Third Space perspective that one can move beyond the descriptive to explaining why the hybridity emerges and what purposes it serves for its users. Such a perspective makes important the context – both historically and currently – within which the language use occurs.

The examples that follow of hybridity and identity in the performance of some immigrant/refugee youth in the central part of the United States take this Third Space perspective. While the context of the first two examples is the classroom, the third example takes place out of school, in an after-school center. Though occurring in two different contexts, all of the examples concern the youths’ performance around an overtly national (i.e., American) practice – the Pledge of Allegiance (in the classroom) and a nationally-framed object – the American Girl dolls (at the after-school center). In two of the examples, the creation of a Third Space enables the immigrant youths to perform their selfhood as they develop alternate, hybrid behavior around the Pledge and, in the case of the dolls, appropriate and reshape dominant discourses in the identities they construct around “American Girl.” In both of these cases, they achieve the means of participating in the L2 or dominant language community. However, in the remaining example of the three, the efforts of a student to create a Third Space are unsuccessful, and lead to her giving up on participating at all. Studying the identity performance of some immigrant children around these particular practices also makes clear the problematic use of categories such as “national” in our discourse, because even in these overtly-marked “national” practices, labeling their instantiation “national” is not only simplistic but even perhaps completely irrelevant with regard to how the children construct their selves (see also Blommaert 2008).

2. Creating a Third Space in performing the Pledge of Allegiance: Two examples

The two examples below come from a larger longitudinal ethnographic study of academic language socialization in a culturally and linguistically diverse high school in a midwest U.S. urban area.2 “Jefferson” High School1 lay in
an economically-challenged area of the city; of the school’s 1400 students, 60 percent were Hispanic, 20 percent African-American, 10 percent White, 8 percent Asian, and 2 percent Native American. Our research team visited Jefferson High twice-weekly from the fall of 1996 to June of 2000. The project data include science and social studies classroom videotapes and observational notes, student questionnaires, teacher and teacher aide interviews, and focus groups with students. Since the events of 9/11 in 2001 fostered hyper-patriotic discourse in their wake, it should be noted that these Pledge examples focused on here occurred prior to 9/11.

Each Monday, at the beginning of the third class period, Mr. Agnew, a social studies teacher, got on the school’s public address system to announce the Pledge of Allegiance. Though “under God” has continued to be controversial for many Americans, the wording of the Pledge is fixed:

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.

Since its inception in U.S. schools in 1893, the Pledge of Allegiance has been charged with controversy regarding who should pledge, whether it should be required, and how often it should be offered (see, e.g., Westheimer 2007; Seefeldt 1989; Zirkel and Gluckman 1990; and Olson 1988). As a result of a 1943 Supreme Court decision, it is unconstitutional to compel students to recite the Pledge. Beyond that, it is up to individual states to pass statutes regarding the Pledge. Thirty to 40 states have statutes regarding the Pledge; there is quite a variation among them with regard to which grades should be reciting the Pledge and how often. At the local level, individual school districts, while legally required to uphold the state statute, can and do add on to the statute their particular policies regarding the Pledge.

In the state in which Jefferson High School was located, the statute read as follows:

(state name) Statute 118.06 Flag and pledge of allegiance.

(2) Every public and private school shall offer the pledge of allegiance in grades one to 8 at the beginning of school at least one day per week. No pupil may be compelled, against the pupil’s objections or those of the pupil’s parents or guardian, to recite the pledge.

The Jefferson High School district added on to the state statute its own policy:

7.40: Patriotic Exercises:
1. Pledge of Allegiance

State statutes provide that “Every public and private school shall offer the Pledge of Allegiance in grades one to 8 at the beginning of school at least one day per week. No student shall be compelled, against his objection or those of his parents or guardian, to recite the pledge.”

In keeping with this, students may decline to recite the Pledge of Allegiance and may refrain from saluting the flag. Students refraining from such participation have the responsibility to respect the rights and interests of classmates who do wish to participate in the ceremony. If students choose not to participate, they will not have to explain their reasons for refusing to recite the pledge, but they should remain silent during the rendering of the salute or pledge. They may decline to participate in the salute to the flag and the Pledge of Allegiance without securing permission from their parents.

In high schools, the Pledge of Allegiance should be offered at least one day per week.

As is evident, the Jefferson High School district policy added two elements: the first provided an elaboration of what not being compelled to recite the Pledge meant, namely, that students could decide not to recite the Pledge and not salute the flag. Students did not need to give a reason for not participating, but they had to “respect the rights and interests” of the others who were participating, and remain quiet. The second element added by the school district was to extend the Pledge of Allegiance beyond the eighth grade required by the state to the high school (i.e., grades 9–12). As we will see in the examples below, the students may have been participating in the Pledge, but in doing so, they used language and body language in hybrid ways to reshape and re-signify the nationalist discourse of the Pledge.

Example (1): Masha and Nina in Mr. Douglass’ World Geography class

Mr. Douglass, a native of the state in which Jefferson High was located, taught social studies classes and also served as the Jefferson High basketball coach. The class of mostly freshmen (and thus newcomers to Jefferson High) was made up (according to the school’s ethnicity and race classifications) of approximately a third “Hispanic” students, about a third “Black” students, with the remaining third consisting of those identified as American Indian, several “white”, and several identifying as “other.” Though a number of the students indicated on questionnaires to us that they spoke Spanish, rather
than English, at home, they appeared bilingual or even English dominant, and were not considered to be “limited English proficient” by the school. However, there were two very limited English proficient students who joined the class, two Arabic-speaking Palestinian sisters. The sisters, Masha and Nina, are the focal immigrant students in our consideration of the Pledge in this class. The two girls had arrived in the U.S. only a year before. We observed them in classes right after they arrived. Though they were placed in Jefferson’s ESL classes for several hours a day, the rest of the days they sat in mainstream classes. At first, they had virtually no English, communicating with each other by whispering in Arabic and nodding or shaking heads in response to teachers’ occasional efforts to interact with them. When they joined Mr. Douglass’ Geography class a year later – Masha came in at the beginning and Nina joined the class several weeks later – they were observed to interact, somewhat, in English, with other students and the teacher. However, interactions with others were minimal as they were not asked or expected to do the regular work and participate in class discussions with others; instead, they were given special, lower-level assignments (like looking up definitions of words) which they worked on individually or together. In an effort to improve communication links, the teacher arranged for a bilingual Arabic–English student to join the class to serve as translator, but neither he, nor the sisters, showed much interest in this arrangement.

As already mentioned, the Pledge was announced via the school’s PA system every Monday morning. Our first video was filmed in early September, two weeks after the students began their school year. The transcript below includes the talk leading up to the Pledge:

Excerpt (1)

2SO1DOUGLASS
filmed 9/8/97 (Note: PA = public address system, F = female)

(Xylophone-like tone sounds over loudspeaker preceding announcements)

F student: I pledge allegiance (??)(hurriedly).
Tchr: OK quiet for announcements please (pause)
F student: pledge allegiance
Tchr: quiet for announcements (class quiets down)
PA: [Good Morning Jefferson High. Would everybody please rise for the pledge of allegiance]
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(class starts to rise and face flag in rear corner of class. This also signals the start of general noise, movement and conversation)

PA: Again would everybody please rise for the pledge of allegiance
M student: I pledge allegiance
Tchr: [Sh quiet please

(As the pledge is spoken, some students talk and some stand, accompanying the PA. Not all are reciting it. Some students look around and play to the camera, some are laughing and giggling. CE2F having stood up late, adjusts her shoe during the pledge and sits down before it finishes.)

F student: (singing) My country ’tis of thee (students sit down)

One of the girls shows her recognition of the xylophone sound as the onset of the pledge – she simply starts the pledge recitation right away, before the PA announces it. Mr. Douglass, meanwhile, works to get the class settled down and quiet for what he calls “announcements” – the Pledge is followed each time by various announcements, so he refers to the whole PA delivery as “announcements.” As it is done each time, the PA voice twice requests “would everybody please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance.” Another student begins on his own, but Mr. Douglass shushes him. The Pledge recitation begins. Masha is in the class (her sister Nina has not yet joined the class) and Masha remains seated while almost all of the others stand. Mr. Douglass points to the corner in which the flag is standing; it is not clear from the video, however, whether he is directing this to Masha. Then he stands with his hand on his heart, facing the flag. As the recitation of the Pledge begins, Masha stands up. Only some of the students appear to be reciting it; others just stand. One of the girls points to the flag for a girl standing next to her, some look around rather than face the flag, some play to the camera, while several are joking and giggling. Though it is clear that most of the students are not newcomers to the Pledge, as they seem familiar with the ritual, almost all of them recite at a pace out of synch with the PA voice. When it is over, they sit down, though one of the girls starts to sing the anthem “my country ’tis of thee.”

The Pledge performance on this day and perhaps previous ones prompts Mr. Douglass to have a talk with the class right after all of the announcements are completed:
In what he says to the class, Mr. Douglass makes clear his understanding of and rules for participating (or not) in the Pledge within his classroom. Doing the Pledge requires performing it seriously because it is showing respect that displays pride in your country. Those who don’t want to take it seriously should sit down, but should respect the students who are doing the Pledge, because in doing it (and here he struggles to find the word) the pledgers are showing “patronance” toward “your country.”

How Mr. Douglass frames the activity foregrounds seriousness: the Pledge is a serious display of respect and pride in the U.S. (described as “your country”); anyone not wanting to take it seriously should not participate – after all, he concedes, they cannot be forced to take it seriously. However, they can be made to respect those who do. Why they should take this seriously is something they will take up another time – in their next year’s civics class.
In his discourse of seriousness and respect, Mr. Douglass positions those not doing the Pledge as not *patriotic*. He does not acknowledge, in what he conveys here, that students might have other reasons not to pledge.

It was not clear how much Masha understood of Mr. Douglass’ lecture on their Pledge behavior. Nor was it clear that the other, English-speaking students took Mr. Douglass’ words to heart. As the year wore on, the Pledgeurs continued at times to recite out of synch with the PA voice, lean against or sit on top of their desks, in some cases, finger or clutch the flag (until Mr. Douglass reprimanded them), and use their extra hand (the one not over their heart) to groom their hair, playfully punch their neighbor, etc. Each time, several students remained seated and quiet, looking ahead or down at their desk.

A couple of weeks later, Masha’s older sister Nina joined the class and was given a seat close to her. In the first taping we have that includes her, Nina gets up out of her desk, along with most of the others, as the PA voice asks them to “please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance.” Standing, she then turns around and sees her sister Masha, who, this time, remains seated. Nina turns back around, facing toward the flag and away from her sister, but takes her hand off her heart. As the Pledge ends, Nina turns back to look at her sister as she sits down. During the next couple of weeks’ Pledges, Masha remained seated (and she continued to remain seated during the Pledge through the rest of the school year). Nina, on the other hand, continued to stand – quietly, but looking equivocal and even uncomfortable: sometimes we saw her putting her right hand over the right side of her chest (i.e., not over the heart), then she moved it back over to her heart but then lifted the palm up and touched her heart with only the tips of her fingers; sometimes she faced the front of the class rather than turning toward the flag at the back. This is shown in the still taken from the video (figure 1). Nina’s displays of equivocation and discomfort ended about a month later, when she stayed seated during the Pledge. Like her sister, she remained quiet, looking ahead or down at her desk. And like her sister, she continued to remain seated for the remainder of her time in Mr. Douglass’ geography class. Seeking to create an alternate, Third Space in which she could display an identity she was comfortable with, Nina appeared for a while to “try out” standing, but not going through the verbal motions of reciting the Pledge or the nonverbal motions of facing the flag while placing her hand over her heart. Not achieving a satisfactory alternative – a Third Space – via these means, Nina ultimately opted to join her sister in remaining seated. While one might argue that staying seated could represent a Third Space with hybrid performance, it seems clearer that
remaining in one’s seat during the Pledge signaled that one was not participating in it. After all, Mr. Douglas told the class that anyone not wanting to Pledge should remain seated.

Mr. Douglass, meanwhile, continued his efforts to convince the class of the importance of participating in the Pledge. In early December, he used a weekend experience at a basketball game to make his point.

Excerpt (3)

2SO22DOUGLASS
filmed 12/1/97

Tchr: One thing too (.).I I made a-I think I talked about this a little bit last week about the pledge of allegiance an uh I I thought about (.). this again um (.). I guess over the weekend I I don’t know what made me think of this = Oh I know I was at(.). I was at a basketball game again but uh (.). it just uh (.). again today (.). during the pledge of allegiance it says
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I guess it (.) to a lot of you it must not mean too much that you guys you know don’t stand and um show your pledge of allegiance and that (.) an (.) you know um (.) I don’t know if I I gave you this example (.) I think I talked about this last week (.) was I went to a basketball game (.) um (.) [brief drop in sound volume] (?) [name of school] (.) that’s a a parochial school did I talk about this (.) an uh [name of public school] (.) it’s funny the parochial high school school (.) thes-the whole crowd was quiet (.) they all stood (.) and they were looking at the flag (.) you looked across at the [name of public school] crowd (.) they were all loud an talking an I don’t think anyone knew where the flag was (.).

Students: [laughter]

Tchr: an uh (.) but the thing is uh (.) you know some of you might think that that’s funny (.) but uh (.) do you want (.) I mean do you want to represent yourself (.) your school (.) uh (.) your city (.) uh

S: ()

Tchr: (.) do you want to represent yourself that way = I mean does it matter to you = I mean that’s something to think about (.) if if you had-if you had children would you want your children to be acting that way also (.) would you want uh (.) you look at one side of the gym (.) where the kids are um (.) you know respecting the flag and everything (pause) and other side is not (.) I mean uh which side would you want your (?) son or daughter on (.) it’s just something to think about an (.) you know a lot of you take that for granted = but I think you should take it more seriously (.) that’s a matter of opinion (.) of course I can’t make you do that (.) um (.).

OK now (.). let’s get to the project here

This time, Mr. Douglass brought up his experience at the basketball game, a domain in which Mr. Douglass, as a basketball coach, has a lot of cultural capital. In constructing the parochial high school students as the good pledgers and the public school students as the bad nonparticipants, Mr. Douglass invoked the still-current and contentious discourse of parochial schools as more effective institutions for instilling appropriate academic and social behavior – especially for poor, urban minority kids – than the public schools. Another message Mr. Douglass was conveying here was the importance of good public behavior (not, specifically, patriotism to flag or country) because how a student behaves during the Pledge reflects on the student’s school and city as well as on the student him or herself. Projecting the question onto them as hypothetical parents, Mr. Douglass asked them if they wanted their children to behave like the “bad,” public school kids, acting out noisily and ignorantly in public, or whether they would want them to act like the
“good,” better-behaved parochial school pledgers. In so doing, Mr. Douglass creates for them an additional interactional identity – besides students, they are future parents (see Wortham 1994, on participant examples), so they have double levels of responsibility: one, now, as students, and a second, as future parents of students. And the Pledge has added import; in addition to conveying patriotism and respect for the flag, it is also an important moment for showing that one can comport oneself well in public as well as be a fitting representative of school and city. The Pledge has thus doubled or tripled in importance.5

Given Masha and Nina’s limited English proficiency and Mr. Douglass’ lack of foreigner talk accommodations, it is likely that neither Masha nor Nina understood much of the actual recited Pledge text or what Mr. Douglass told the class about Pledge behavior. Since neither Masha nor Nina had attended elementary or middle school in the U.S., the Pledge to the U.S. flag was undoubtedly a new practice with an unfamiliar text. However, because both Masha’s, and gradually Nina’s, decision to remain seated required an active resolution on their parts to deviate from the majority – and from the efforts of their teacher – and since Nina showed signs of discomfort when standing, one can conclude that they did, in fact, understand the meaning of the Pledge. They were not sitting down because they did not understand what was going on. Each of the sisters sought an alternative space, a space accepting of who they were. In Nina’s case, the likely conflict between her wanting to display respectful student conduct toward Mr. Douglass and her discomfort in following behavior that she may have found threatening to her cultural and religious identity was something we observed her wrestling with for a while and then resolving by sitting down. One could argue that Masha and Nina turned on its head what Mr. Douglass was telling the class about seriousness and pledging. He had said, it will be remembered, that those not wanting to take it seriously should not stand for the Pledge. Instead, we can argue, it was because Masha and Nina did take the Pledge seriously that they each chose to not stand for it.

It is important to note that the other students in the class, particularly those who recited out of synch, were playing to the camera and in general, displaying playfulness more than seriousness in their recitation of the Pledge were perhaps involved in the same process as Masha and Nina of needing an alternative, Third Space in which to assert their identity. What Mr. Douglass saw as lack of respect might have been the hybrid performance – i.e., reciting the Pledge but in an unconventional manner – possible once the students
constructed an alternative space for themselves that was between performing the Pledge in the expected manner and not participating in it at all. They had the same needs as Masha and Nina to find a means of displaying their identities.

Example (2): Students pledging in Mr. Agnew’s Civics class

The classroom next to Mr. Douglass’ was Mr. Agnew’s Civics class. Mr. Agnew’s Civics class was a sheltered class for the limited English students whom the school referred to as the “Asian” students. Though there was a Spanish–English bilingual program at Jefferson high, there was no bilingual curriculum for the smaller groups speaking other languages. Most of the students in Mr. Agnew’s class were Hmong; the others were Lao or Thai. There were also three Spanish-speaking students whose mothers were teacher colleagues of Mr. Agnew’s and liked his teaching style, so they asked if their children could be placed in the class. English proficiency in the Civics class was varied, ranging from the quite limited proficiency of at least half of the Hmong students to the native speaker-like proficiency of the three Spanish speakers. According to Mr. Agnew, most of the students in this class were not U.S. citizens. Since almost all of Mr. Agnew’s students were English language learners, our focus in this example is on the class as a whole. Besides Mr. Agnew, who spoke a little Spanish but none of the other languages of the students, there were two Hmong aides, one of whom was Mr. Tong. Mr. Tong had worked with Mr. Agnew for a number of years, and was given more responsibility than the other Hmong aide, who had joined the class more recently. When Mr. Agnew left the class, every Monday, to get on the PA and announce the Pledge, it was Mr. Tong who took over the class.

Each week, when Mr. Agnew broadcast “would everybody please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance,” Mr. Tong, through pointing to the flag, calling students by name to stand, and repeating “everybody, this means everybody,” directed all of the students out of their seats to stand and face the flag:

Excerpt (4)

2SO15AGNEW
filmed 11/24//97 (Note: Aide = Mr. Tong)

[Xylophone-like tone sounds over loudspeaker – Aide is sitting writing with back to class]
Good morning Jefferson High(.) would everybody please rise for the pledge of allegiance.

Aide: there’s the flag (.) come on TOM (points to flag w/left hand) (points to the student with right hand)

PA: again would every[body please rise for the pledge of allegiance

Aide: [you too (.) everybody (.)( ) the [s f] please ( ) (points to student)

F S: [ ( )

PA: [I pledge allegiance to the United States of America (.) and to the republic for which it stands. (.) One nation (.) under God (.) indivisible (.) with liberty and justice for all.

(Aide, holding hand over heart, taps his chest at the end of pledge)

Ss: ( )

PA: do you enjoy swimming

This example is typical of how the Pledge activity was performed in the Civics class. Mr. Tong actively, quickly identified students whom he thought needed coaxing to stand, and called them by name, repeating Mr. Agnew’s “everybody.” Students obliged by getting up out of their seats and standing quietly, with only a couple of them observed moving their lips but not vocalizing. Though they were quiet, several would look down at their desks while standing, and others, while they had their hand on their heart, often made use of their remaining hand to share candy, look at photos, or read a magazine. This still from the video shows the sharing of candy between several of the girls during the Pledge: During the Pledge, Mr. Tong and the other aide stood facing the flag, with their hands over their hearts. Neither mouthed the words. Sometimes, Mr. Tong tapped his heart at the end of the Pledge.

In contrast to Mr. Douglass, neither Mr. Tong nor Mr. Agnew talked to the students about the Pledge at any time over the course of the year. Though unexpressed in the classroom, we learned about Mr. Agnew’s, Mr. Tong’s, and the other aide’s opinions regarding the Pledge when we had interviews with them. Mr. Agnew told us that if his students were doing the Pledge, “it’s basically coming from [Mr. Tong] … what it all means and what else have you I’m sure he’s translated and explained that to them because obviously I’m not even in the room.” However, as just mentioned, there were no explanations or translations that we were aware of in the class. Mr. Agnew told us he did not care whether the students did the Pledge or not, acknowledging that the students legally did not have to pledge, and bringing up experiences with mainstream classes which revealed how emotion-charged the Pledge activity could be for some:
I’ve had kids who say this racist country doesn’t owe me shit I’m not standing up they can go to Hell . . . I’ve been told everything from it’s a white man’s flag to you name it.

However, the Pledge activity, as Mr. Tong directed it, did not openly elicit any such emotions.

Both Mr. Agnew and the other Hmong aide felt that if the students were standing for the Pledge, it was because they were showing respect for Mr. Tong, who had asked them to stand. Mr. Tong, Mr. Agnew explained, was a highly-respected adult within the tightly-knit Hmong community in the city. In encouraging students to stand for the Pledge, Mr. Tong was not only showing the pride he often conveyed to us about living in the U.S., but was getting the class to appropriately respond to the PA voice, who was after all their teacher, requesting “everybody” to “please rise.”

Mr. Tong’s opinion was that students were standing because “we want them we make them stand.” As Mr. Tong explained it, it was something they
needed to do, to show respect for the flag, whether they were in the U.S. or somewhere else:

I have never taught them the pledge of allegiance you know. I just told them. But I did tell them that the reason we do this because of respect of the flag. The respect the United States. And then I mean in Lao we did the same thing. Every Monday before … we start school we would all to the flag pole and start singing the national anthem. And then we would raise the flag and we would salute … And that’s culture … I did that. I taught them…

Mr. Tong went on: “but they know that when Mr. Agnew asks for … the pledge they will have to stand. And part of it because I think because of the disciplinary.”

As to whether the students actually understood the words or significance of the pledge itself, the other aide felt that they didn’t: “I don’t think they understand … what it means or like the importance of it.” Then, she added: “I don’t think I know the pledge either.” Not given the opportunity to decide whether or not to participate, it was difficult for us observers to determine how the students felt about the practice. A number of them seemed to treat it more like an automatic routine with fixed content (see Peters and Boggs 1986) which did not, in itself, necessarily elicit any patriotic emotions. The pledgers seemed similar in this respect to Mr. Douglass’s pledgers, but they were quieter since no one was reciting the Pledge out loud. Students stood and faced the flag, but often attended to something else at the same time – as mentioned earlier, students would share candy, pass around photos, or read magazines. Unlike Masha and Nina, these immigrant/refugee students seemed to have already carved out a space, a “comfort zone” for their identities vis-à-vis the Pledge activity. Though they did not choose to take an oppositional stance by remaining seated, they hybridized their Pledge performance through finding ways of engaging in other common student behavior while standing. Interestingly, early in the following year, two students did come up to Mr. Tong telling him that they would not be doing the Pledge because it was against their religion. The two students were Masha and Nina.

Example (3): Girls at after-school center get American Girl dolls

The last example of immigrant children creating a Third Space in which to perform their identities takes place outside of the classroom, at an after-school center called Nugent Learning Center. The example is from an ongoing
ethnographic study of the cultural and language learning experiences occurring within the after-school site that serves both immigrant and nonimmigrant children. After-school sites are important to study as they often have little-to-no connection to formal schooling and are places where children voluntarily come to spend time. Nugent Learning Center is located in a small city in the U.S. midwest. What distinguishes Nugent from many other community centers is the director’s and staff’s dedication to instilling a discourse of social justice within the center. In particular, there was a conscious commitment exerted to counteracting or “neutralizing,” in the director’s words, the norms of the American school system which, the director strongly believed, led to the marginalization of immigrant and refugee kids, among others.

Nugent Learning Center is situated within a low-income residential housing area in the city. The director made a point of explaining that it is for “learning,” and needs to be called that, rather than the more common term “community center.” The majority of residents are African-American; additionally, there are Hmong refugee families. Some came 8–10 years ago while others arrived more recently within the past several years, constituting what some call the “last wave” of Hmong immigration. Some Latino families live there, as do a few Anglo families, and some African immigrants – in particular, two families. One is from Togo and the other, from southern Sudan. Nugent Learning Center serves about 200 people, with about 60 coming by on any given day. The center is open for the children during the week from about 3:00 p.m. to about 8–9:00 p.m. Help with homework is offered throughout those hours. There are games, books, and other resources available, but the children can use them only after completing their homework. Elementary, middle, and high school youth each have an hour allotted in which they can use the computers in the lab downstairs (there are about 15 terminals). Staff make sure that when one group’s time is up, they leave so that the next group can use the computers.

I have been a participant-observer, 1–2 times per week for the last one and a half years. Over this period of time, I have become actively involved in helping children with homework and, if there are no such needs, playing games or coloring with any of the children who are looking for something to do. (These activities primarily involve the elementary and some of the middle school children.) After each visit, I write detailed observational notes, taking special care in trying to recapture conversations I have had with the children— or ones I overheard them having. My data also include artifacts such as the Nugent newsletters, and pictures and drawings that the children give me. I have in addition conducted several semi-structured audiotaped interviews with Nugent’s manager, Joan.
The staff at Nugent Learning Center, in multiple ways, were enthusiastic and supportive of the children, and very accepting of children’s ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as their nonnative and/or nonstandard English. The only exception was written homework, where only standard English could be used. There were clearly efforts made to construct a discourse (using Gee’s [1996] conception of “discourse” as a way of believing and behaving) that supported ethnic and cultural equality as well as an inclusiveness and acceptance of non-standard English speech. This attitude served to validate the African-American and immigrant/refugee children’s language practices. I have reported elsewhere (Zuengler 2008) that the immigrant/refugee children used several features of African-American English (see also Reyes 2005; Ibrahim 1999).

Given the inclusiveness of the discourse fostered by the staff, the children did indeed engage with this discourse. It was a context in which the African-American children, who were in the majority at the center, were able to speak freely in African-American English, with no pressure exerted toward the standard in activities other than the completion of written homework.

The example to be discussed involved a group of girls at Nugent who were friendly with each other and ranged in age from about 6 to about 13. Several of the girls were African; one, Michelle, had come with her family from Togo, while another, Susan, had family from Sudan. The other girls were African-American. All were neighbors of each other, as they lived in the apartments surrounding the center. In late 2007, the girls were the recipients of the popular but expensive American Girl dolls. The January 2008 newsletter of the Center described the gifts:

In her work at United Way, Jenny was in charge of distributing hundreds of dolls donated by the American Girl company. With her assistance, every elementary school aged girl at [Nugent] received a special doll, along with an American Girl Book, second outfit and accessories. These much-loved dolls are well beyond the price range of most residents, with each doll’s retail value at over $200. We are so grateful to American Girl, the United Way and Jenny for making this possible! (Nugent Newsletter, January 2008)

American Girl dolls offer (American) historical characters with their own names and information on the context in which they “live.” Some of the characters listed on the company website (http://www.americangirl.com/corp/corporate) are:

Addy®, a courageous girl determined to be free in 1864, during the Civil War.
Samantha®, a kindhearted girl of privilege living with her grandmother in 1904.

Kit®, a clever, resourceful girl growing up in 1934, during America’s Great Depression. (See the Appendix for more character examples.)

An increasing number of products that relate to a particular doll can be bought, including books with her as the main character and different sets of clothing, shoes, etc. While I did not observe the girls playing with their dolls while they were at the center, they were nevertheless a big hit, as the Nugent Newsletter reported on an American Girl party that the girls held. Printed alongside a set of eight pictures of girls with their dolls (see figure 3), the report reads as follows:

“Are We American Girls, or What?”

That’s what the invitation created by fifth-grader [name deleted] asked. To celebrate their gifts, several [Nugent] girls got together for an American Girl party. They used American Girl books available in the community learning center library to plan party games and snacks. Everyone was instructed to bring their doll hairbrushes to create new hairstyles at the party. Aren’t these kids great? (Nugent Newsletter, January 2008)

Among the pictures to the side of the report is one of the invitation (figure 4). As one can see from the close-up shot here, the invitation is red, white, and blue with the question printed and many American patriotic icons filling the rest of the space which look like they have been printed off the Internet. What are included are an American flag with “freedom” printed above it, the expression “Old Glory,” “Peace,” two star-shaped American flags, and the expression “United We Stand.”

The girls have very cleverly constructed a discourse around their dolls and their identity as doll owners. The reading of the discourse that I provide here does not imply that the girls consciously created such discursive messages, but serves to indicate the complex identities in what they constructed. “Are we American Girls, or What?” plays on language in a couple respects. First of all, “Are we American Girls, or What?” is similar to the colloquial expression “Are we special, or what?” That is, can we now be a part of this exclusive group of doll owners?

Further, there is ambiguity built into “Are we American Girls”: are we American Girls (the dolls); are we American Girls (are we girls who are American), and also are we American Girls (girls who own American Girl dolls). Different readings of these invoke discourses that position the girls as
excluded, marginalized, or accepted. Considering “American Girl” to be an assertion of nationality excludes the immigrant girls who are not Americans. On the other hand, a different reading of “Are we American Girls” as “are we now, as doll owners, part of the ingroup?” invokes the girls’ prior lack of access to the dolls due to economic disparity and the racial subordination that is related to it. In other words, the ingroup is predominantly white middle-class.

The icons and expressions decorating the rest of the invitation are intriguing as well. While “Old Glory,” as a nickname of the U.S. flag, has a

![Figure 3. Girls with American Girl dolls](image-url)
long history, “United We Stand” and, possibly, “Freedom” written above a flag, were strongly, almost aggressively, asserted in the wake of 9/11. Drivers attached “United We Stand” banners to their cars; one still sees people wearing T-shirts with “United We Stand” stamped on them. Because it is still considered part of the hyper-patriotic discourse that began circulating as an immediate response to 9/11, “United We Stand” leaps out (at this reader, at least) from the other, less-charged icons and expressions. Of course, it may be no such flashpoint for the girls. What is clear, though, is the American patriotic theme that the icons collectively construct. In displaying this theme, the girls could be identifying themselves as upstanding, patriotic Americans (just as the other doll owners are) and that the symbols have been collected to decorate the invitation because they make the invitation “American.” This could be their way of answering, on the invitation, the question posed toward the top: “Are We American Girls, or What?” One could offer additional readings of the invitation cover. But what is clear is that the girls have constructed a complex discourse around their newly-acquired dolls and the events for celebrating them. They have created a Third Space in which they can (re)frame the dolls, their relationship to them, what they want “American Girl” to mean to them, who is now on the margin and who is privileged, in short, who their selves are. The complexity and hybridity that emerge in their space give them affordances for performing their identities, on their own terms. And as

Figure 4. Invitation made by the girls at Nugent
important, they have found a means of participating in the larger, dominant community.

3. Conclusion

First, in examining performance in several activities that are overtly “national” (i.e., American-oriented), we have seen that any such pre-established categorization may or may not be taken up because participants, even with limited second language skills, may find an alternate space in which they position themselves according to who they think they are at that time. They may thus, as we have seen, participate in the Pledge as a sign of respect for their aide, Mr. Tong, but with no feeling of national pride; on the other hand, they may be discomforted by perceiving nationalism in an activity and choose not to participate in it. The girls with their new American Girl dolls appropriated the national (i.e., “American”) framing of their dolls and built an “American” discourse by bringing in national icons such as the flag, together with the assertive “patriotism” of “United We Stand.” However, as we have seen, the complexity of their identifications with “American” makes a term like “national” or even “American” problematic.

Secondly, the difficulty of Nina’s efforts to locate a Third Space in Mr. Douglass’ class suggests that the formal classroom context might be less conducive to learners’ creating hybrid Third Space identities than the after-school context of a site like Nugent Learning Center, where we saw the girls appropriating and reshaping “American Girl.” Of course, Third Space was realizable during the Pledge in Mr. Agnew’s class. However, the context of formal classrooms – speaking, at least, of American kindergarten through high school levels – contains a lot of regulating behavior of learners (not to mention the fact that attendance is compulsory) that after-school or out-of-school contexts can choose not to adopt. Thus, after-school contexts are already potential alternative spaces for youths to develop and enact their selves.

Finally, we need to recognize the complications, “messiness,” and hybridity of what youth are performing. This is said with particular regard to immigrant and refugee children, who have been displaced and more often than not, are experiencing subordination and hegemonic discourses in a national context foreign to them. There is a need for them to locate spaces in which their often-conflicted identities can be asserted. And these spaces should afford
access for them to assert their selves within the larger dominant or target language community. The conception of Third Space makes us start where we should in our research, with the hybridity, complexity, and conflicts of understanding immigrant youths’ behavior.

Appendix

From the American Girl website
http://www.americangirl.com/corp/corporate

American Girl characters

American Girl characters past and present show girls today that they can do great things if they believe in themselves and each other. From a Native American girl living in the Pacific Northwest in 1764 to a contemporary girl pursuing her dream of becoming a figure skater, every story illustrates the power of determination, imagination, courage, and hope – the same spirit that inspires modern American girls.

Historical characters

Introduced in 1986, the historical characters give girls an engaging glimpse into important times in America’s past. Each character’s story is told in a series of compelling books, focusing on such themes as family, school, holiday, birthday, summer, and winter adventures. Gentle life lessons throughout the stories remind girls of such lasting values as the importance of family and friends, compassion, responsibility, and forgiveness. Each book concludes with a nonfiction picture essay, “Looking Back,” that further explores the character’s historical period. Our historical characters currently include:
Kaya®, an adventurous Nez Perce girl growing up in 1764, before America became a country.

Felicity®, a colonial girl growing up in Williamsburg in 1774 – the time of the American Revolution.

Josefina®, a girl living in colonial New Mexico in 1824, during the opening of the Santa Fe Trail.

Kirsten®, a pioneer girl settling on the frontier prairie in 1854.

Addy®, a courageous girl determined to be free in 1864, during the Civil War.

Samantha®, a kindhearted girl of privilege living with her grandmother in 1904.

Kit®, a clever, resourceful girl growing up in 1934, during America’s Great Depression.

Molly®, a child of World War Two being raised on the home front in 1944.

Julie®, a bright, fun-loving girl growing up in San Francisco during the seventies.

Notes

1. However, some raise reservations. Joseph (2006), while acknowledging the potential of third space to explain language processes, nevertheless cautions us that in some contexts, “translating [it] into linguistic reality is a tricky business” (p. 147). That is, looking for language and communication that are hybrid mixtures of one’s multilingual, multicultural selves present a challenge for researchers.

2. “The Socialization of Diverse Learners into Subject Matter Discourse,” Jane Zuengler and Cecilia Ford, Principal Investigators. The project was part of the Center on English Learning and Achievement (CELA), and supported by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI Award #R305A60005). However, the views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Department of Education or of CELA.

3. All names are pseudonyms.

4. “Families” refers to curricular groupings in the school, such as the grouping focused on engineering, or one on tourism.

5. However, in an interview he had with us at the end of the year, Mr. Douglass expressed a more conflicted and nuanced view of the Pledge than he conveyed in the classroom. Mr. Douglass in an interview at the end of the year (5/20/98):

   I don’t know if I had to do that over again this year I don’t know. I (1.0) there’s – I don’t know there’s something I want to change about it. I just
Performing “national” practices

don’t like um (1.0) I know with some teachers they see it it’s kind of a grey area. Like I know some teachers say well um (2.0) I-you have to get up and if you’re not going to pledge allegiance to the flag stand outside the class. You know it’s like well (1.0) yeah you can do that but at the same time it’s like um (2.0) I guess it’s one of those things um (1.0) you want the kids to do it on their own? Or or do you have to (2.0) teach ’em the right (1.0) behavior and and when it comes to the pledge, that’s really touchy you know. Because it’s just like you have religious beliefs you have um (1.0) um I don’t know to me it’s just I don’t know that’s a hard one. Like to make a kid do it you know. It’s um. Actually that bothers me.
Chapter 5
L1 and L2 reading practices in the lives of Latina immigrant women studying English: School literacies, home literacies, and literacies that construct identities

Julia Menard-Warwick

1. Introduction

Second language learning can be seen as “a struggle of concrete socially constituted . . . beings to participate in symbolically mediated lifeworld(s)” (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000: 155). Unlike the learners described by Pavlenko and Lantolf, the six Latin American women in California discussed in this paper were not attempting to become part of a cultural community other than their own; nor could they be described as “shuttling between communities” (Canagarajah 2005). Rather, through attending an English as a Second Language (ESL) family literacy program, they were attempting to more fully participate in the “lifeworld” of their own immigrant community, where bilingualism was valued because of the opportunities it brought to interact with the larger English-speaking society.

In conducting ethnographic research at the ESL program that these women attended, I saw the connections they were drawing between their schooling experiences in childhood and their current experiences studying English. At the same time, I began to see that for many of these women, L1 literacies were used not just for meeting practical needs, but also were important to their on-going (often gendered) self-reconstructions in the aftermath of immigration (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Vitanova 2005); however, few of them seemed to be using their L2 literacies in this way. Thus, this paper explores the following questions:

1. What were these learners’ perspectives on acquiring their L1 literacies as children and their L2 literacies as adults? What were their perspectives on the literacies they were currently using at home?
2. What literacies did the ESL program emphasize? To what extent were the learners’ L1 literacies a resource for their development of L2 literacies (Canagarajah 2005)?
3. How were participants’ literacy practices related to their identities and (re)constructions of self?

If identities refer to the multiple ways that individuals are understood in relation to the social world (Norton 2000), self can be defined as an individual’s ever-developing mental representations and internal experiences of situated personhood – that is, of being a particular kind of person at a particular social location (Pellegrino Aveni 2005). Although there is an extensive literature on connections between literacies and identities (Menard-Warwick 2005b), and although a few authors have begun to explore connections between L2 learning and (re)constructions of self (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Vitanova 2005; Kinginger 2008), the place of literacy in L2 learners’ self-constructions remains little considered. To this end, this paper connects the literacies of six Latina immigrants with their ongoing constructions of identities, and especially with their self-reconstructions in the aftermath of immigration.

2. Review of literature

Since the 1980s, it has become widely recognized that literacy cannot be seen as a unitary skill; it is better conceptualized as a form of social practice, adapted to particular contexts. As Street writes, contemporary views of literacy “entail the recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space” (2003: 77). Thus, individuals, social networks, and communities use diverse reading and writing practices to meet their social goals. Moreover, critical perspectives on literacy emphasize that such practices are “contested in relations of power” with some literacies “dominant” and others “marginalized or resistant” (ibid). Thus, contemporary scholars ask first of all what people do with literacy, and secondly whose interests these practices serve.

3. Immigrant women, language learning, and literacy

Studies of literacy in immigrant communities have described the collective success of families and social networks in dealing with what Kalman calls “everyday paperwork” (2001). Documenting the literacies of a transnational Mexicano social network, Guerra (1998) notes practices in the familial, religious, commercial, legal, and educational domains, including personal
letter writing, filling out forms, and paying bills. However, other studies note the difficulties immigrant women can face in taking L2 literacy classes (e.g. Bodwell 2001) or in operationalizing their support for their children’s education (e.g. Valdés 1996). As Hawkins points out, “students come with diverse histories and understandings, and interact within an institutional setting that privileges certain ways of using language, thinking, and interacting” (2005: 62). Nevertheless, Hawkins’ research demonstrates how students from diverse backgrounds can become recognized as competent members of academic communities even while learning English. As she explains, children’s histories of learning both in and out of school come together to influence how they see themselves as students. If early academic experiences are supportive, “the child can become school affiliated, that is, a student who sees him- or herself and is recognized by others as being a person who belongs in, and can be successful in, this sort of community” (2005: 66–67, italics mine).

Moreover, recent studies of immigrant women’s L2 socialization have focused on women’s agency in overcoming gender, racial, and economic constraints in the aftermath of immigration. According to Norton (2000), participation in new linguistic practices is an “investment” in cultural capital and thus in new identities. For example, Gordon describes Lao women in Philadelphia “negotiating domestic events” (2004: 446), such as interacting with school personnel and selling used cars, and thus taking on more powerful identities in their families. Likewise, Vitanova (2005) illustrates how opening a catering business helped a Russian former journalist to “find a voice” in English, while Menard-Warwick (2005a) describes Latina immigrant women drawing inspiration from their own parents’ experiences as they pursued educational opportunities under difficult circumstances. However, Norton’s central emphasis on “claiming the right to speak” (2000: 8, my emphasis) has perhaps led this literature to comparatively de-emphasize immigrant women’s investments in both L1 and L2 literacy practices – as well as the consequences of these investments for their ongoing constructions of identities in a society stratified by race, class, and gender.

4. Literacy, power, and identity

Viewing identities as “affiliations that people choose to make in their social worlds” (2008: 255), Zacher argues that literacy practices inevitably “constitute and maintain identifications” (p. 256). In constructing such affiliations and identifications, readers draw upon discursive resources from the texts
they consume, leading critical literacy scholars to focus not only on the potentials of literacy, but on its dangers as well (Street 2003). As McLaren and Lankshear write, “the ability to read and write may expose individuals and entire social groups to forms of domination and control by which their interests are subverted” (1993: 379). Thus, authors who have studied women and girls’ reading of fiction (e.g., Christian-Smith 1993; Davies 2003) have warned of the power of texts to interpellate readers into gender ideologies.

However, recent studies have begun to shift from causal interpretations of literacy and identity work towards examining how “readers construct themselves . . . as continuous, ever-shifting, and evolving sel(ves) in process” (Hagood 2002: 255; cf. Zacher 2006). For example, in Sutherland’s 2005 study, participants in an out-of-class book club for Black adolescent girls discussed their identifications with characters in a Toni Morrison novel, and in so doing renegotiated the racial and gendered boundaries in their lives, “decry(ing) ascriptions of identity that define them and instead explor(ing) the multiple complex definitions possible for them as individuals and as a group” (p. 391).

While such issues of desire, aspiration, and identification have often been ignored in adult literacy research, Jarvis’s study of women readers concluded that “[l]ifelong learning is an ontological process: learners are engaged in becoming as much as knowing” (2003: 261). In Alexander’s lifespan model of reading development, a learner’s transition from *acclimation* to *competence* to *expertise* crucially depends on “deep processing strategies (which) involve the personalization or transformation of text” (2005: 421–422). From this perspective, learners need to connect text to their experiences or aspirations in order to develop expertise: literacy development and self development need to be seen as reciprocal processes. Going beyond previous studies on “everyday paperwork” in Latino communities (e.g., Kalman 2001), this chapter examines the extent to which Latina immigrants were connecting literacy to their experiences and aspirations both in and out of school.

5. **Methodology**

This chapter draws on data from an ethnographic study (Menard-Warwick 2009) conducted at the Community English Center (CEC),1 an adult ESL program located in a working-class, multi-ethnic city in California. Most CEC students were Latina immigrants, the mothers of small children. Assuming that “the meaning-perspectives of teacher and learner are intrinsic to the educational process” (Erickson 1986: 120), I took an emic approach
to this research, employing methods that would allow a focus on “the way (participants) understand what they are doing” (Watson-Gegeo 1988: 576). Additionally, I took a critical approach, considering the ways that power relations shaped participation in the practices that I observed (Norton 2000).

In writing about critical ethnography, Canagarajah cautions against “treat(ing) the words of informants from the community as sacrosanct” (1999: 48). While space limitations in this paper prevent me from foregrounding historical and discursive processes, clearly these have shaped my research as well as participants’ words and actions in profound ways. Thus, in writing ethnography, I am constructing a subjective interpretation of participants’ statements and actions as I observed and audiorecorded them. Likewise, participant narratives should not be seen as transparently factual information, but rather as the tellers’ perspectives on past events in relation to the context of telling (Ochs and Capps 1996). Nevertheless, in constructing interpretations of participants’ literacy practices throughout this chapter, I have tried to emphasize their own understandings of their experiences, as they shared them in interviews (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). This paper is not a factual recounting but rather a representation of learners’ “meaning-perspectives” (Erickson 1986) as I came to understand them from my own positionality as an Anglo-American, Spanish-speaking, former ESL teacher turned researcher.

From May to December 2002, I served as a participant-observer classroom volunteer in both a beginning and an intermediate ESL class at the CEC for approximately 180 hours. While volunteering, I tutored students individually, led small groups, or circulated through the classroom helping students as needed. After every volunteer session, I wrote ethnographic field notes (Bogdan and Biklen 1998) about my participation. When students asked why I was there, I explained that I was working on my dissertation (tesis) for a doctorate in education (doctorado en educación). If students wanted more details of my research, I told them I was interested in how people learn to read and write in a second language, and how what happened outside the classroom affected what happened inside the classroom. These explanations were usually met with nods and smiles rather than further questions.

During this time I also carried out more formal audiotaped observations of the two classrooms for approximately 20 hours, focusing on literacy events, and incorporating the transcripts into my field notes. Each observation centered on one of seven focal students, six of whom I discuss in this paper: Brenda, Camila, Fabiana, Laura, Raquel and Trini. At the time of the research, all six were married to immigrant men employed in stable working-class jobs (e.g., factory work), and all had one or two children between 2 and
12 years old. Most were part of extended-family social networks that helped to support their educational endeavors, and all were regular attendees at the CEC. All but Brenda and Trini were currently full-time homemakers. During the study, Camila was in the intermediate class at the CEC, and Laura and Trini were in the beginning class, while Fabiana, Brenda, and Raquel moved up from the beginning to the intermediate class.

The women’s educational and work experiences in their home countries varied considerably. Brenda was a 24 year old Nicaraguan with a high school education who had run a small retail business in her country, but who currently worked as a janitor. She shared a home with her sister-in-law Raquel, 30 years old, also Nicaraguan, with an 8th grade education, and no previous work experience outside the home. Camila, a 36 year old Salvadoran, had a high school education plus one year of teacher’s college, but had worked in retail in her country. Fabiana, a 34 year old Peruvian, had studied business at the junior-college level and then worked for her family’s import business. Laura was a 31 year old Mexican who completed six years of schooling before working as a food vendor. Her friend Trini, 34 years old, also had a sixth grade education; she had been a farm-worker in Mexico but now worked as a fast-food cook. I make no claim that my research participants are typical of Latina immigrants in California, but I did choose them to typify the range of regularly-attending CEC students.

As well as observing these six participants in their English classes, I conducted a total of 25 audiotaped interviews with them between July 2002 and February 2003. Interviews, averaging about 1.5 hours each, were conducted primarily in Spanish and usually in the participants’ homes; they were transcribed by an educated native-speaker of Spanish. The first interviews with each participant focused on home literacy practices. As part of these interviews, I asked participants to show me examples of things that they read and wrote in English and Spanish. In life history interviews, begun after completing the home literacy interviews, I asked about childhood experiences with literacy and schooling; the educational and work experiences of family members; decisions about schooling, work, marriage, children, and immigration; experiences with literacy in adulthood; experiences learning English; goals for the future.

Following data collection, I conducted a thematic analysis of interview and field note data (Bogdan and Biklen 1998), creating a list of coding categories (e.g., work, ethnicity, elementary school) and assigning one or more codes to each segment of data. Reviewing the coded material, I looked for overarching themes that represented strong trends in the overall data. Literacy is the
overarching theme in this chapter, including the following subthemes: letter writing, library, learning to read, adult home literacy, complex literacies, family literacy. To give background for these literacies, I also include data coded as schooling in Latin America. After thematic coding, I coded my observation data for activity type (e.g., dictation, vocabulary), and looked for interview data concerning these activities.

6. Findings

In this section, I first describe participants’ experiences with schooling and literacy in Latin America. After reporting on their current strategies for meeting literacy needs in California, and their participation in family literacy practices, I note the involvement of some participants with literacy practices connected to identity work and self-construction. Finally, I share observation data illustrating participants’ approaches to the literacy practices at their adult ESL program, which seemed to be based on previous schooling experiences.

6.1. Schooling in Latin America

My mom was always saying . . . as my mom doesn’t know how to read, “read me this” . . . Or she would get letters from her brothers in the U.S., and would tell us, “read me this letter.” So my mom taught us a little how we should read (Trini, Interview, 10/25/02).

In the above interview excerpt, Trini explains how her unschooled mother taught her children how they “should read” by giving them responsibilities to read documents and letters. Seeing the utility of literacy in this way, the parents of all six participants strongly supported their elementary education. Below Laura describes her elementary schooling (primaria) in rural Mexico. Most of my participants had very similar things to say about their early schooling experiences: they saw themselves as belonging and being successful in their early academic environments (Hawkins 2005). The following narrative should be seen as typical:

The teachers I had since the beginning were good teachers . . . they didn’t scold us much . . . But there were some teachers that were very strict . . . They wanted everything very well done (and) . . . the kids who didn’t pay attention they would hit on
the hand with a rod . . . (But) almost always I got one teacher, when we were in third, fourth, and fifth grades we got the same teacher who became very fond of us (Laura, Interview, 11/15/02).

Like almost everyone I interviewed, Laura’s description of schooling and teachers employs a strongly affective discourse. No one described teachers in terms of competence, intelligence, or professionalism. Rather, participants made a distinction between good teachers who were “cariñosas (affectionate)” and bad teachers who were “estrictas (strict),” who hit children.

Participants described a wide variety of activities in elementary school, including the memorization of multiplication tables and the scientific observation of live insects. However, their acquisition of Spanish literacy was probably the most important resource (Canagarajah 2005) for their current efforts to learn English in ESL classrooms. All the participants described learning to read phonetically, beginning with vowels, then going on to syllables and whole words. Many could quote the first simple sentences they read. For Brenda they were Memo ama a papá (‘Memo loves daddy’) and Pepe ama a mamá (‘Pepe loves mommy’). As Laura outlined the process:

Ohh . . . at first they taught us the vowels A,E,I,O,U, and then we began to see the alphabet, the letters, and now with the L with the A, how they sound like L.A . . . And after that we began to make the word like the L with the A, the R with the A, to say LARA . . . (And then) to begin to read, to make sentences, like now the teacher dictates to us some sentence, “the frog has four feet” or something (Interview, 11/15/02).

In this approach to literacy, sound-symbol correspondence takes priority over meaning, at least during elementary school. Dictation is the common practice of writing symbols that correspond to spoken sounds, and reading aloud is the equally common practice of saying sounds that correspond to written symbols. Participants who went to secondary school also mentioned a class called Lectura y Comprensión (‘Reading Comprehension’) that involved answering factual questions about texts. Outside of school, books were not widely available in participants’ hometowns, but they all reported reading for personal reasons during adolescence, for example, trading celebrity magazines with sisters and friends (Laura and Trini), re-reading school novels (Camila, see below for more discussion), buying Archie comic books (Raquel), reading aloud classic poetry with her mother and siblings (Brenda), and sharing diet information (Fabiana).
While *primaria* seemed to have gone smoothly for the most part, participants’ narratives of schooling beyond elementary school are marked by struggle, discontinuity, and a sense of missed opportunities. Secondary education was available in their societies, but economic conditions and gendered constraints made it difficult for many young women to attend. Raquel dropped out of secondary school to take care of her sick grandmother. Camila almost failed high school because of spending too much time with her boyfriend and was then unable to complete teacher’s college due to her country’s civil war. At 16, Brenda got married and pregnant, and had to take evening classes to finish high school. Fabiana failed her university entrance exam, then took business school classes, but never got a diploma. In all these narratives, decisions about where to study were difficult, and graduating was not a foregone conclusion.

Moreover, despite parental support of their early schooling, gender ideologies in their families kept Trini and Laura out of secondary school entirely. According to Trini, “My dad didn’t let us . . . because ‘the girls are real clowns, they just go, and you don’t know what they are going to do, and in the end they don’t even study, in the end they are going to come back pregnant’” (Interview, 12/13/02). Although literacy was important in Laura and Trini’s families, their parents saw sixth grade as sufficient for the demands of daily life. Indeed, for all the participants in this research, education had to be balanced with work and family life, and this same balancing act continued at the time of the interviews.

6.2. *Everyday literacy in the United States*

The ability to accomplish daily life tasks involving texts has often been seen as the most important kind of literacy for adult learners (Kalman 2001; Guerra 1998). However, the participants in this study had followed relatives to California and thus could access assistance from them. Literacy demands did not have to be met individually, but rather by an entire transnational social network (Guerra 1998). Laura’s strategy was typical: when I asked what she and her husband did with letters in English, she said they asked her niece next door to translate them. Whereas participants were generally happy to let family members deal with official paperwork, gender ideologies gave them the responsibility to support their children’s education. As Trini explained her reasons for enrolling in English classes: “So when I began to have children . . ., I began to want to learn so I could teach them” (Interview, 10/25/02).
The CEC’s family literacy program was to some extent customized for this purpose, as Fabiana explained:

My school and my husband’s school are different . . . They don’t teach him, for example, about what if a child falls down, what if a child has a wound that swells up . . . They don’t teach him that children need to eat vegetables. They don’t teach him those kinds of things. Things that are very interesting that they teach us in my school, because we have children (Interview, 10/31/02).

In teaching their children, all the women drew on their existing L1 and developing L2 literacies (Menard-Warwick 2006b, 2007). Brenda, Laura, Camila, and Trini frequently took their children to the library to check out books in both English and Spanish. In fact, all of the participants reported reading story books aloud to their children on a regular basis (from several times a week to daily), except for Raquel, who had her older daughter read story books to her younger daughter, but also had them both listen to family Bible reading daily. Participants all reported helping with homework and going to parent meetings and conferences, and several volunteered at their children’s schools (Menard-Warwick 2007). Correspondence with absent kin was another important form of family literacy (cf. Guerra 1998). Being good mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters was important to these women: as they re-constructed their sense of self in the aftermath of immigration (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000), both L1 and L2 literacies enhanced their capacity to successfully enact these relational aspects of their identities.

6.3. Literacy of identification

While their children’s education was clearly important to them, several participants spoke at length about a different value to literacy in their lives, which was based on their sense of identification with particular Spanish-language authors and texts. This literacy of identification had been and continued to be important for developing and maintaining L1 literacy. Likewise, these texts provided significant resources for these adult immigrants as they explored particular identities in the interest of self-construction.

Although she had been raised Catholic in Nicaragua, Raquel converted to the Baptist faith after immigrating to the United States, and the Baptist church she attended in California provided a sense of community as she adjusted to her new life. Daily Bible reading, a practice more common among Baptists
than Catholics, reinforced Raquel’s acquired religious identity. Referring to
the Bible as “the identification of the Christian,” she said she read the Bible
aloud with her family daily: “to enter into prayer, let’s say, in order to start
to pray, we read a little bit of the Bible, and then we pray.” She particularly
liked the Psalms. She often prayed while doing housework or walking her
daughters to school, connecting the words of the Bible to her everyday life
(Menard-Warwick 2007). Thus, her L1 literacies were important to her iden-
tity as a devout Baptist, which she had actively developed since coming to
the United States.

Raquel’s sister-in-law Brenda participated in this family Bible reading, but
also enjoyed reading popular magazines such as People and Selecciones, the
Spanish-language edition of Reader’s Digest, publications that have become
“transcultural” as they reach out to Latin American markets (Pennycook 2007).
When I asked her to tell me about Selecciones, she explained that it had:

Stories about people . . . Real stories . . . I liked one about a couple that got married
young, and only had one child? And maybe for reasons of work, of economic well-
being, they decided not to have more children . . . When their daughter was ten years
old? She died, right? And by that time they couldn’t have babies any more. She was
sterile from an injection of Depo-Provera? And they suffered a lot. It broke up their
marriage . . . And she suffered a lot, he did too. And I believe that these stories hap-
pen . . . Each story has its lesson . . . I believe family is more important than money
(Interview, 8/2/02) (Menard-Warwick 2007).

Clearly, gender ideologies are implicated here in reinforcing childbearing as
a goal for women, and like the couple in the story, Brenda and her husband
had “got married young, and only had one child.” Although reading the story
had no immediate effect on Brenda (six months later she was still taking
English classes, working at the same job, and at least not visibly pregnant), it
appeared that the dilemma of the couple in Selecciones helped her to weigh
her own values at a time when she was deciding which direction to pursue
next (community college? a housecleaning business?). Based on my inter-
views with her, she clearly saw coming to America as a chance for enhanced
“economic well-being” – but not at the expense of family relations (Menard-
Warwick 2005a, 2007).

While Raquel read the Bible and Brenda enjoyed popular magazines,
another study participant, Camila, had read the classic Colombian novel of
romantic love Maria (Isaacs 1938) by her estimate ten times since she first
encountered it in her high school in El Salvador, including twice in the last
two years. After recounting one of the tragic scenes to me, she told me about one afternoon when she was 17:

I was just reading it because I like it so much. And I read over it and over it, and well, that day, I don’t know what happened to me, and after reading it, I cried and cried, and as the rain was falling, I think it inspired me, and I wrote some phrases, and . . . I copied them on the book.

She read me her poems, which ended with the lines, “Let’s cultivate always united this love/so noble and worthy/because if to love is divine/ours is inspired by God” (Interview, 12/5/02). Now in her mid-thirties, Camila was still married to her high school boyfriend, to whom these poems were dedicated. Thus, Maria and the poems it had inspired helped to connect her high school years in El Salvador to her current life as an immigrant wife, mother, and student in California.

While Camila had been re-reading the novel Maria for half a lifetime, Trini read a new book during the course of the study: the autobiography of immigrant journalist Jorge Ramos (2002). Her favorite passage was about the author’s contradictory feelings of nostalgia and restlessness when he remembered his native village in Mexico:

I like it because . . . I always dream about Mexico, I always dream about my little village, I always dream about my little house, and I dream it very nice the way it was. And when I dream about it, I am really . . . how do you say, content, like . . . as if I went back to live there, right? In a dream. But when I am there I don’t like it any more, and I want to come back here. So that’s why I like (the book) because he says that . . . at best, if he went back (to Mexico) he would leave again (Interview, 11/8/02).

For Trini, as for Ramos, memories of life in a small village were like a happy dream, but based on recent visits to Mexico, she knew she would not be satisfied if her dreams of return came true. After describing some of Ramos’s US experiences that were similar to hers, arriving in poverty, fearing the immigration service, she summed up her feelings about the book: “that’s the way it is for us too, and so in that way one identifies with it” (ibid). Thus, she explicitly connects literacy and identity: she enjoyed Ramos’s book because he describes feelings that she shares. Moreover, reading Ramos’s story reinforced the choices Trini had made in her life: to put up with difficult conditions in hopes of the better future that Ramos had attained.

This tendency of some participants to identify with particular L1 texts demonstrates that for them, literacy was about more than meeting practical
needs or even supporting their children’s educational futures. Rather, literacy was implicated in their (often-gendered) self-constructions. However, this literacy of identification appeared to be confined to L1 reading outside of the school context, and the participants did not yet appear to be finding similar identifications with L2 texts. As will be seen in the next section, they tended to approach the ESL literacy practices at the CEC in much the same way that they described practicing school literacies during childhood in Latin America. This meant that for the most part they felt comfortable at the CEC, but were not yet developing the more complex literacies in their L2 that some had developed in their L1 in out-of-school settings.

7. Literacy at the Community English Center

All the participants said similar things in their interviews about why they liked the CEC classes and teachers, emphasizing the qualities they had used in their descriptions of “good teachers” from their childhoods, especially the word cariñosa (‘affectionate’). As adults, they continued to value warm, nurturing relationships with their teachers. Participants also tended to feel comfortable practicing the same literacies in their ESL classes that they remembered from their childhood schooling experiences. Their classroom participation in this environment did not demand the wrenching self-transformation that occurs when individuals take on new cultural and discursive practices (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). Thus, in my interpretation, they were able to draw upon identities as “good students” from their Latin American childhoods to reconstruct a school-affiliated self (Hawkins 2005) who can belong and be successful in their adult ESL program in California. Below, I give examples from audiotaped classroom data of learners participating in two common literacy practices at the CEC: answering reading comprehension questions and taking dictation. Arising from European traditions of schooling, these practices are common in both North American and Latin American educational settings and thus provide a familiar framework for school-affiliated Latin Americans in adult ESL.

7.1. Reading comprehension?

According to my interviews, study participants had learned to read by methods that emphasized sound over sense. Intriguingly, Trini told me that she liked to read in Spanish as a child, but did not consider herself a good reader
due to the way her reading aloud sounded: “Because I don’t know how to read well. Like where it goes, where I should stop, where I should continue . . . like sometimes it has a period, I didn’t know I was supposed to stop there” (Interview, 12/13/02). Trini, however, was the only participant who specifically mentioned identifying with a passage from an ESL textbook. In an interview conducted a few days after the class had read about an immigrant family from Laos (Magy 1995), she told me, “Because only the names are a little different, but the story is almost our story, really” (Interview, 10/25/02) (Menard-Warwick 2006b). It would seem that reading about immigrants, or other people who had something in common with the students (e.g., the mothers of young children), should at times have resulted in events of identification and ultimately to the kind of “deep processing” that Alexander describes as leading to expertise in reading (2005).

Such events of identification certainly happened, and it is possible that “deep processing” was occurring in ways that I could not observe, but typical classroom activities tended to foster a more superficial engagement with texts. Brenda had gone to school twice as many years as Trini, had taken Reading Comprehension in high school, and had learned how to find answers to questions in texts, whether in Spanish or English: “I think that the question is more correct if I read it, and take the question from there, right? If it is from the text itself, I think” (Interview, 10/15/02). However, when I observed her reading aloud in class, most of the questions she asked and the marginal notes she made were about pronunciation. Even when she followed the strategy she describes above of finding answers in texts, this did not guarantee “deep processing” (Alexander 2005) nor genuine comprehension:

**Audiotaped classroom observation, 8/2/02**

Brenda: (reading the directions to the comprehension questions) Answer the questions. You may look back at the story for the answers. How does Mr. Baltierra feel about his son’s death?

Marisol: (without looking at text) Very, very angry and sad.

Brenda: (pointing at text) Very sad and very, very angry. (reading) What did Mr. Baltierra say to the police on July twenty-two, 1996?

Marisol: (without looking at text) He said no to donate his son’s organs. (pause)

Brenda: Oh! (looking at text) The police say Mr. Baltierra if he wanted to donate any of his son’s organs.
While the class read and answered questions on this article about organ-selling (Buehring 2000), Brenda did not engage much with the topic, but focused primarily on repeating the specific words on the page, as she had been socialized to do in high school. In the excerpt above, “taking (the answer) from the text itself” involved ensuring that the adjectives “very sad and very, very angry” were in the same order in the answer as in the reading, as well as attending to the grammatical difference between “no” and “any.” As she continued trying to answer later questions with verbatim quotes even when correct answers required inference and paraphrasing, it did not appear that she had actually comprehended the events described by this particular text.

7.2. **Dictation**

Dictation was another school literacy activity familiar to students from childhood, and thus possessing a lot of legitimacy. Like reading aloud while paying attention to pronunciation, it is an activity in which sound–symbol correspondence takes precedence over meaning. As may be recalled, in Laura’s description of learning to read, she remembered the teacher dictating sentences like “the frog has four feet.” Camila told me that dictation was one of her favorite class activities at the CEC:

> When she is dictating the paragraphs or sentences, I feel that I have to have my ear wide awake to hear very clearly the word she is saying. And at the same time I feel . . . (while) my ear is working to hear it, also my mind is working to write. That is, I like it (Interview, 1/9/03).

Many students studied for dictation. Brenda told me she would copy the passage over and over until she had it memorized. In the following instance, Fabiana had had a chance to study beforehand, in this case a reading about a woman with small children who had to make a decision about going back to work (Pickett 1984). In this dictation, the teacher followed her usual custom of reading a whole sentence, then breaking it into parts and repeating the parts. However, because she had studied thoroughly, Fabiana was able to write the beginning of each sentence the first time that the teacher read it, without waiting for her to slow down and repeat. Below I include what Fabiana wrote, with comments on when she wrote what (I am skipping the first three and last four sentences in interests of brevity). I insert an asterisk at the point in each sentence when Fabiana stopped writing and waited for the teacher to repeat.
This dictation is on a topic that is clearly relevant to Fabiana, who like Betty had worked in business and now had a small child. Moreover, the conflicting gender ideologies that Betty confronts in this reading are ubiquitous in the students’ communities and in the larger society. However, as in the example with Brenda above, Fabiana was focused for the moment on getting specific words correct. If she spared a thought for the content of the message, it is not manifest in this data. In both dictation and reading exercises, then, the application of texts to personal experience that participants mentioned in interviews happened only rarely with L2 texts in the classroom, and did not appear to be a key goal of literacy instruction in this context.

8. Discussion

In interviews, learners tended to portray themselves as school affiliated (Hawkins 2005) throughout elementary school, and most described their teachers as cariñosa (‘affectionate’). They remembered acquiring L1 literacy unproblematically as a matter of establishing correspondence between sounds and symbols. Reading aloud and dictation were the school literacy practices that they remembered employing to this end. Those who attended secondary
school recalled more of an attention to reading comprehension, in terms of answering specific questions about texts. However, education after elementary school was difficult for most participants to access, due to economic problems and gender restrictions. As young women, most had pleasurable though not extensive literacy experiences with magazines, novels, poetry, or comic books.

In the aftermath of immigration, participants found paths to self reconstruction (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Vitanova 2005) that allowed them (in limited ways) to engage with a new culture and pursue new goals while remaining firmly rooted within their extended family networks and immigrant communities. In California, participants tended to meet most literacy demands through their social networks (Guerra 1998), but saw their own developing L2 literacies as a way to support their children academically (e.g., through helping them with homework). Most participants read aloud to their children, from several times a week to daily, in English or Spanish, and some received help in this area from older children who had been schooled in the United States. Additionally, four of the six women read in Spanish for personal reasons, whether for pleasure, religious instruction, or desire for knowledge. These personal literacy practices generally seemed connected to self development, as they used texts to explore relevant identities.

Unlike earlier studies (e.g., Bodwell 2001), this research did not find that school settings presented particular problems for immigrant adults still developing L2 literacies. Many of the literacy practices in the adult ESL class were familiar to participants from previous schooling experiences, including reading aloud while paying attention to pronunciation, taking dictation, and answering comprehension questions. They generally felt comfortable with this approach to literacy instruction. Additionally, they tended to describe their ESL instructors in the same way they had described their primaria teachers as cariñosas (‘affectionate’). However, their classes did not connect much with their out-of-school literacies either in Latin America or California.

Thus, while, both L1 and L2 literacies were significant resources in their lives (e.g., for supporting their children’s schooling) (Canagarajah 2005), it was primarily their L1 literacies that were implicated in their self (re)constructions (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Vitanova 2005). This was perhaps especially true for Raquel as she applied the words of the Psalms to her daily life, but could also be seen in Trini’s perusal of immigrant memoirs, and even in Brenda’s thoughtful analysis of “real stories” from Selecciones, the Spanish-language Reader’s Digest. Then there was Camila’s habitual reading of Maria (Isaacs 1938), a classic tale of true love, and tragic, untimely death. Critical
literacy researchers have described such reading of romantic novels on the part of women and girls as “deeply implicated in reconciling them to their places in the world” (Christian-Smith 1993: 62). As Davies found in her study of children reading fairy tales, such texts possess an “impressive power . . . to assert oppressive gender relations as natural and correct” (2003: 175).

Thus, to some extent participants’ identifications with particular texts substantiate the fears of critical literacy educators that these texts are “recruit(ing) readers to be certain sorts of people, to have particular sorts of identities that they recognize in themselves” (Hagood 2002: 250). Indeed, these women’s comments suggest that some texts “assert powerful meaning and . . . present realities of the world (identities)” which they then “take up as the way they see themselves” (ibid.: 254). While readers have multiple identities, particular texts can be seen to privilege only one identity out of all the possible identities each reader might claim. Moreover, the women’s comments above do not suggest any resistance against the standard identities that are open to them in this society (wives, mothers, low-wage workers) – a trend which could also be seen as troubling by critical literacy educators. Nevertheless, resistance and agency should not be seen as synonymous. Although the women were not “pushing back” (Hagood 2002: 255) against standard societal identity categories, they were nonetheless engaged in ongoing development as “continuous, ever-shifting, and evolving sel(ves) in process” (ibid.: 255), agentively deciding which categories to emphasize in their lives. Their literacy practices supported these choices.

If agency is defined as “the socioculturally-mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001: 112), readers’ agency is situated somewhere between the passive imbibing of cultural messages and automatic “resistance” to those messages. There is choice involved in appropriating texts for self (re)construction, but that choice is as much about affiliation and belonging as it is about separating and resisting (Jarvis 2003; Zacher 2006). In using these texts to make sense of their lives, the immigrant women profiled in this chapter were making agentive choices, choices which deserve respect and support from educators. Indeed, because self-development and literacy development go hand-in-hand, teachers should look for ways to foster such articulation in relation to texts, and be ready to draw upon this identification when it occurs. If some learners at times engage with texts that seem sexist or otherwise oppressive, discussions with classmates could help them question the extent to which they actually wish to obey particular texts’ prescriptions. Although, as Brenda said, “each story has its lesson” (Interview, 8/2/02), this does not mean that readers are bound to follow the lessons of every appealing story.
L1 and L2 reading practices in the lives of Latina immigrant women

(Hagood 2002). Conversely, if other learners see English in purely instrumental terms, and express little desire to identify with L2 texts, teachers can help them recognize that they will be better able to meet their instrumental literacy goals if they can begin to engage in a personally meaningful way with English texts that connect to their interests.

While some adult ESL students undoubtedly attend class for purely social reasons, many more express goals such as finding a better job, supporting their children academically, or continuing their own education – all of which necessitate a considerable investment in L2 literacy development. For this reason, I argue that teachers need to take such learners at their word and help them build on literacies they bring with them (Auerbach 1992) – and encourage them to continue developing them. Due to adult learners’ vast range of experiences, it should not be assumed that all will identify with ESL textbook accounts of “the immigrant experience.” Rather, it is important for teachers to explore their students’ perspectives on past experiences with schooling, as well as with literacy practices in out-of-school settings. Bilingual teachers may be able to have these discussions with learners in their L1s, while other teachers may rely on bilingual aides or volunteers, but even teachers in multilingual settings can provide space for students to share L1 and L2 texts that interest them. The next step is to help students find new texts in English which are similar to the L1 texts that are most meaningful to them. I ultimately argue that teachers can best foster literacy development that leads to expertise (Alexander 2005) when they encourage and provide textual resources for the identity work and self (re)constructions in which learners are already engaged.

Notes

* This chapter grew out of an earlier version co-authored with Jessica Zacher and presented at the 2004 National Reading Conference; I gratefully credit Jessica for many insights in the discussion section. I thank Maren Aukerman for helpful comments on this early version of the paper, and Christina Higgins for suggestions that shaped my (much later) revisions.
1. Names of persons and places are pseudonyms.
2. The seventh participant, an indigenous Guatemalan refugee, faced substantially different issues with literacy, which are beyond the scope of this paper, but which I have discussed in detail elsewhere (Menard-Warwick 2009). I also conducted life history interviews with an eighth participant (the only male student in my study),
but he left the program before I could formally observe him (Menard-Warwick, 2006a).

3. All interview excerpts are translated from Spanish by the author.
4. The Spanish spelling system is far more phonetic than that of English.
5. The book was a gift from her husband, to congratulate her on passing her driving test.
Part II. Identifying with third spaces among ideoscapes
Introduction to Part II

Part II of this volume explores whether and to what degree language learners come to inhabit a *third place* (Kramsch 1993, 2009) when they encounter differing ideologies and viewpoints as a result of study abroad and expatriate living. Such language learners help to comprise *ethnoscapes* (Appadurai 1990, 1996), as they are among the increasing flows of sojourners and border crossers who travel for study tours, work opportunities, and improved living conditions. Ethnoscapes provide people with the opportunity to forge new cultural identifications by virtue of providing them with the opportunity to interact with others who speak different languages and have different cultural practices. Central to this formation, however, are learners’ responses to the *ideoscapes* that are connected to ideologies and state politics, which in turn shape their cultural identification. In the new millennium, ideoscapes often promulgate a west-based vision of the world, due to the dominance of west and north nations in shaping global flows which propagate particular worldviews and concepts like “freedom,” “human rights,” and “democracy” (Appadurai 1990). These concepts produce national and regional narratives that individuals often draw on to make sense of their lives at the ideological level. Sojourners may border cross into contexts where their ideological outlooks on these concepts are compatible, thus making it comfortable to identify with those who share their ideological stance. Of course, alternative and resistant ideoscapes are also present that carry their own counter narratives.

Since ideoscapes are not always in harmony, language learners may experience circumstances that challenge the ideoscapes they have embraced and on which they have built their own understandings of the world. In response, learners may find cross-cultural experiences dissatisfying, or they may come to question *territorial* notions of culture, perhaps identifying more with *translocal* perspectives about language and cultural difference (Nederveen Pieterse 2009). In other words, instead of envisioning culture as emanating from languages, societies, or nations, a translocal perspective places diasporas, migrations, and border crossing at the center of cultural identification.
Translocal cultures are outward looking, heterogeneous, and diffuse, in contrast to the inward looking, homogeneous, and unitary nature of territorial cultures (Nederveen Pieterse 2009: 85).

In applied linguistics, translocal cultural perspectives resonate with the concept of an *intercultural self* (Byram 1997, 2008), an idea that relates to the attitudes a person has toward one’s own culture and those of others. In contrast to a *biculural self*, who can “switch on” different cultural identities depending on the context, the intercultural self is a mediator between cultures who can decenter from her/his own values, beliefs, and behaviors upon encountering cultural difference. Decentering means that intercultural speakers do not treat their languages or cultures as natural starting points for understanding the world, but, instead, and through experiencing cultural difference, come to be able to see how their languages or cultures might be experienced by an outsider. Rather than acquiring an additional set of cultural viewpoints as a result of learning a new language, then, L2 learning has the potential to lead to the formation of an intercultural self located between cultural points of view.

Intercultural perspectives are closely tied to the concept of a *third place*, an idea first formulated in applied linguistics by Claire Kramsch (1993), who describes it as a vantage point for language learners from where to understand perspectives and attitudes from their first/home culture and that of the language they are learning. Drawing on Bakhtinian concepts, Kramsch highlights the importance of *dialogue* as a way to achieve a third place perspective by examining cultural contrasts. To provide a simple example, the practice of keeping one’s office door open or closed when inside the office is a culturally-specific choice that may strike members of some cultures (e.g., North American) as “odd” or “unfriendly,” but which seems like perfectly normal and unremarkable behavior to others (e.g., Germans) (Kramsch 1993: 209). Dialogues about such examples can encourage people to unearth their own culturally-based interpretations of such practices, and to develop an understanding of others’ points of view, thus yielding a third place perspective.

Through these dialogues, people become aware of the various frames of reference one can use to describe events. Indeed, the telling of these boundary experiences makes participants become conscious of the paramount importance of context and how manipulating contextual frames and perspectives through language can give people power and control, as they try to make themselves at home in a culture “of a third kind.” (Kramsch 1993: 235)
Introduction to Part II

While the concept of *thirdness*, and especially Homi Bhabha’s (1994) term, *third space*, have become common in sociolinguistics and language-in-education literature since the mid 1990s, these ideas have not yet become central to research on language learners’ identities. A key exception is Michael Byram, who has published over a dozen monographs and edited volumes that outline the chief aspects of sociocultural and intercultural competence and which explore pedagogical practices dedicated to developing intercultural awareness (ICA) and global citizenship. His framework for ICA aims at decentering learners from their own ethnocentric perspectives and taking on a more intercultural attitude. Other notable contributions in this area are LoBianco et al. (1999), an edited volume examining a range of classroom-based intercultural language pedagogy, and Belz and Thorne (2006), a volume which examines Internet-mediated intercultural language education. Risager (2007) extends Byram’s framework to the *transnational* context by creating these additional guidelines for language learning and pedagogy (Risager 2007: 236–237):

- The target language community is not confined to a nationally defined language area but exists in a linguistic network with a potentially global range, mainly as a result of transnational migration and communication.
- The target language is never isolated but always exists in a local interplay with other languages.
- The target language is associated with an infinite range of socioculturally different, personal languacultures.
- The target language is not associated with definite discourses and topics.

What is remarkable about all of the literature linked to ICA is that all of this research explores language learners in *instructed contexts*. There has yet been little attention dedicated to the development of ICA through other modes of language learning, and so the three contributions that follow in this volume offer insights on what this might look like. They also take up Risager’s call to focus on transnational ICA that breaks with the tradition of viewing language as tightly linked to a national culture.

Through long term sojourns in the form of study abroad and expatriate living, the participants in the next three chapters were exposed to experiences which have made them reflect on their prior and current cultural contexts. This introspection has compelled them to reflect on the constructed nature of their L1 cultural perspectives as they grapple with cultural differences linked to their L2. As these chapters show, not all learners embrace the opportunity
to develop a decentered perspective on their own languages and cultures, and there are several cases that clearly illustrate learners’ resistance to inhabiting a third place. However, there are also cases where learners find themselves in-between cultures, and rather than deeming that an uncomfortable position to be in, they appreciate their ability to make sense of multiple worlds.

In chapter 6, Jane Jackson draws on qualitative data to trace the experiences of a Hong Kong university student during a five-week sojourn in England. Elsa’s “affinity” for English, her desire for “a more meaningful, colorful life,” and aspirations of enhancing her linguistic/cultural capital to obtain a higher status motivated her to join the study abroad program. However, her journey of discovery of Self and Other involved the contestation and negotiation of many facets of her identity (e.g., ethnic, social, linguistic, gender) in an unfamiliar sociocultural environment. Through analyzing Elsa’s oral and written narratives, Jackson shows how Elsa adjusted her goals and developed a more intercultural perspective in order to push past her insecurities and interact with her hosts in her home stay. In spite of what Elsa perceived to be a lack of equal reciprocal social interest, she took up as many affordances as possible to engage in meaningful conversations with her host family and their social network. As a consequence, she picked up more colloquial expressions and developed closer relationships across cultures than many of her peers who could not overcome the culture shock. Jackson’s chapter draws our attention to the importance of recognizing the potential impact of access, power, and agency on L2 sojourners, particularly in contexts which may not be socially hospitable to them, while also demonstrating that ICA can be a possible way forward for learners who encounter difficult environments. Jackson’s analysis also shows that the quality of intercultural contact and a sojourner’s reactions to and perceptions of these encounters can have a significant bearing on intercultural adjustment and the learning process. While Elsa’s case provides us with a success story in many ways, it also suggests that many other learners may require extra preparation for the cultural differences which they encounter and strategies for coping with them.

Celeste Kinginger also explores how study abroad offers learners the opportunity to decenter themselves from their home cultures and to develop more intercultural perspectives in the process. In chapter 7, she provides a case study of four American learners of French in France during the U.S. invasion of Iraq (Spring 2003), the season of the “freedom fry” and the “axis of weasel,” when sociopolitical tensions between Europe and the United States were in clear evidence on both sides of the Atlantic. Through an examination of journal entries and an analysis of interviews with the students,
Kinginger finds that three of the four participants failed to seek to understand the perspectives of their French interlocutors, instead choosing to recoil into U.S. national superiority as they developed an increasingly defensive stance toward local events on a backdrop of American “collective remembering” (Wertsch 2002) of Franco-American relations. Ultimately, this ideoscape and its accompanying nationalist narratives led these three students away from an intercultural stance and limited their opportunities for French language learning and use. On the other hand, one participant, Jada, started to attempt to decenter her American cultural perspectives and to engage with her fellow students’ (some of whom were French) views of U.S. involvement in Iraq. The result was that, in spite of a great deal of discomfort, Jada had more interactions with local speakers, and she developed a much greater degree of intercultural awareness. Kinginger’s study suggests that in the post 9/11 era, American students abroad are in ever-increasing need of explicit guidance in observation and interpretation of intercultural encounters. Her study points to the need for ICA training discussed by Byram (e.g., Byram 1997, 2008; Byram and Feng 2006) in which students learn how to see their own cultural viewpoints as strange, and to appreciate the constructed nature of all cultures.

In chapter 8, Christina Higgins explores identity formation among three L2 Swahili speaking, expatriate western women who have lived and worked in Tanzania for 10–12 years. She examines how the historic mutability and socio-cultural fluidity of the “Swahili” identity has created a language learning terrain which provides L2 users with many possibilities for cross-cultural adaptation and identity slippage (Armour 2001), and she investigates how the three women have responded to these opportunities to “become Swahili.” Drawing on Goffman’s (1981) concept of footing, she uses narrative analysis to examine how the women evaluate Tanzanian cultural practices and ways of being in their retellings of past events. The analysis reveals that the women’s identities as feminists, sojourners, and world citizens are sometimes at odds with their interpretations of a “real Swahili,” and their narratives show that they prefer to position themselves in a third place, rather than to affiliate with any particular cultural identity. Higgins discusses the women’s backgrounds to make sense of their resistance to identity slippage, and suggests that their experiences as global citizens have strongly shaped their identities.

These three chapters reveal that language learners may choose to enter a third place, even without the aid of instructed language learning. For some, an intercultural zone is more comfortable than a marginalized positionality, as was the case with Elsa, the focal participant in Jackson’s study. For others, however, an intercultural attitude can develop as a result of intentionally
taking on an intercultural attitude and an “international posture” (Yashima 2002), purposefully surrounding oneself with cultural difference and engaging in it with an open mind. This describes Jada, the only young woman in Kinginger’s chapter who sought out opportunities to become more introspective through engaging with others who did not share her cultural background or outlook. It also describes the three women in Higgins’s study, though it is clear from their biographical information that they are very comfortable committing themselves to “unconventional” lives as long-term transnational expatriates whose work and social lives involve deeply engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds. Since many language learners struggle to develop intercultural perspectives, or may not even think of the possibility to do so, the case studies presented here offer potentially valuable insights on what factors can encourage language learners to embrace an intercultural attitude.
Chapter 6
Mutuality, engagement, and agency: Negotiating identity on stays abroad

Jane Jackson

1. Introduction

Each year foreign language students at universities across the globe pack their bags and travel abroad to gain firsthand exposure to another language and culture. While many educators assume that this sojourn will enhance their linguistic and cultural development, there are no guarantees. A range of internal and external factors can result in differing outcomes. Using a case study approach, this chapter addresses issues of agency, mutuality, and access in relation to the cultural and linguistic development (e.g., intercultural sensitivity, sociopragmatics awareness) and identity expansion of second language (L2) sojourners.

2. Introspective accounts of SA

In recent years, a number of applied linguists have been investigating the processes involved in the language and (inter)cultural learning of student sojourners using introspective techniques such as first-person narratives and interviews (e.g., Carson and Longhini 2002; Jackson 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010; Kinginger 2004, 2009; Mendelson 2004; Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Pellegrino 2005). Recognizing that “narratives constitute, rather than reflect reality,” these researchers are becoming increasingly mindful that their analysis of sojourner accounts must consider the context and “linguistic, rhetorical, and interactional properties” of these “discursive constructions” (Pavlenko 2007: 180–181).

In a qualitative study of student mobility, Murphy-Lejeune (2002) analyzed interviews with “year abroad” students in 31 European countries. She discovered that the sojourners had differing access to “native members,” and social scenes in the host culture and this affected their language and (inter)cultural learning. She also found that “the spatial, temporal, social and
symbolical disorientation which strangers experience may provoke a personal ‘crisis’ during which their identity appears somewhat fragmented or torn” (p. 27).

In Russia, Pellegrino (2005) investigated the experiences of American learners of Russian who were participating in study abroad (SA) programs ranging from 4 to 12 months. Using a grounded theory approach, she reviewed their oral and written narratives and identified factors that impacted on their self-presentation (e.g., anxiety, willingness to take risks, and self-esteem). Some of the sojourners limited their intercultural contact and use of Russian to avoid embarrassment and preserve their “ideal self-image”; this reduced their opportunities for language and (inter)cultural learning.

Kinginger (2004, 2009) also analyzed introspective data to better understand the language learning of sojourners. In one study she focused on Alice, an American learner of French who participated in a SA program in France. This highly motivated young woman aspired to leave behind her parochial American identity and transform into a more refined, “cultured person.” The realities of her life in France, however, did not match her romantic, idealized expectations and she lapsed into a serious bout of depression. After a period of intense reflection, she was able to readjust her sojourn aims and persevere with her language and intercultural learning and identity expansion. Kinginger (2004) observed that Alice’s story illustrates “the significance of access to social networks, or of marginality within such networks, in the process of negotiating and (re)constructing a coherent and satisfying identity” on stays abroad (p. 220).

These qualitative researchers have provided compelling evidence that introspective data can offer insight into the personal, sociocultural, linguistic, identity, and academic development of student sojourners and, subsequently, offer direction for interventions in SA programming. This chapter continues this tradition by examining the experiences of an L2 sojourner from Hong Kong, who, like Alice, experienced both highs and lows as she adjusted to a new linguistic and cultural environment, and took steps toward a more global, intercultural self (Byram 2008). Before focusing on her story, it is important to understand the theoretical foundation of my inquiry, which primarily draws on Bourdieu’s (1977, 1991) theory of language, power, and social life, poststructuralist notions of identity (re)construction, investment, and imagination in L2 learning (e.g., Bakhtin 1981, 1986; Norton 2000; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004; Ryan 2006), and a contemporary theory of situated learning – communities of practice (CoP) (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998).
3. Bourdieusian theory and SA

Pierre Bourdieu (1991) developed a number of conceptual tools and ideas that have implications for the L2 sojourn experience. In his social theory, he used the term “habitus” to refer to the learned habits and beliefs that prompt “social agents” (individuals) to behave in particular ways in social/linguistic exchanges. Within a “field” (social arena), “social agents” struggle to acquire resources (“economic, linguistic, cultural capital”) which are considered desirable in society (e.g., status, knowledge, wealth, L2). When outlining his conception of “practices,” Bourdieu (1991) focused attention on the miscommunication and identity misalignments that can occur due to a lack of congruence between a habitus and a field. L2 sojourners, for example, may suffer from culture shock (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001) and feel out of place in new surroundings where different values, worldviews, and habits abound. Even if they adjust their behavior (e.g., appropriate the discourse of locals), existing social networks and power structures may limit their access and positioning (Bourdieu 1991; Joseph 2004).

4. Poststructuralist notions of identity, investment, and imagination in L2 learning

Building on Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) and Bourdieu’s (1991) work, poststructuralists define identity as “a contingent process involving dialectic relations between learners and the various worlds and experiences they inhabit and which act on them” (Ricento 2005: 895). Within this orientation, it is recognized that individuals are influenced by the social, historical, economic, cultural, linguistic, and political constraints of their environment. Identities and beliefs are thought to be “co-constructed, negotiated, and transformed” on an ongoing basis by means of language (e.g., Kramsch 1993; Norton Pierce 1995; Norton and Toohey 2002).

While some SLA theorists (e.g., structuralists) portray L2 learners as “passive vessels for input and output,” poststructuralists regard them as agents who shape their own learning (Norton 2000; Norton Pierce 1995; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Pavlenko and Piller 2001). From this perspective, agency is defined as the “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001: 112). How might this relate to the sojourn experience? In the host culture some L2 sojourners (“social actors”) may decide to limit their L2 use (e.g., to secure their basic needs), avoiding new “ways of being” in the world.
They may confine their social networks to home nationals and resist the host language, convinced that it positions them unfavorably or disrespects their first language (L1). By contrast, others may embrace the new linguistic community, interact more frequently across cultures, and experience identity expansion. These individuals may enter what is sometimes referred to as a “third place,” “thirdness,” or “a third culture” (Byram and Fleming 1998; Kramsch 1993, 2006, 2012). As Kramsch (1993) explains, in the intersection of multiple cultures, border crossers may “create a culture of the third kind in which they can express their own meanings without being hostage to the meanings of either their own or the target speech communities” (pp. 13–14). On stays abroad, this “third place” may emerge as L2 sojourners try to make sense of intercultural encounters.

In Norton’s (2000) case studies of the language learning of immigrant women in Canada, she proposed the notion of investment, to represent “the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language” (p. 10). Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of practice (1991) and Weedon’s (1987) feminism framework/poststructuralist theory, Norton (2000) criticized static conceptualizations of motivation for ignoring “the complex relationship between power, identity, and language learning” (p. 10). She argued that language learners continually reorganize their aims, sense of self, and perceptions of their real and imagined positions in social worlds (Kanno and Norton 2003). For Norton (2000), “an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space” (p. 11). Due to accelerating globalization, we are witnessing increasing movement of people across their national and cultural boundaries. As the language of international and intercultural communication is most often English, the possibilities of identity expansion through this language are greater today than in previous generations.

5. **Communities of practice and situated L2 learning**

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, social theorists, developed a model of learning which focuses on the process of engagement in what they termed a “community of practice” (CoP). Within this framework, newcomers or “apprentices” are thought to engage in “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998); that is, they observe experienced “core” members and take part in simple yet productive tasks within the community. As they learn to speak and behave in ways that are deemed culturally
appropriate, they may develop a sense of belonging in the new CoP. Over
time, they may experience a change in their identity and social relations.

Within the context of SA and the CoP framework, the L2 learning and
socialization of sojourners may be characterized as a process of gradually
gaining competence and membership in new CoPs (e.g., homestay). If L2
sojourners are to become fully engaged in the host community, they must be
favorably positioned as “legitimate peripheral participants.” This involves
relations of power, as Lave and Wenger (1991) explain: “As a place in which
one moves toward more-intensive participation, peripherality is an empowering
position. As a place in which one is kept from participating more fully –
often legitimately, from the broader perspective of society at large – it is a
disempowering position” (p. 36).

Wenger’s (1998) notion of “mutuality and engagement” in CoPs suggests
that L2 sojourners who perceive their hosts as receptive and supportive may
become more open to personal expansion and identity reconstruction. By
contrast, those who experience “a lack of mutuality” may fail to fully engage
in the community and feel alienated to the extent that their identities are
threatened. Moving toward full membership in new CoPs (e.g., the home-
stay) is partially dependent on the willingness of the “core” members (their
hosts) to share their expertise and resources. While Lave and Wenger (1991)
recognize the importance of access, they do not sufficiently emphasize the
“discursive processes of conflict, instability, and power negotiations” (Barton
and Tusting 2005: 9) that may limit exposure to situated social practices and,
subsequently, curtail the learning of newcomers. Nor do they account for the
possibility of newcomers finding a sense of belonging in a third place that is
between cultures.

6. Elsa’s case

To gain deeper insight into the multivarious factors that can affect a L2
sojourn, we now turn to the story of Elsa, an advanced foreign language
learner of English who participated in a faculty-led, five-week sojourn in an
English-speaking milieu. As part of a larger ethnography on stays abroad
(Jackson 20081), this chapter traces her experiences from a Hong Kong
Chinese environment to England and back again. Similar to her peers, data
for her case study included a language and cultural identity narrative,2 an
intercultural reflections journal,3 interviews before and after the sojourn, a
diary detailing her language and cultural learning abroad, and open-ended
surveys and ethnographic conversations with me before, during and after the sojourn. All of the written narratives and surveys were in English; her pre-sojourn interview was in Cantonese, while the post-sojourn session was in English, reflecting her preference. Throughout the study, I kept detailed field notes of Elsa’s journey and those of her 14 classmates who took part in a literature and cultural studies program at the host institution.

With the help of NVivo, a qualitative software program, the data were triangulated as themes and issues related to the students’ linguistic and cultural development and self-identities were identified and analyzed. As well as a full-group account of the sojourn, individual case studies tracked the progress of each student. Elsa’s case was selected to be the focus of this chapter for the following reasons: 1) she had no previous SA experience and had never visited an English-speaking milieu prior to the sojourn; 2) she was very reflective and candid in her oral and written narratives, and 3) while abroad, she experienced greater personal expansion than many of her peers as she made a concerted effort to nurture her “intercultural self” (Byram 2008).

Elsa’s story cannot represent the experiences of all L2 sojourners; however, her revelations do elucidate the potential significance of access, agency, and mutuality in the language and (inter)cultural learning and identity reconstruction of those who cross cultures. What follows is a focused discussion of specific elements in her journey that impacted on her intercultural and sociopragmatic development and sense of self (see Jackson 2008 for a full account of her developmental trajectory and those of three of her peers).

6.1. Profile

When I first met Elsa, she was a twenty-year old English major, entering her second-year of studies in a three-year Bachelor of Arts program at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. A soft-spoken young woman with a pleasant demeanor, she appeared to have a positive, enthusiastic outlook on life. In an interview she described herself as “very serious, quiet and genteel” with a wide range of interests including sports, writing poetry, listening to classical music, and playing the piano. She was very close to her family members and lived at home. While she had made a few short trips to Mainland China with her family as a child, she had never ventured outside the Chinese-speaking world. Similar to many of her peers, her intercultural contact had been very limited prior to the sojourn.
A very bright, multilingual student, Elsa excelled in the academic arena. She spoke Cantonese, English, some Putonghua, and a little French. She started learning English in primary school and had become very proficient, receiving a “B” on her A-level exam in the language at the end of secondary school. Her family members all spoke Cantonese as a first language; they could also speak some English but limited its use to interactions with foreigners in the public domain. Although Elsa’s environment did not encourage the use of English, she practiced all four language skills at home. On a regular basis, she read an English newspaper and watched TV programs in English, demonstrating a higher level of investment in the language than many of her peers, who largely limited their use of English to the formal classroom setting.

Elsa was convinced that mastering English would help her to acquire what Bourdieu (1991) referred to as “linguistic capital” – a wider range of “symbolic and material resources” (e.g., a better paying job, prestige). Through English, Elsa also believed that she could gain exposure to an exciting array of worldviews. Although immersed in a Cantonese-speaking environment, her imagination enabled her to see herself as a more cosmopolitan, international person who could speak English fluently. Reminiscent of Alice’s dreams (Kinginger 2004), Elsa’s revelations evoke Wenger’s (1998) explanation of imagination as a “process of expanding oneself by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves” (p. 176). What is significant is that Elsa’s desire to learn English went beyond the instrumental desire to gain access to material benefits (Bourdieu 1991; Ryan 2006). She felt some “psychological and emotional” connection to English and wished to make this global language “part of herself” as she cultivated a more open, intercultural mindset:

I have fallen in love with the language since I realized the importance of reading and writing in society is something that can broaden my views and allow “invisible” intercultural communication (the perception and expression of distinctive ideas and thoughts) throughout the world and between mankind … I’ve developed a strong desire to master English, and I have set my target to learn this language well … Nowadays, there is the great demand of English in this internationalized society … As an English major, English gives me a sense of self. I believe nothing can make my affinity for English, or languages, die out. (cultural identity narrative)

Keenly aware of the bond between language and culture, Elsa believed that exposure to many languages afforded her the opportunity to access “an
abundance of [linguistic and cultural] treasures.” Her affinity for English, an optimistic spirit, a genuine interest in other cultures, and a sense of adventure helped set the stage for further enhancement of her intercultural self and intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997, 2008). For Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002), this entails “the ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and [the] ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality” (p. 10). In her language and cultural identity narrative, Elsa described her own cultural identity as “a cloud floating free” that could be “blown and carried away by even the lightest wind.” This metaphor captured her perception of her selfhood as dynamic and open to cultural expansion.

6.2. Pre-departure aims and concerns

In an interview, journal, and survey, Elsa disclosed her aims for the five-week sojourn in England, which ranged from socio-emotional to instrumental aspirations. She wished to gain firsthand exposure to “English culture and the people who speak that language.” By broadening her social networks and bolstering her oral skills, she hoped to become more self-assured when communicating across cultures: “I’d like to be more active in building friendships or interacting with others, even strangers … I would most like to improve my oral English as well as my intonation and pronunciation.” In England, she aimed to open herself up to “a meaningful, colorful life” (intercultural reflections journal) and be transformed into “an extrovert, exploring more new things …” (survey).

While excited about the impending sojourn, she questioned her ability to build a relationship with her homestay family and was nervous about coming into “close contact with Westerners.” Elsa lacked confidence in her ability to adjust to a new way of life and this, too, caused her some stress as the departure date drew closer: “I guess I’ll have culture shock … I can’t easily adapt to change … I don’t think I’m prepared for the trip – psychologically speaking … I don’t know why but I’m nervous” (interview).

6.3. The sojourn

When Elsa disembarked in England she experienced many emotions: joy and anticipation tinged with self-doubts and fear. Noticing that she was visibly
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different from most of the people around her, she became conscious of her race and newcomer status. While anxious, she was determined to “fit in” and make the most of the sojourn. In her first diary entry, she wrote:

I was suddenly surrounded only by foreigners (mostly “giant” Westerners whose skin, eye and hair colors were different from mine; speaking English or other foreign languages) … And due to these intrinsic differences between them and me, psychologically I felt distanced from them though all of us were now under the same roof. Still, I was happy as I knew a fantastic challenge was just ahead: I was to live in this foreign land with such a diversity of people and particularly, the Westerners whom I had always admired. And the challenge definitely involved communication with them: “Will I be able to hear all what they say when they speak too fast?”; ‘Can I express myself clearly to them?”; “What should I do to facilitate effective communication?”; “What are considered by them as appropriate/ inappropriate responses?”; “How can I assume a pleasing manner in their eyes?” All the way my mind was occupied by uncertainty, curiosity and my effort to force out the courage to face the new…

As her host mother gave her a warm welcome, she soon began to relax. Full of excitement, she viewed her surroundings through rose-colored glasses: “… I could hardly believe I was in England. It was all like a dream, a dream that came true finally … The colors of my room, the neighboring houses, the trees and the sky, were plain, fresh and lively. A sense of satisfaction ran through my heart” (diary, first week). This “honeymoon” state still enveloped her when she penned the following in her first sojourn survey: “The beauty of England exceeds my predictions. And I also didn’t expect to have such a large bedroom of my own! The magnificent buildings here are stunning and gave me a very big surprise.” Would she remain in this euphoric state or become disillusioned as Alice had done in France (Kinginger 2004)?

From the beginning, Elsa felt that her host, a single mother of one adult son, was sincerely interested in her and Hong Kong Chinese culture: “Talking with my host mum has developed my confidence in contacting English people. I believe that she is willing to listen to our culture and our living environment” (diary, first week). In this supportive environment, Elsa began to overcome her fears of interacting with native speakers/Westerners. Her new life was not perfect, however. In her diary, she recounted the difficulties she faced trying to get her ideas across in English: “I see my English is bad. Really bad! The time when I felt confused or embarrassed is when I don’t know how to express an idea in English and need more time to think and search for the right word.”
On the first weekend, Elsa’s host invited her and one of her classmates to a family barbecue. At this event, Elsa introduced herself to two local teenagers. When they failed to respond as she had hoped, she believed they were prejudiced against Chinese: “I was too insignificant or different (owing to my Chinese identity) for them to interact with.” In her diary, Elsa recounted this unsettling encounter:

The two teenage girls were not showing any signs of interest to socialize with me. I did approach the garden table where they were sitting in, took my seat, waited for the right moment, leaned forward and introduced myself to them. But they just smiled a little and talked no further with me, not even telling me their names. Their resumption to their own chat at once made me feel that I was alienated. Another time I broke the dead air by saying to them “you gals drink a lot of beer, don’t you … I am not used to alcohol.” “We do” was all their responses. Feeling as if I was dismissed, I asked no further. Later even when the girl’s mother was with us at the table, I was disappointed to find her talking JUST to them, not with Lara and me. I had used to think all British were chatty, very elegant and composed, mature and proper in socializing, and ready to respond to and communicate with new faces, but now I saw that either this impression was not always true, or I was too insignificant, or different (owing to my Chinese identity), for them to interact with. (diary, first week)

What Elsa did not realize is that her comment about the consumption of alcohol may have unintentionally annoyed or offended the teenagers. It is also possible that they were preoccupied and lacking in social skills.

Elsa and her friend also found it difficult to converse with the adults at this gathering. This was partially due to their lack of familiarity with the cultural background, speech genre, and sociocultural norms in this context (Bakhtin 1986). Unable to change the flow of the discussion, the young women were sidelined and discouraged. What they experienced, in part, was what LoCastro (2003) refers to rather bluntly as “sociopragmatic failure,” that is, “misinterpretation at the level of implicit social meaning” (p. 230). Not surprisingly, by the end of this disappointing evening Elsa felt neglected and “impotent”:

From my perspective, Lara and I were clearly an outsider. We had no idea of the topics they [the adults] were talking about, and we could not find any space to join into their conversation either. All of a sudden I realized we were in a passive role, impotent in facilitating communication across culture except waiting for their occasional questions/words to us which were like an invitation to us to speak, a golden chance for us to weed out the uneasiness deep within. (diary, first week)
What Elsa experienced at this intercultural, social event was “a lack of mutuality in the course of engagement.” Wenger (1998) warned that this can lead to perceptions of marginality and negatively impact on one’s sense of self. Similar to Kinginger’s (2004) Alice, Elsa’s idealized perception of locals had been tarnished, raising doubts about her willingness to stay on track and cultivate relationships with people from the host culture. In a survey, she vented: “English people should be very civilized in my past imagination but it turns out that NOT all of them are; in fact, many teenagers here are not culturally civilized but rude, impolite and discriminate against Chinese!”

Elsa did not dwell on the negative for long. After reflecting on her reasons for joining the SA program, she refocused her attention on learning more about the new environment and different “ways of being.” In Bourdieu’s (1991) terms, she remained committed to unlocking the mysteries of the “durable motivations, perceptions, and forms of knowledge” that the locals possess as a result of their socialization in England. While still on the periphery of the host culture, Elsa aimed to maximize her stay by enhancing her intercultural sensitivity and sociopragmatic competence: “I started to ask myself, ‘What things did the locals not do?’ … (our behaviors that were most probably considered strange/ inappropriate here)” (diary, end of first week).

Although Elsa’s transition had not been easy, early on, she was more amenable to experimentation with local customs than many of her fellow sojourners: “I came here to try new things, and to live in the way the locals did … I wanted to experience everything of the English living style; be it good or strange or bad, it was always interesting and worth trying” (diary, first week). Instead of focusing on Hong Kong happenings, she concentrated on making the most of her new environment. She spent much more time in the company of host nationals than some of her peers who remained distant from their host families and avoided intercultural contact in the community. I also observed that she paid more attention to colloquial expressions in the host language. The “mutuality” and “sense of belonging” she cultivated in her homestay encouraged her use of English and bolstered her confidence in intercultural encounters. In the second week, she wrote the following in her diary:

I was an outsider of the language—of their language system with so many colloquial expressions … I wanted to respond in a way that the locals would consider as normal. I found out (by watching the local TV) that the normal response to some amazing facts was: “Really?” And when I heard my host son’s answer to his mother’s question, “How are you?” was “Fine,” or “Not bad,” I realized that such a greeting phrase really meant asking if the person was alright, i.e. I should answer that real question.
Engaging in what Bakhtin (1981) termed “ventriloquation,” Elsa experimented with local expressions to feel more like a member of the community. In the process, she enhanced her sociopragmatic awareness and intercultural sensitivity. For example, she observed that her host mother’s attitude towards animals was very different from what she was used to in Hong Kong. She then translated this knowledge into more culturally appropriate ways to refer to pets in this context: “Thinking back, I must have offended my host mum when I kept addressing her beloved dog, Puddles, with the pronoun ‘it’ instead of ‘she’ on the first few days of my arrival when I could not get used to addressing animals according to their sex, like addressing human beings” (diary, second week). Elsa was making an effort to cultivate an ethnorelative, intercultural mindset (Bennett 1993; Byram 1997, 2008; Byram et al. 2002).

Amenable to being an “apprentice” or “language child,” Elsa assumed an active role in determining her own learning trajectory. She displayed curiosity about her linguistic and cultural surroundings and did not cling to her peers and L1. Rather, she made an effort to include host nationals in her social networks. Consequently, she gained more access to the host culture and experienced more opportunities to expand her knowledge of informal English discourse. As she began to feel more secure in the local environment, the euphoria that she had experienced on arrival resurfaced: “I still wonder if I am dreaming: I am now in the other end of the world, a place where English literature flourishes, the country I’ve longed to go to for a long time … How unbelievable! How fantastic and wonderful! … I still have that exotic feeling. England is a poetic place to me!” (survey, beginning of third week).

Near the end of the third week, however, Elsa suddenly found it difficult to sleep and longed for her Hong Kong family. As she had become close to her host mother and was leading “a Westerner’s lifestyle” in English, she felt disloyal to her own parents and L1. Her inner turmoil and identity insecurity permeated the following diary entry:

I was now in a Westerner’s house, leading a Western lifestyle … “Oh! How much I miss the Chinese dishes my mother cooks,” thought I; and the Cantonese seemed weird and unnatural to me when I thought of how they spoke. Finally I came up with a strong sense of belonging to my Hong Kong parents: “It was they who gave birth to me … not my host mum, although she is now so close to me and is part of my daily life.” Spontaneously I found I missed my family, and I desperately missed the intimate relationship we shared, the warmth and care they gave me, as well as the easiness, freedom, and informality I enjoyed before them when there was not the need for me to make effort and rack my brain just to get along with them.
Elsa’s malaise brought to mind Ryan’s (2006) admonition that L2 learners may experience “a conflict between their aspirations of membership to the external [host] community and existing loyalty to the local [home] community” (p. 32). This “push and pull” element may lead to disequilibrium and an identity crisis in sojourners. In severe cases, it may even cause some to board the next flight home (Ting-Toomey 1999, 2005; Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001) or sink into a deep depression (e.g., Kinginger’s (2004) Alice in France). In Elsa’s case, she rebounded quickly, again proving to be resilient in the face of difficulties.

Instead of spending all of her free time with her peers, Elsa engaged in homestay activities, garnering more exposure to her hosts’ “ways of speaking and being.” As the weeks unfolded, she continued to enhance her intercultural communicative competence and social skills in English, while developing a close bond with her hosts:

Sometimes I think the most important thing to build up a relationship is not to talk non-stop; it can help if one just exposes oneself to the family simply by sitting with them together, watching the same TV programme or having the same snacks. This is also my process of learning to adapt. Then naturally, we will have topics to talk with one another about. We can really talk about anything (especially the TV programme we’re watching). (survey, beginning of fourth week)

In conversations with her host mother, self-disclosure drew them closer as they learned more about each other: “I have the unexpected development of truthfulness and honesty between my host mom and I. We talk of things that absolutely require trust between us. I feel excited and happy about this. And this certainly strengthens our relationship.” This degree of mutuality and respect influenced Elsa’s views of the host culture and her willingness to use English in informal interactions. Throughout the remainder of the sojourn she continued to try local expressions and patterns of speech that were new to her:

… I know I am here to experiment with them [local cultural norms] no matter they suit me or not; after all, I gain invaluable experience and understanding through different tryings. And I am willing to try. For example, … I keep saying the “magic word” “Thank you” to the locals once they do me any favour; and upon any invitation my host mum/other host moms made to me, I’d try my best to attend it despite how busy I am, because I want to seize any chance I have to experience local activities. (survey, beginning of fourth week)
In the fourth week, Elsa provided a long list of sojourn experiences that she would never forget. Most involved encounters with locals (e.g., chatting with her hosts while preparing dinner, attending a church picnic). She had made a genuine effort to participate in activities in the community and assume a dynamic role in her new CoP (Lave and Wenger 1991). Compared with many of her peers, Elsa’s choices revealed a higher level of investment in the enhancement of her intercultural communicative competence and social English skills. In line with her desire to cultivate a warm relationship with her hosts, Elsa continued to spend more of her free time interacting with them; she also paid much closer attention to informal discourse than her peers who still judged their English language proficiency solely in terms of academic standards (e.g., grammatical accuracy): “In an all-English environment as England, I found that many expressions were new and interesting … I understood that living in an English-speaking country, one certainly needed to master the colloquial way of speaking” (diary, end of fourth week).

Wenger’s (1998) notion of “mutuality and engagement” suggests that newcomers who believe the “experts” (e.g., their hosts) in the new CoP (the homestay) are receptive and supportive may be more willing to “engage.” This seems to have been true for Elsa. Her helpful host provided her with ample access to her sociocultural world; Elsa gradually began to feel “like one of the family” as she actively joined in activities. Hence, access and agency both played a role in how Elsa’s sojourn unfolded. Her diary entries revealed a great deal of awareness of her “past” self and her emerging self:

My interaction with my host mom is superb … Different from my past self, I am more comfortable with dead air, and I no longer force out any topics to discuss just for the sake of creating some noise. At the same time, I can initiate a topic to talk naturally. In fact, with my host mom, we can talk about anything, from some general topics like TV programmes and food to deeper issues like her family and dating. Now I feel like I am one of the family members in the house. I am very satisfied. (diary, fifth week)

Through intercultural mediation in social situations and service encounters, Elsa opened herself up to new ideas and “ways of being.” This exposure provided further opportunity for the enhancement of her sociopragmatic sensitivity and overall intercultural communicative competence:

Conversing with local people in different social contexts (e.g., shopping) and gatherings (e.g., in barbeque, charity walk) equipped me with the skills to communicate
Mutuality, engagement, and agency

with people across cultures. For instance, I am now more ready and courageous to interact with a foreigner/any stranger… I think I’ve learnt the key to interact with people, saying what is appropriate, giving suitable responses for politeness, smiling and staying natural as signs of friendliness … I am still learning the way to strike a balance between a too active and a too passive role in communication. Making others feel comfortable (and even delighted) to talk to me is my goal. (survey, beginning of fifth week)

Elsa’s personal expansion is congruent with contemporary poststructuralist notions of identity as socially constructed, relational, and fluid (Byram and Feng 2005; Guilherme 2002).

Speaking English throughout the sojourn had been “incredibly valuable,” according to Elsa. As well as learning the host language from locals, interestingly, she picked up expressions from her fellow sojourners: “When we spoke English all the time, we actually learnt from each other: it was an exchange of the things we knew. In our group, many spoke excellently. “Tactic” and “reciprocal” were, for example, words I learnt from my classmates’ speech.” Her “love for English” had become stronger, which she attributed to “real contact with beautiful England and its language’s speakers.” As hoped, she achieved her goal of making the language more a part of herself: “Truly, English has now become an indivisible part of me. I am just not willing to abandon English in my life” (diary, fifth week).

By contrast, several of her peers commented that they had not had enough opportunity to use English outside their group. These individuals were also convinced that it was a waste of time to use the language with each other. They generally found it difficult to cope with daily life in English and did not build a close relationship with their hosts. What can account for these very different perceptions and outcomes? Individual L2 learners may perceive a similar learning situation or linguistic environment quite differently, as noted by Gibson (1979) and van Lier (2000). They may have very different aims and objectives. While some learners may aspire to integrate into the host culture and experiment with local expressions, others may prefer a more distant role. Instead of interacting with their host families, they may choose to travel with peers during their free time. The choices that sojourners make impact on their degree of exposure to the host language/environment. As Elsa tried to be open to the world around her, she made better use of linguistic and cultural affordances, including learning from her peers and seeking out opportunities to use English in social situations. Consequently, as evidenced in her surveys, diaries, and ethnographic conversations, her intercultural self,
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sociopragmatic awareness, and intercultural sensitivity developed more than those who were less engaged in the host community.

6.4. Post-sojourn

Back on home soil, Elsa elected to be interviewed in English about her sojourn experiences. She had become more comfortable using the language and more confident about her ability to express her thoughts and emotions. The warm relationship that she had developed with her host mother and her attention to (socio)pragmatic features had also led to tangible improvements in her “practical language usage”:

I’m more ready and confident to speak English and I accept my own English language skills more. Isn’t it interesting? I mean it’s not in terms of the language skill that I’ve gained the most. For example, I still make grammatical mistakes. I can still point out a lot of weaknesses in my language skills but I’m more ready to speak English. This is great progress actually. And my vocabulary capacity has increased because I came across many new words there … I also picked up some slang from my host family. I often asked my host mom to explain words that she said that I didn’t understand. Besides the words, I also learned some appropriate ways of responding and some phrases like, “Oh, what a shame!” I learned a lot more about the practical language usage in their daily life.

Elsa experienced re-entry culture shock (Martin and Harrell 2004; Ward et al. 2001), prompting her to further consider her positioning in England and Hong Kong. While she felt some connection to both places, after deep reflection, she did not believe that she was fully accepted by either (Bourdieu 1991; Joseph 2004). She seemed to be in a state of what Yoshikawa (1987) defined as “in-betweenness,” that is, “no longer at home in [her] original culture, not really belonging to the host culture” (Kramsch 1993: 234). The experience of crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries had evoked a range of confusing emotions in her: “I was part of the local culture because I was living in England but I know that I was a foreigner in their eyes … but back in Hong Kong, I now feel different from other ‘Hong Kongers’ because I’ve been to England … Sort of in-between” (interview). She had been more open to personal transformation than many of her peers, and this raised the possibility of the formation of “an identity that is not exclusively anchored in one culture/language or another” (Ricento 2005: 904) as she experimented with what Kramsch (1993, 2012) refers to as “third place.”
In diverse discursive contexts, Elsa felt compelled to negotiate new subject positionings. Her emotive words lend support to the poststructuralist depiction of identity as “multiple, changing, and a site of struggle” (Norton and Toohey 2002; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). They also raise awareness of the challenges that “intercultural speakers” face when they cross borders. For Byram (2008), the “‘intercultural speaker’ is someone who is aware of cultural similarities and differences, and is able to act as mediator between two or more cultures, two or more sets of beliefs, values and behaviors” (p. 75). In Elsa’s case, with very limited intercultural contact prior to the sojourn, she was just beginning to develop her mediation skills in England, as she became more aware of Self and Other while striving to make connections across cultures.

7. Conclusions

Elsa’s revelations illustrate the significant impact that even a short stay abroad can have on a L2 sojourner, bearing in mind the degree of preparation and support (e.g., guided critical reflection) she received before, during, and after the sojourn. Her journey offers insight into the diverse elements that can impact on the outcomes of stays abroad. Elsa’s “affinity” for English, her desire for “a more meaningful, colorful life” in another culture, and aspirations of a higher status compelled her to join the SA program. On her first trip outside a Chinese milieu, she was confronted with identity threats and misalignments and unsettling racial awareness. Similar to many L2 sojourners, her journey of discovery of Self and Other involved the contestation and negotiation of many facets of her identity (e.g., ethnic, social, linguistic, gender) and forays into “third place” (Kramsch 1993, 2012) in an unfamiliar sociocultural environment.

Her oral and written narratives provided evidence of culture shock and sociopragmatic misalignments in intercultural encounters during her stay in England. As the sojourn progressed, however, she displayed a strong determination to take an active role in her homestay to enhance her intercultural sensitivity and more fully experience the host language and culture. She spent much of her free time with her host mother and, with a positive, open mindset, developed closer ties across cultures than many of her peers. In the host environment, she made progress in terms of her pragmatic competence, which DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004) define as “the ability of interlocutors to participate effectively and appropriately in communicative interactions” (p. 70). In her writing (e.g., diary entries, surveys) and ethnographic conversations, she displayed a growing “knowledge of such factors as social context; social variables, including status, gender, and age of the interlocutors; and
cultural knowledge, including politeness codes and nonverbal cues” (p. 70). Her written and oral narratives furnished evidence that she was gradually acquiring some of the affective, behavioral, and cognitive capacities that Byram (1997, 2008) associates with intercultural communicative competence and an intercultural identity, e.g., “the ability to decentre from one’s own culture and its practices and products … to gain insight into another” (Byram 2006: 117).

Elsa’s motives, her investment in learning more about the host culture and language, and her evolving sense of self are best understood in relation to her personal history, the socio-historical context, her access to sociocultural worlds (e.g., homestay, peer support network), and her vivid imagination. Her experiences raise awareness of the potential impact of access, power, and agency (the ability to understand and control one’s own actions) on L2 sojourners, including their use of the host language. The quality of intercultural contact and a sojourner’s perceptions of these encounters can have a significant bearing on intercultural adjustment and the overall learning process. Ultimately, individual differences (e.g., level of resilience and openness) and a range of environmental, sociocultural factors may result in differing degrees of language and cultural learning and identity reconstruction in L2 sojourners.

Exposure to new CoP (e.g., homestay practices) may vary due to many factors. All sojourners do not have the same opportunity for language-mediated engagement with the host culture. While some may find their hosts welcoming, others may not. In some homestays, hosts may happily include their “guests” in a wide range of family activities; others may be too busy to even sit down to have a meal together. Some hosts may validate the preferred identities of their “guests” and be genuinely interested in their culture and personal lives, others may not. Based on the experience of Elsa and the more than 100 students who have participated in this program, it is evident that the selection of homestay families is crucial. Host institutions must aim to attract hosts who will provide a supportive environment and access to their sociocultural world.

As well as host receptivity, a learner’s willingness to take part in new CoP (e.g., the homestay) plays a significant role in sojourn outcomes. This may be linked to the ecological notion of affordance, which refers to the reciprocal relationship between properties of the environment and the learner (Gibson 1979; van Lier 2000). Even if L2 sojourners are positioned in a similar linguistic and cultural environment, individuals may view their world differently. Those who are open and receptive, like Elsa, are apt to assume an active role in their language and (inter)cultural learning, take more advantage of linguistic affordances, and, over time, embrace a more intercultural, global
self (Byram 2008) as they experiment with “third place” (Kramsch 1993, 2012) and enhance their intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997). When difficulties arise, these “intercultural mediators” may make better use of coping strategies to stay on course. By contrast, those who see only obstacles and rejections may withdraw and cling to familiar “ways of being,” thereby reducing opportunities for linguistic and cultural enhancement. At the end of their stay, these sojourners may show little or no development in terms of sociopragmatic awareness and intercultural communicative competence.

Access, mutuality, and agency can each play a significant role in determining the outcomes of stays abroad. To enhance the learning of student sojourners, adequate linguistic and (inter)cultural preparation must include attention to strategies that can help them make sense of a new environment and cope with the natural ups and downs of intercultural adjustment. They must also have essential knowledge about the host language and culture (e.g., norms of politeness in social contexts) and be sensitive to individual variations in ways of being. Reducing fears, offering encouragement, and providing adequate debriefing sessions throughout a sojourn can nurture the independence, whole person development, and intercultural identity of sojourners. Those, like Elsa, who have supportive hosts and are open to this process of personal expansion, may develop their intercultural self and new, more accepting perspectives on cultural difference, even on a short stay abroad.

Notes

2. Early in the program, Elsa wrote a personal, descriptive, and analytical narrative in English in which she reflected on her cultural background, language and cultural socialization, and place in the world.
3. In the pre-sojourn intercultural communications course, Elsa kept a journal in English in which she recorded her reactions to intercultural readings, videos, critical incidents, class discussions, intercultural contact, and her aspirations for the sojourn.
4. During the sojourn, the open-ended surveys focused on such aspects as the students’ language and cultural awareness, intercultural adjustment, reactions to cultural difference, self-identities, and perceptions of the host culture. The survey instruments were modified versions of those employed in previous ethnographic investigations of Hong Kong sojourners (Jackson, 2006).
Chapter 7
National identity and language learning abroad: American students in the post 9/11 era

Celeste Kinginger

I haven’t written much about it, but its [sic.] difficult living here during the war. I got an email saying to be careful but no plans to send any programs home yet. Scary. There are lots of protests and French people are brainwashed into being anti-war. Its [sic.] none of their business. The newspapers sympathize with Irak. They portray Americans as hicks or freaks. Today I got a flyer for a theme party called HitUS with a picture meant to look like twin towers. Its [sic.] just unreal. Hopefully in time the conditions and the attitudes around here will improve.

(Brianna’s journal, March 26, 2003)

Things are very hostile in Montpellier. It seems as if all the people only want to talk about the possibility of war and the involvement of the US. There have been a few students protests at Paul Valéry and it seems as if Greenpeace is on every corner. Honestly, I didn’t want a war before leaving for France, but all of the anti-American sentiments make me feel like I need to be in extreme opposition to the French.

(Olivia’s journal, March 5, 2003)

1. Introduction

The above citations, drawn the from the study abroad journals of undergraduates in France, illustrate the complexity of the topic I wish to address in this paper, namely the educational potential of study abroad for American students in the wake of 9/11. After many years of language study, Brianna and Olivia have reaped their just reward, arriving in Montpellier where they will spend the spring semester of 2003. In place of the exotic romance and high culture portrayed in popular media and in textbooks, however, they have discovered that French society seems to be holding up a mirror reflecting a broadly negative version of their own self-image. They
have arrived just in time to witness the widespread and vocal outpouring of anti-American sentiment accompanying the onset of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

In writing of her experience, Brianna positions herself as a victim: she is frightened, and she intends to make her reader feel sorry for her. The French media, according to her, present a biased and unjust image of the U.S. while the entire country meddles in an affair that is “none of their business.” Even as she complains about criticism of her country’s provincialism, however, Brianna displays startling naïveté in her assessment of the problem. She finds it notable that there could be public sympathy with Iraq. With the unapologetic narcissism characteristic of American middle-class youth in similar circumstances (Feinberg 2002), she sees points of view diverging from the American mainstream as an effect of “brainwashing.” She exteriorizes responsibility for the local conditions she finds unacceptable. For Olivia, the encounter with opposition to American military action has generated an urge to put up her own fight. Rather than making an honest attempt to understand their surroundings and the motives of the people there, both students recoil into national superiority – a tactic commonly documented in the qualitative research on American students abroad who only rarely develop foreign-language mediated identities (Block 2007).

The purpose of this paper is to take a closer look at the process by which some contemporary American students construct rationales for a affirming a fixed national identity when confronted with opportunities for intercultural learning and foreign language development. The narratives of four American students in France show little evidence of focus on the perspectives of others or critical reflection on the students’ own views. Rather, in recruiting discourses of national superiority, including traces of American collective remembering (Wertsch 2002), these students effectively refuse intercultural competence (Belz and Thorne 2006; Byram and Feng 2005), or the symbolic competence described by Kramsch (2006: 251) within an ecological approach to language teaching in the contemporary, global age:

In order to understand others, we have to understand what they remember from the past, what they imagine and project onto the future, and how they position themselves in the present. And we have to understand the same things of ourselves . . . Symbolic forms are not just items of vocabulary or communication strategies, but embodied experiences, emotional resonances, and moral imaginings. We could call the competence that college students need nowadays symbolic competence. Symbolic competence does not do away with the ability to express, interpret, and negotiate meaning in dialogue with others, but enriches it and embeds it into the
ability to produce and exchange symbolic goods in the global context in which we live today.

Elsewhere in the literature, and particularly in the European context, policy and practice related to student mobility are connected to a “political will to tolerance and integration respecting cultural and linguistic diversity” (Coleman 1998: 168). Thus, for example, writing from a European perspective, Crawshaw, Callen and Tusting (2002) draw on Ricoeur’s notion of attestation to illustrate the development of an “intercultural self” in one British student’s diary of life in France and Spain. Identity, for these authors, is a continuous process of discursive construction involving voluntary acts of self-differentiation through language. The notion of attestation, according to which language verifies and bears witness to who we are, draws upon Ricoeur’s conceptual extension of selfhood to others through a dynamic version of identity composed of the ipse, or reflexive self (corresponding to the singular je ‘I’) choosing identification with others (the idem, or – potentially – collective self, corresponding to the plural on ‘one’). The authors emphasize in particular the ethical dimensions of Ricoeur’s argument in ways resonating with Kramsch’s notion of symbolic competence: “. . . identity implies not only our reiterated awareness of selfness as articulated through language in our dealings with society. It also means our identification with other members of a potentially global community, our ability to see ourselves in their place and to act – both physically and through language – on the basis of that fundamental sameness” (p. 107).

Crawshaw, Callen and Tusting (2002) examine the discursive practices by which the student diarist distances himself from his own statements and comments upon his own responses to living abroad, thereby illustrating the development of an intercultural self, combining personal agency with openness to difference and awareness of the perspectives of others. In the data presented here, however, there is relatively little evidence that the student participants chose to identify with their French hosts or to represent their point of view in their own attestation of self. Instead, as young Americans in Europe at the onset of the war in Iraq, in various ways they nurtured defensive postures serving to limit opportunities for dialogue and learning.

2. Challenges to language learning by American students abroad

Among policy makers and education professions around the world there is widespread, if none too frequently examined faith in the educational value of
study abroad. Among other virtues, study abroad is believed to foster a broadened perspective on world events, enhanced commitment to academic work, and of course, competence in additional languages. In the post 9/11 United States, renewed interest in study abroad is reflected in the fact that 2006 was named “The Year of Study Abroad” by unanimous Senate resolution. The Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (2005) outlined a plan for dramatic increases in study abroad participation, stating that “the engagement of American undergraduates with the world around them is vital to the nation’s well-being” (p. 5).

In the Lincoln Report, as elsewhere in American policy documents related to international education, the need for a radical enhancement of international perspectives among the U.S. citizenry is justified via documentation of widespread global illiteracy. In the 2002 National Geographic–Roper Global Geographic Literacy Survey, for example, American undergraduates scored next to last among the national groups tested: “87 per cent couldn’t locate Iraq on a map of the world, 70 per cent couldn’t locate New Jersey, 20 per cent couldn’t find the Pacific Ocean, and 11 per cent couldn’t even point to the United States” (Gore 2005: 5). These alarming figures are interpreted in terms of global competitiveness, national security, and responsible world leadership. The answer proposed by the Lincoln Report is to dramatically increase the number of U.S. students who go abroad. This move alone would constitute a major next step in the evolution of American educational practices, analogous in scope and impact to the G.I. Bill or the establishment of land-grant universities.

While an increase in study abroad participation is much to be applauded, and is in fact already well underway, we find that within this policy document as elsewhere, concern for competitiveness and security overshadow the educational goals of study abroad, particularly any broadly (if perhaps vaguely) defined humanistic aspirations such as increases in intercultural understanding and propensity toward dialogic conflict resolution. Language learning is assumed to take place but is framed as a utilitarian by-product of study abroad. In contrast to the European tradition (e.g., Coleman 1997; Murphy-Lejeune 2002) the qualities of student participation and experience, as they relate to the development of intercultural communication skill (Byram and Feng 2005) or symbolic proficiency (Kramsch 2006) are largely absent from the picture (Kinginger 2007). Yet, as language educators point out, in a globalized world, and one in which globalization is often perceived as an American project of economic and military dominance, the dangers of complacency on issues of foreign language
development, broadly conceived as inclusive of intercultural or symbolic competence, are real:

The shadow side of our economic and political dominance could turn out to be cultural underdevelopment. Already, the unfortunate sense among Americans that learning a foreign language is at most an academic exercise without much utility in careers and mature lives sets our citizens off from most other educated peoples on the planet. (Falk and Kanach 2000: 165)

Of course, study abroad also enjoys a reputation among American language educators as the prime context for enhancement of language proficiency. Researchers examine language learning in study abroad sojourns on an optimistic backdrop existing at least since the 1967 publication of Carroll’s national assessment report, where time spent abroad proved a robust correlate of language skill. Yet, if we look closely at the contemporary study abroad experience and its documented qualities (e.g., Kinginger 2008), we find many ways in which this experience is not designed to promote language development:

– Demographic figures show increases in the number of students going abroad, but decreases in the length of the typical sojourn. The Junior Year Abroad involving foreign language majors now verges on the anachronistic, as the typical participant is a business or social science major going abroad for a semester or less (Institute for International Education, Open Doors Report). The new typical study abroad participant is less likely to be well prepared for language learning or to exhibit a durable commitment to that endeavor.

– In the European model, students go abroad for a year or more as independent agents interpreted as adults capable of satisfying their own needs through negotiation with local institutions (Murphy-Lejeune 2002). By contrast, American programs “generally envisage the short-term transfer of cohesive groups of American students to a different geographical base, where they may benefit from formal (classroom) and informal (naturalistic) language learning without necessarily abandoning an American educational framework and academic/administrative support” (Coleman 1997: 1). American students tend to be “in this together” and to rely upon each other for social and psychological support (e.g., Kline, 1998; Twombly 1995). Some programs (see for example Levin 1999) explicitly downplay language learning goals in
favor of a “coming of age” model explicitly encouraging in-group solidarity and rejection of local social networks.

- Globalization has fundamentally altered people’s relationships with the local, and has changed the nature and meaning of language learning (Block and Cameron 2002). Widespread availability of global communications technology and ease of travel mean that while students are abroad they must choose to be available to their local hosts, and not, for example, to situate their experience in home-based electronic networks or cultural infotainment through tourism. For American students, the spread of English as the accepted lingua mundi has consequences both for access to local L2 interaction and for attitudes toward the value of the L2.

- If the number of students going abroad is increasing, the proportion of full-time undergraduate participants in these programs remains low (less than 3 percent). Moreover, study abroad has always been and remains a feminized educational experience, with an average of two thirds female participants. According to Gore (2005), this phenomenon can be explained through explication of the “dominant” and “alternative” discourses of study abroad policy in the United States. According to the dominant view, education of true value for economic striving and success is only available in the United States; study abroad is akin to the Grand Tour, a decorative pursuit for the privileged few, appropriate mainly as a finishing touch on the education of elite women. Alternative voices do exist, however, and belong to students willing to undergo hardships and face challenges in the interest of enhancing their education via the liberal curriculum, thereby contributing to global peace and understanding. Thus, some students go abroad with broadly defined humanistic goals in mind, others do not.

These issues, taken together, suggest that American students who go abroad to learn languages will require an unusual level of commitment and dedication to that task. As documented in the qualitative research, such students do exist; based on a sincere desire for access to the sociocultural worlds of others, they struggle for access to local social networks, volunteer their time to worthy causes, devote themselves wholeheartedly to the study of opaque and high-minded literary works, and become trusted long-term friends of host families. Some of them see globalization in an idealistic positive light; they want to make a personal contribution to worldwide efforts in ecology or peacemaking, and they see language learning as a necessary step toward this goal (Kinginger 2008; Wilkinson 1998).
While recognizing and celebrating the contributions of these students to the overall success of study abroad in its educational goals, in this chapter I wish to explore yet another source of particular difficulty for American students in study abroad contexts. Specifically, I wish to explore the “recoil into national superiority” that Block notices in the research literature about American students abroad, and consider what this tendency means for language learning. Of particular concern is the effect of contemporary sociopolitical changes, particularly changes in the image of the United States both at home and abroad, on students’ tendency to adopt such stances. It is well documented in the literature that study abroad brings with it an enhanced awareness of national identity (Dolby 2004). A sojourn abroad can serve as a wakeup call for students with no previous affective engagement in global sociopolitics (Kinginger 2004). It can also, unfortunately, cement students’ commitment to monolingualism and/or view of travel as the consumption, by the privileged few, of global infortainment on the model of the “Survivor” TV series (Feinberg 2002). In this chapter I will examine reactions to conflict by four participants from a cohort of study abroad participants in France during the spring of 2003, at a time when sociopolitical tensions between the United States and France reached a level unprecedented in the students’ lifetimes.

3. The study

The cases to be examined in this chapter are extracted from a larger multi-method study of language learning in study abroad by American undergraduate students in France during the academic year 2002–2003 (Kinginger 2008). The study’s design was inspired by three key notions from contemporary sociocultural theory. First among these is the claim that human activity is fundamentally mediated: humans think, speak, and act by using cultural tools, including the narrative tools that characterize particular social settings (Bruner 1986; Wertsch 1998; 2002). The second is an historical approach to the study of higher mental functions and their development. In this study, the genetic approach outlined by Vygotsky (1978) is applied less to the short term development of language skills and more to an interpretation of the students’ life histories as young, generally middle class Americans growing up in a particular socio-historical and cultural environment. Finally, within this approach, participants in research are interpreted as intentional human agents who play a defining role in shaping the qualities of their learning but
who, at the same time, may be subject to variable positioning within specific settings and relations of power.

Participants in the study were 24 French minors or majors, most of whom traveled to a variety of study abroad sites in metropolitan France for the spring semester (2003) alone. Since the aim of the study was to examine the full diversity of the study abroad experience as locally instantiated, the project was opened to all who would participate, and the resulting cohort thus reflected the typical demographic makeup of contemporary American study abroad groups. The group included: a significant majority of female participants (19 of 24); few minority participants (2); and mostly third-year students majoring in a business related or social science field with a minor in foreign language.

The project was designed as a primarily qualitative study to “reconstruct detailed life stories of learners hand-in-hand with an interest in linguistic development over time” (Block 2003: 138). The primary data for the study are extensive semi-formal interviews conducted two or three times over the course of the semester, and bi-weekly entries in language learning journals. In addition to collecting the students’ own accounts of the experience, the study sampled the students’ progress in a range of communicative domains before and after the sojourn in France. To examine the students’ ability to perform well in an academic assessment context, the Test de Français International (TFI) was administered. The TFI is a standardized, multiple choice test of Reading and Listening including both traditional comprehension questions and items assessing knowledge of standard French grammar. The test yields scores interpreted in terms of proficiency ranges, from “Elementary” to “Advanced Working Proficiency.” The students also participated in various primarily qualitative assessment procedures designed to tap their awareness of pragmatics and sociolinguistic variation: e.g., address forms, colloquial lexis and syntax, and formulae for leave-taking. Ultimately, this combination of data collection procedures was intended to yield data-enhanced case studies of individual experiences, with the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the study serving to illuminate each other (see Kinginger 2008 for a complete report on the study).

4. Narrative resources for the interpretation of conflict

One of the major goals of the project was to examine how students go about making sense of their experience, including especially any points of conflict (Agar’s “rich points,” 1994) they encounter. For an approach to the study of
narratives, the project relies upon the insights of Wertsch (2002) on the process of “collective remembering.” Wertsch explores the organic link between language, culture, and human activity with reference to “textual resources,” taking an interest in the process by which societies construct and circulate “collective memories” of historical events. The project was launched by a story, in particular an occasion when Wertsch listened to an account of the Second World War by an eleventh grade Muscovite, Sacha. In Sacha’s version, the role of the United States was limited to arms dealing and jockeying for dominance over the Soviet Union in the post-war era. Because Sacha demonstrated absolute confidence in a version of the story very different from the one that Wertsch himself might have recounted, Wertsch began to pose questions about the sociocultural resources made available for remembering historical events:

It was as if Sacha were “looking through” the narrative text he was employing and could not see it or appreciate the way it shaped what he was saying. It may be quite possible for people whose collective memories of World War II are quite different from Sacha’s to detect the mediating texts shaping his account, but clearly this seems to have been something that escaped his attention. In reality, however, one can ask how often any of us recognizes such mediation in our accounts of the past. (Wertsch 2002: 5)

Wertsch concludes that remembering, like all human action, is a process (something we do rather than something we have) that is mediated by cultural tools. In particular, as they construct their own unique and concrete utterances, speakers rely on the “repeatable aspects of texts” (p. 15) as cultural resources. That is, in the Bakhtinian sense, the resources involved in speaking or writing about the past reflect the perspective of others who have used them. In a given collective, people share representations of the past because they share textual resources. For Wertsch, following Bruner (1986), many aspects of thinking, speaking, and other forms of human action are fundamentally shaped by narratives. As cultural tools for mediated action, narratives offer crucial affordances, narrowing perspective and excluding potentially relevant information while making it possible to carry out the “configurational act” required to “grasp together” sets of temporally distributed events into interpretable wholes or plots (p. 57). The narrative tools that humans employ are provided by the particular cultural, historical, and institutional settings in which we live; they are part of the “cultural toolkit” that characterizes a sociocultural setting. They are employed to create, recognize, and reproduce
collective remembering . . . is an inherently distributed phenomenon. It is defined by an irreducible tension between active agents and the textual resources they employ, especially narrative texts. . . . If one starts from this perspective, one is naturally led to pose questions about how the textual resources are produced by those who have the power and authority to do so and how they are consumed (mastered, appropriated, used in public and private performance regions, and so forth) by members of a collective. (Wertsch 2002: 174–175)

By focusing on the local use of particular textual resources in the unique utterances (or journals) of individuals, but situating these resources in their sociohistorical context, the approach advocated by Wertsch responds to Pavlenko’s call for consideration of global and local influences in applied linguistics research using narratives (Pavlenko 2007).

5. American students in France, spring 2003

The process of collective remembering, and the narrative toolkits involved in this process, are of particular interest for the analysis of the accounts under scrutiny in this project. As noted above, the students were in France during the spring of 2003, that is, during the build-up in international tensions over the unilateral actions of the United States in the decision to invade Iraq. Because France and Germany refused to support the invasion of Iraq, there emerged a crisis in international relations of “exceptional gravity” (Roger 2004: 467), a situation in which the “emotional gap” between Europe and the United States grew to levels unprecedented in the students’ lifetimes (Jurgen Habermas, interview by Danny Postel, The Nation November 26, 2002). In Europe, the actions of the U.S. administration were subject to intense critical scrutiny as vocal protests against the war erupted throughout France. On the 15th of February, for example, tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets from Aix-en-Provence to Vannes. Meanwhile, published figures represented majority anti-war sentiment throughout Europe.
Meanwhile, back in the United States, and in the worldwide U.S.-based media, the spring of 2003 became the season of the “freedom fry.” A long-term tendency toward French bashing was unearthed and sent on a campaign of renewed vigor. Curiously, while both France and Germany were dubbed the “axis of weasel” by the New York Post, it was anti-French sentiment that won the day as French products were boycotted and public figures, from politicians to talk show hosts, celebrated stereotypes portraying French men as cowards of uncertain gender identity. In the political cartoons of the time, we find multiple representations of the French as disingenuous, ineffectual effeminates, willing to support the build-up of American military might only when it benefits them directly (as in the case of the Second World War). The French Army Knife is shown to be equipped with nothing but a white flag, a single French fry (in a beret) sticks out its tongue at a huge bag of Freedom fries, street protests are reduced to one angry waiter tossing a Happy Meal into the gutter, and the French military tries to prevail through mime. “Going to war without the French,” quipped Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Missouri), “is like going deer hunting without your accordion.” These representations were normally based on an over simplistic interpretation of the Second World War in which the United States single-handedly saved France from its Nazi occupiers (Nadeau and Barlow 2003). In this interpretation, Americans are owed unqualified respect grounded in history along with unqualified support for the military actions of their country.

As noted above, study abroad, even in times of relative calm, tends to highlight the national identity of participants. In this case, for many students, coping with criticism of their nation became a defining aspect of the experience. Most of the participants claimed that, prior to their experience abroad, they had devoted little effort or time to the elaboration of an informed opinion about current events. Consequently, when asked to state and defend their views on the war in Iraq, they felt multiply challenged: to learn about the events, to develop an opinion, and then to give expression to their views in French. Rarely did they mention the difficulties associated with interpretation of others’ views. Instead, the students’ interview and journal accounts are filled with stories of intense frustration, anger, and sadness over interactions interpreted as challenges to their patriotism and to their identity. In host families, in classes, in cafes, and on the street, the students encountered criticism of the United States and, in many cases, they took it personally instead of attempting to understand their interlocutor’s reasoning.

In addition to its affective impact, the sociopolitical tension surrounding the war had direct, practical effects upon the students’ access to French
language learning. As news of the impending invasion gained momentum, many of the students abandoned attempts to follow the events through local French language resources, and turned instead to online news outlets in English, such as CNN or FoxNews.com. Here, of course, they were likely to encounter the campaign of French bashing in full swing. In order to protect students, and perhaps to assuage their parents’ fears, program administrations enjoined American study abroad participants to stick together and to avoid large gatherings. One small group of study participants was assaulted at a sporting event, and others, like Brianna, witnessed anti-American events advertised or realized through disturbing imagery.

In the sections below, we review how four of the study participants recounted their experience of coping with criticism of the United States. The case of Camille exemplifies the ways in which these American students appealed to cultural/narrative tools related to the history of Franco-American relations in order to justify a recoil into national superiority and thereby avoid the development of an intercultural self (Crawshaw, Callen and Tusting 2002). The case of Hannah shows how some students withdrew from communicative contexts within their host families in reaction to conflict over the war in Iraq. For Delaney, criticism of the United States and its military actions was simply unacceptable. Jada, on the other hand, confronted her own extreme naiveté in matters of contemporary international events and their media portrayal, and thereby gained a more nuanced perspective on the meaning of national allegiances and a budding awareness of interest in developing an intercultural stance.

5.1. Camille

At the time the study began, Camille was a 20-year-old finance major enrolled in a business-related program in Paris and determined to “become fluent” in French by the end of her semester-long stay. The program included a homestay component, and Camille was placed in the home of a single, older woman with an “empty nest.” Although the program was housed in a French business school, the classes that Camille attended were designed for her cohort exclusively, thus while at school she made very few social contacts outside her own group. Camille expressed disappointment in her lack of access to age peers both at home and in her courses. However, Camille’s mother had worked as a French language teacher at the beginning of her career, and the family had personal contacts in France, including some young people of Camille’s age who lived in Paris. Thus, unlike many of her classmates,
Camille was able to join a local social network consisting of a boyfriend, Gabriel, and his circle of friends.

On the standard test administered for the project, Camille registered scores in the Intermediate range both before and after her sojourn in Paris. In her journal and in interviews, Camille repeatedly expresses a desire to develop fluency in French. For Camille, as for others in the group who base their assessment of language learning on a similar “folklinguistic theory” (Miller and Ginsburg 1995), language competence is equivalent to a skill realized through fluency, and fluency is an effect of exposure to the language. Given sufficient exposure, L2 learners experience an automatic transformation as fluency “clicks” into place, from one day to the next. Thus, one of the most important learning outcomes of Camille’s sojourn in Paris was the realization that foreign language speaking ability is the outcome of effort over time in addition to exposure. However, Camille made no obvious revisions to her view of foreign language ability as a personal attribute and a skilled performance. In the data she provided, she recounted the ways in which her everyday life and social encounters, the people she met, and the activities in which she was engaged either helped or hindered her progress toward fluency.

For Camille, as for many others, development of language ability did not include making an effort to understand, if not to accept, the perspectives of her interlocutors. Conversation about the war in Iraq could be summarized as a challenge to her national identity. She defended her perspective in terms of the “respect” owed to Americans for their role in the Second World War, and thereby risked alienating her French age-peer friends:

(1)  
C: one comment that made my, my French friends really mad when I said + all I am asking for is a little bit of respect. I was like at this point, if it wasn’t for America, you guys would be speaking German right now. and I was like could we get a little respect from it, please, it’s all I’m asking. and I was like I understand that you don’t want a war, fine. you know, but just a little respect that’s all I’m asking.
I : yeah. how did they response to that, they were not happy?
C: (laugh) Gabriel was like “uh”,
I : yeah?
C: t’es chante. [you’re a pain in the ass.]
(Camille, Mid-Term Interview)

In making the claim that she, as an American national, was owed respect in light of the role played by the United States during the Second World War,
Camille drew upon the very collective memories that were circulating in the French bashing media imagery of the time, specifically, images of the French as ineffectual in their own self-defense. Unlike the student diarist highlighted in Cranshaw, Callen and Tusting (2002), Camille made no effort to articulate her experience through others’ eyes, opting instead to draw on an American narrative of heroic liberation of France. The fact that Camille was obliged to recognize the existence of other ways to tell this story may represent a crucial first step toward an intercultural stance, but there is no evidence in her account to suggest that she attempted to explore her friends’ views on the matter.

5.2. Hannah

A 23-year-old senior marketing major, Hannah was enrolled in the same business-related program as Camille. In her small town high school in the south, Hannah had been the president of the French Honor Society and had taken advanced placement courses. In college, she had pursued her study of French until her junior year, but had then interrupted her language study for a year prior to her semester in Paris. For Hannah, the opportunity to study in Paris was all about “soaking up the culture,” which meant a combination of exposure to High Culture in museums, monuments, and performances, along with experience of everyday life. Unlike Camille, Hannah had no personal connections in Paris. At school, she found herself surrounded by the other Americans in her study group, with few opportunities to interact with local students. For Hannah therefore, the most productive setting for informal language socialization would be the homestay setting, where she lived with a traditional family (mother, father, and school-aged children).

Hannah began her sojourn in Paris with “Basic Working Proficiency” as documented on the Test de Français International. In her journal, she focuses on her outings to cultural events (mainly with the others in her cohort), her courses and readings, and suggestions for future study abroad participants. Outside of the formal classroom environment, the homestay appears to have become, in fact, the main setting in which she was invited to participate in French-mediated conversational interaction. After the onset of the war, however, Hannah recounted an event around the family dinner table that soured her relationship with the family:

There has been much buildup in the press of the criticism against the United States and George Bush. I’m so tired of hearing about it. I can sit back and see both sides,
but it is evident that the US and the French press are definitely very very biased. So this all leads up to tonight, when my french [sic] host mom brought up the war at the dinner table. I was quietly eating soup, and she started criticising [sic] the US for using up 1/4 of the world’s energy supply and how we only want to go to war for oil. She made me lose my appetite. I realise [sic] that everyone has their own opinions, but this was personal. All of a sudden, her husband told her to stop talking about it in front of me because it was really rude. He started defending me saying that, “here we have an american [sic] that is a guest in our house, and she hears criticism of her own country all of the time, do you think she really wants to hear more?” The whole time I was holding back the tears, but it just took a load off of my shoulders because here was a french [sic] person defending exactly what I was thinking! I felt this huge release that someone actually understood what it felt like, and then I started to cry. I excused myself from the dinner table, and washed my face, and then came back up to the dinner table. But after that moment, I didn’t feel as close to my french [sic] host mother ever again. Hannah (Journal 3/20/2003)

Frustrated and angered by her own inability to express a complex opinion, but also relieved by the empathy of her host father, Hannah found herself unable to repress an obviously emotional reaction, and was therefore also humiliated. Like the case of Beatrice reported elsewhere (Kinginger 2008), Hannah’s situation illustrates the ways in which the participants’ defensive posture risked leading to estrangement from their host families. In her narrative, there is little evidence of detachment from her own perspective, and explanation of others’ behavior is offered only in relation to her own stance and emotions. Were her sojourn of greater length, or had it involved routine French-mediated social interaction outside the home, this estrangement might have been less significant. However, in the event, Hannah’s conflict with her host mother effectively shut down her access to the only context she experienced for informal language socialization.

5.3. Delaney

In contrast to Hannah, a relatively mature student on the verge of graduating from the university, Delaney was one of the youngest members of the cohort, a 19-year-old international politics major undertaking what she hoped would be the first of several college-related sojourns abroad. In connection with her father’s highly successful military career, Delaney’s family had lived in Africa and in France when she was a small child. Although she had not retained the language skill in French and Lingala that characterized her early
youth, her parents’ and brothers’ ongoing multilingualism inspired her own efforts, and the family had multiple personal connections throughout France. Delaney was enrolled in an “integrated” program including language courses and enrollment in regular university classes in a major southern town. She began the semester with a score of 545 (Intermediate) on the Test de Français International, a score that rose by a modest 40 points, to 585, by the end of the term.

Delaney regularly spent weekends away from the locale of her studies either visiting family friends or traveling alone. At school and in her daily life she made few efforts to interact in meaningful ways with local people. No doubt in part because she saw the study abroad experience as an avenue toward greater personal independence, she elected to live in a program-sponsored apartment rather than with a host family. She was therefore obliged to cope with the practical concerns of everyday survival on her own for the first time, and many of her comments focus on problems with the apartment and lack of satisfaction with the program’s provisions for its students.

As the news of impending military action in Iraq spread and public opposition grew more dramatic, however, Delaney’s remarks on her experience focused increasingly on the confusion and outrage she felt in response. For Delaney, the onset of war really was a personal matter. Her brother, who had followed their father into the military, had been killed in an exercise just prior to her departure, and she was still in the earliest stages of mourning. At the time, she could not even begin to analyze the scenes she witnessed:

I got stuck in the middle of a manifestation once, and my face just turned red and my heart started pounding, and became so furious and I just wanted – I was so angry + and so I had to get out of there + like I couldn’t – I can’t explain it + but my heart was just pounding + I just got so angry + because that’s something ya know + when like people are going against my country + and my president + that’s something that I support completely, and and I’m very proud of + and so that’s very difficult in that sense + and just to see things like ya know Bush’s face wanted + or like some kids were telling me oh Bush is just a cowboy from the west (Delaney, Mid-Term Interview)

As the semester proceeded, Delaney tried on various ways to integrate her commitment to patriotism with efforts toward a meaningful educational experience in France. She proposed, for example, that the best way to encourage acceptance of American views in Europe, and a separation of personal and political issues, is to be a living representative of the “nice people” in
the United States. This perspective allowed her to cling to her own point of view rather than engaging in the self-questioning reflexivity in consideration of others’ subjectivities, as reported in Cranshaw, Callen and Tusting (2002). Meanwhile, due to her program’s concern for students’ safety, the sponsors discouraged students from contact with groups outside their own, and organized group-exclusive weekend excursions to local tourist destinations. By the end of the semester, Delaney claimed that she had a circle of “international friends” with whom she spoke mainly English, but that she had no French friends and had concluded that “the French really don’t have a good view of Americans” (Post-Interview).

5.4. Jada

A lively and loquacious 21-year-old junior, Jada had devoted considerable classroom seat time to the learning of French: four years in high school, including a year-long Advanced Placement course, and five semesters in college leading to courses in literature and history. Over the course of her semester in the south of France, she would be enrolled in the same program as Delaney, but living in a university dormitory; her performance on the standardized test rose from the Intermediate range to that of Basic Working Proficiency. In her pre-departure interview, she readily admitted to a general tendency toward indecision and a certain naivété due to a sheltered upbringing, thus demonstrating the self-awareness considered by Crawshaw, Callen and Tusting (2002) to be indicative of the potential for an intercultural identity. Her hope at the outset was to effect a personal transformation, in essence to live as if she were French, a phenomenon she described as consisting mainly of appearances and manners.

Once she had arrived, Jada immediately realized that she would need a strategy to break away from exclusive and almost invasive socializing with the American group. She decided to violate local norms and leave her dormitory door open much of the time, a decision that attracted the curiosity, and then the attention of French speaking dorm mates. In fairly short order, as documented in her journal, Jada was surrounded by a kaleidoscopic and rapidly evolving social circle including students of various origins. These companions challenged her assumptions on many levels, including especially her beliefs about gender (see Kinginger and Farrell-Whitworth 2005), her surface-level appreciation of cultural differences, and her complacency on issues of international politics. In discussing the effects of the war on her study
abroad experience during the final interview for the project, Jada insisted that the conflict had become a major theme of her interactions with others. In the manner of other American students abroad, such as Alice (Kinginger 2004) she had attempted to remain detached from the issues raised by the invasion of Iraq by claiming a “non-political” personal identity. Despite these efforts, however, in the end she had “definitely become more culturally aware” and more interested through constant exposure to debate about the war, revealing a detached stance and willingness to question her own naïveté:

it’s everywhere, and you see it in everything + and I don’t think that I really have many issues with it + I’m not at all an internationally political person + I didn’t – I don’t like watching the news at home + I don’t like reading the newspaper + I don’t know if that’s my like ignorance just shining through + but um I just – I’ve grown more interested in it because it’s involving me + um + but I don’t – I just never followed it. ya know there’s things people are talking about now they’re like well they’re bombing Baghdad and I’m like and Baghdad’s a country? ya know like I didn’t know. ya know? (Post-Interview)

In describing this transformation, Jada cites specific incidents during which she encountered the media “bias” condemned by others in her cohort, and saw it as representative of an alternative point of view. For example, while watching news coverage of the war in Iraq on her friend Hakim’s television:

I actually started crying watching the news it was so horrible. he’s like are you crying + and I was like I can’t help it + because I just sat there watching people fighting over water bottles. they were like + Americans turned off all electricity and all water supplies to these people + and they were handing out water. I was like what are we gods? like we can redistribute water at our ya know – we’re the ones that control what these people do? like that’s not fair at all. and these people are like crying + ya know + just to get a bottle of water to like + give to their children and stuff. I was absolutely appalled but we don’t see that. ya know? in the States. we see us being the benevolent one going over there and giving them water + but we don’t hear that we’re the ones that turned off their water. (Post-Interview)

Thus in the end, while engagement in extensive interactions with local peers may not have allowed Jada to “turn French” in the manner she originally imagined, there are indications in these data that her insistence on gaining access to local social networks yielded unanticipated learning outcomes in the form of increased intercultural awareness.
6. Discussion and implications

In the case of students from the United States, language learning in study abroad presents numerous challenges. Due to the limited timeframe of the typical sojourn, the tendency for these students to cleave together as a group, the ready availability of travel and telecommunications, the spread of English as a lingua mundi, and the history of study abroad as an elitist and somewhat decorative pursuit, American language learners require a remarkable level of commitment, if not devotion, to their task. In addition to all the above challenges, the current visibility of the United States along with its declining international image mean that the hyperawareness of national origin normally characteristic of study abroad becomes further intensified for these students, which must craft a subject position allowing them to cope with criticism of their country.

The brief cases studies included in this paper illustrate various ways in which these American study abroad participants experienced and reacted to challenges involving their national identity at a time of high sociopolitical tension. In the first three cases, these reactions led to a decrease in the students’ openness to learning through interaction. By calling upon collective memory of the Second World War in composing her demand for respect based on national identity, Camille risked alienating her French age peer friends. By retreating from, rather than attempting to understand the critique of the U.S. issued by her host mother, Hannah estranged herself from the people who had welcomed her into their home. Delaney, whose primary learning opportunity outside the classroom was informal observation, returned from France convinced that her patriotism was inconsistent with efforts to comprehend the French. Of the four students whose experience is described here, only Jada showed signs of an attempt, albeit unwilling and haphazard, to comprehend the perspectives of her interlocutors.

All of these students might well have benefited from provision of guidance in the form of directed reflection on the nature of language and of language learning, or of assistance in interpretive framing of their encounters. Thus, the primary recommendation emerging from this case study is for renewed emphasis on training in ethnographic techniques for dispassionate observation for study abroad participants. The goal of training in ethnography for language learners is a “mix of learning to communicate appropriately and developing an analytic understanding of another group’s system of meanings” (Roberts et al. 2001: 11). In such approaches, learners are trained in methods
Celeste Kinginger

of observation, analysis, and writing engaging them in the observation of “otherness” and representing what they observe not as a set of facts but as one interpretation mediated by their own cultural understandings. Learners come to understand the nature of language learning as socialization, to appreciate the extent to which language and culture are closely intertwined (as “languaculture,” Agar 1994), and to grasp the complexity of intercultural interaction.

Although its goals are ambitious, ethnography for language learning is a proven approach, as documented in the work of the Ealing Ethnography Project in the United Kingdom (Roberts et al. 2001), in the projects described by Jackson (2006) for language learners in Hong Kong, and in the work of American educators such as Jurasek, Lamson and O’Maley (1995). In addition to offering an enriched experience of language learning, these programs have been shown to offer insight into the complexity of cultures, involvement in local communities, meaningful interaction with representatives of local communities, and increased flexibility of reflection (Jurasek et al. 1995). After receiving training on their home campuses, students become involved in ethnographic projects during their stay abroad, often emerging with deep knowledge of a particular setting and highly developed awareness of cultural relativity. For students like Camille or Hannah, such a project might have encouraged interest in the host family’s point of view, and suspension of negative judgment in favor of inquiry and observation. For Camille in particular, it might also have furthered her ability to see the connections between the linguistic and cultural aspects of her language development and made a more sophisticated and successful learner of her.

Clearly, American language learners abroad would be well served by efforts to encourage an analytic rather than a judgmental approach to the societies where they study, and to reframe their goals in terms of intercultural and symbolic competence rather than merely in terms of personal growth and refinement of skill. The extent to which such efforts will succeed, of course, depends, in the end, as much upon the investment of language educators as it does upon the willingness of programs, students, and policy makers to prioritize and support language learning in an era when the challenges to this move are many, and its benefits crucially needed.
Chapter 8
“Y ou’re a real a Swahili!”: Western women’s resistance to identity slippage in Tanzania

Christina Higgins

I studied French until I was fluent, and was NEVER praised – not once – by a native speaker in France. In Tanzania they would praise me for being able to speak the standard Swahili … Swahili speakers were in awe of methali (‘proverbs’) that I could recite and use in appropriate contexts as well as knowledge of politics and government. Also, got a lot of praise for understanding Islamic beliefs and principles. People would always say, wewe-kweli ni mswahili (‘you-you’re a real Swahili!’). I think it is fairly easy to be considered mswahili if you can speak some Swahili. There were countless times where people referred to me as being mswahili and not as mgeni (‘visitor’) … However, I do not feel like mswahili at all. My lifestyle is too different and I have lost a lot of the language now. If there were ever cases where people isolated/alienated me, it was certainly for being a white woman. I feel like as much as there were people willing to speak to me in Swahili, there were as many who were more inclined to yell mzungu! (‘white/foreign person’) at me and not even care that I could speak Swahili.

Email correspondence with Amanda,¹ an American graduate student who studied Swahili in Tanzania for two months

1. Introduction

The above excerpt encapsulates some of the tensions surrounding language learning and identity formation within socio-cultural contexts of cultural difference. Amanda’s words echo the sentiments voiced by many other study abroad Swahili learners whom I have either taught at the university level or
corresponded with regarding their experiences learning and using Swahili as an additional language (L2) in Tanzania. On the one hand, it seems that Tanzania provides a language learning terrain for Swahili language learners with many possibilities for cross-cultural adaptation and identity slippage (Armour 2000, 2001), that is, the ability to develop a new sense of self in another language as a consequence of linguistic and cultural knowledge, as well as acceptance into the “target” culture. Amanda’s ability to speak Swahili, recite proverbs, and discuss aspects of Islam gained her access into Tanzanian communities, which in turn provided her with the opportunity to develop a new Swahili-speaking self. On the other hand, however, learners like Amanda often rejected the possibility of their “becoming Swahili,” typically citing cultural, racial, and gender role differences as key obstacles. Sometimes these differences were highlighted by Tanzanians, as in Amanda’s mention of being called *mzungu* (‘white/foreign’) by strangers despite her Swahili language ability. For others, their own perceptions of Tanzanian cultural practices and American ways of being were considered to be a barrier to their possibilities for cross-cultural adaptation.

Perhaps more so than in many other cultural settings, Tanzania provides a context that offers opportunities for L2 identity slippage, as many Swahili learners often find themselves warmly welcomed and given almost immediate access as legitimated participants in Swahili-speaking communities of practice (CoP) (Lave and Wenger 1991). Amanda’s comments about being treated as *mswahili* (‘a Swahili’) rather than as *meni* (‘visitor/foreigner’) point to this access, but as she states, she felt too different from Tanzanians during her study abroad experience to consider herself *mswahili*. I too have experienced very similar subject positions as a white, female L2 speaker of Swahili from the United States whose sojourns to Tanzania have involved half a dozen periods of less than a year. These experiences, along with the stories of many study abroad students, led me to wonder whether other westerners who lived in Tanzania for longer periods of time felt differently, and if they had, over the years, achieved the ability to occupy more “target-like” subject positions through speaking Swahili and interacting with Tanzanians. In 2006, I began to pursue contacts with female Swahili L2 speakers who were long-term residents of Tanzania in order to understand how they respond to these opportunities to participate in these communities and to “become Swahili.” In this chapter, I make use of narrative analysis to illustrate the range of identity slippage which three of these women narrated in face-to-face interviews.
2. Positioning in narratives: The construction of expatriate identities

I draw on positioning theory as articulated by Davies and Harré (1990) to investigate how three western women discursively constituted and reconstituted their social selves as expatriate, L2 Swahili speakers living in Tanzania. Viewing narration as an act of identity formation, I was interested in understanding how the women positioned themselves and others in their stories, and whether these positionings included subject positions of cultural “insider” and “outsider,” as well as other relevant subject positions involving hybrid, intercultural, or transnational identities. As Davies and Harré explain, “A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those who use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one’s own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the images, metaphors, and storylines that are relevant within that particular discursive practice” (1990: 46). In my analysis, I focused on the women’s responses to opportunities for cross-cultural adaptation, and I approached the narrative data as a rich source of positioning that would reveal their linguistic and cultural vantage points.

Recognizing that the women were expatriates who had committed a decade of their lives to living and working in sub-Saharan Africa, I became interested in seeing how they might articulate their identities with reference to their transplanted, expatriate status. While researchers of language learning and use have examined global flows of people for some time, they have mostly focused on immigrants and refugees from developing countries and nations which have experienced war and other major social and economic challenges (e.g., Baynham and De Fina 2005; De Fina 2003; Menard-Warwick 2009; Pavlenko 1998). In contrast, the women who agreed to participate in my study are quite privileged with regard to socioeconomic status and country of origin. As highly educated women hailing from North America and the United Kingdom, their stories offer insights on the identity formation and language learning experiences among expatriates and transnationals around the world who find opportunities to work outside of their home countries.

In the case of Tanzania, employment for expatriates is often found at international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) that specialize in improving public health, education, and economic conditions for local populations. Due to the number of expatriates in nations like Tanzania, as well as
the burgeoning market for elite education desired by wealthy local families, the existence of English-medium international schools also provides qualified foreigners with job opportunities as teachers. The women interviewed for this study reflect these opportunities for employment: one was working for an international aid organization, while the other two were teachers at a prestigious international school (one of the women working as a teacher had previously been employed by a Tanzanian NGO).

Despite the prevalence of expatriate populations in developing nations like Tanzania, very little research has examined how such individuals learn new languages or use them in their daily lives. The women in this study had relocated to Tanzania by choice in search of international travel and work experience, and to begin careers that they felt would be highly meaningful in the fields of development and education. Their experiences as long-term residents of Tanzania provided them with the opportunity to learn and speak Swahili as an additional language, and to develop identities in response to their new cultural and linguistic contexts. The women are all very knowledgeable of Tanzanian cultural practices and respectful of local languages and traditions, and so they may be considered to show a great deal of investment in Swahili, a language spoken by most Tanzanians. At the same time, they live in a nation where their first language, English, is prized as a medium of globalized communication, and where it continues to be used as a co-official language (alongside Swahili) in many domains. English is the medium of instruction in government-run secondary schools and is increasingly seen as a necessity for obtaining a high-paid job among Tanzanians, which always implies the need to function in a globalizing world. Thus, the interviews provided me with the opportunity to see how these transnational expatriates might negotiate their sense of belonging through Swahili language learning and use in a nation that also prizes global affiliations and English as a vehicle for development and economic growth.

Following the themes of this volume, my approach to narrative analysis is concerned primarily with selfhood and the processes by which language users negotiate selves in additional languages. Pavlenko’s (1998, 2001) work on L2 narratives is especially relevant for examining these topics, for her concepts of *discursive assimilation* and *self-translation* relate clearly to my own goals of exploring how individuals reinterpret their own “subjectivities in order to position [themselves] in new communities of practice and to ‘mean’ in the new environment” (Pavlenko 2001: 133). Narratives of L2 learners show us how “who one is is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one’s own and others’
discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others’ lives” (Davies and Harré 1990, quoted in Pavlenko 2001: 134).

To obtain narrative data, I chose to conduct active interviews (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) with the women so that I could consider the ways in which my own experiences as an L2 Swahili speaker might shape the production of the identity work in the interviews. In contrast with more positivist and objectivist approaches, active interviewing is characterized by postmodern sensibilities wherein the boundaries between the interviewer and the interviewee are blurred, and the interview itself is more of a conversation than a fact-finding activity (Fontana 2000). In this way, I was free to draw on my own experiences and stories as an L2 Swahili speaker as a means of encouraging the participants to share their own thoughts and memories. I view the fact that I shared a lot culturally with my interviewees as a strength, rather than a weakness or a potential for bias, as our commonalities allowed me to engage more deeply with the women and to learn more about the sometimes rather personal elements of their self-making through L2 learning and use.

The three interviews I examine below offer the opportunity to see how language learners position themselves in a context that seems to strongly encourage cross-cultural adaptation. The narratives provide evidence that the women are aware of the possibility to “become Swahili,” and also that they enjoy inhabiting this subject position, but they also reveal that the women’s identities as feminists, sojourners, and world citizens are sometimes at odds with their interpretation of a Swahili-speaking identity. Rather than adapting to a new L2 self, however, their experiences appear to have created an intercultural third place (Kramsch 1993) in which they form their identities. This space does not seem to be connected to Tanzania, their home country, or any one particular geographic or cultural space they have inhabited. Instead, in their narratives, they position themselves as expatriates who are able to decenter from both their original languages and cultures as well as their current context in Tanzania.

3. Narrative analysis

In making sense of the subjectivities narrated by the women, I use tools from narrative analysis to examine how these long-term Swahili L2 speakers respond to the possibility of developing a Swahili self. Because it is a
rather impossible task to predict what specific features qualify as “Swahili” and “Tanzanian,” or as “English” and “American,” “Canadian,” or “British” (i.e., the nationalities of the women I interviewed), I depended on the narratives for emic categorizations of behaviors and actions that the participants constructed. To identify how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis the various identity options within their narratives, I looked for retellings of experience that were surrounded by or interrupted with evaluative comments. 

In locating the evaluative stances of the participants in the data, I draw on work by other narrative researchers who have developed clear analytical tools for identifying narrators’ positionalities. Taking Labov and Waletsky (1967) as a starting point, I view the evaluation of a narrative as “that part of the narrative that reveals the attitude of the narrator by emphasizing the relative importance of some units as opposed to others” (1967: 32). To contend with the discursive aspects of evaluation in narrative data, I draw specifically on Goffman’s (1981) work on footing to identify moments in talk where narrators move from their role as storytellers to evaluators of actions in stories. Specifically, I examine how the women express their stances towards Swahili language and cultural practices when they shift their footing from authors and/or animators to principals. The women’s discursive moves between the act of narrating what happened (author) to reported speech (animator) to an aside wherein some evaluative comment is made (principal) are moments in talk where evaluative stances are expressed. Evaluative comments were often voiced through reported speech, constructed dialogue or inner dialogue as the narrators “ventriloquated” themselves or other characters in their retellings of events (cf. Wortham 2001; Koven 2002; Rosi Solé 2007). Evaluative comments also occurred in the form of asides, mitigations, and concessions after events were recounted (cf. Crawshaw et al. 2001). All of these evaluative comments acted as discursive windows into the women’s responses to their positionings, and they allowed me to see how they aligned with what they narrated as “Swahili” language and culture.

4. Participants

Brief personal histories of the women help to establish some of the macro-context (Pavlenko 2007) for the study, and such “background” also emerges
in the narrative data as a resource for discursively constructing various cultural and linguistic identities.

Diane

Diane is a white woman in her thirties, originally from England. She first visited Tanzania in 1992 as a development worker, and four years later she began living in Tanzania and working for a variety of INGOs which focused on supervising development projects. Currently, she is a manager for a leading INGO in Dar es Salaam, where she lives and works, but she has spent time traveling the country and staying for several days in small villages. Due to her parents’ internationally-oriented occupations, she grew up in Malaysia, South Africa, and England, and therefore, she has some language ability in Chinese, Afrikaans, and Zulu. She also lived in Italy for a period of time and learned Italian “quite well.” She is single and has a child.

Kate

Kate is a white American woman in her thirties who first visited Tanzania as a university exchange student in 1993. She returned in 1996 to begin working for an NGO that focuses on gender and development. In high school, Kate lived in Finland for one year and became fluent in Finnish. She also spent time in Austria and has studied German and Spanish in educational contexts. She worked for 10 years at an elite English-medium international school in Dar es Salaam whose student body is primarily children of expatriate workers in Tanzania before she relocated to a smaller town in 2007, where she currently works as a principal at a private school. She is married to a Swahili–English bilingual Tanzanian man and they have one child.

Tatu

Tatu is a Black woman who was born in Tanzania and lived there until she was three, when her family moved to Canada. Tatu reported that after her family moved, they maintained Swahili at the dinner table, but English eventually became her dominant language. She is frequently deemed a foreigner
by Tanzanians, and she evaluates her own Swahili as a language that she is “still learning.” Due to her parents’ internationally-oriented careers, she and her siblings lived in India, Sweden, the United States, and Canada. Tatu has lived in Canada for most of her life, although she is rather ambivalent about calling Canada home. At the time of the interview, she had lived in Tanzania for 10 years, where she was working as a teacher at the same elite English-medium international school as Kate. She travels frequently to visit her family members who live outside of Tanzania, and she has many family members in Tanzania as well, including two brothers, both of whom are married to Tanzanian women. She lives by herself and is single.

5. Data analysis

The women described their experiences using Swahili in Tanzania in very positive terms, which seemed to allow for the possibility that identity slippage was easy to achieve. The presentation of Swahili speakers and Tanzanians as warm, welcoming, and open were most prevalent in the early part of the interviews, when I asked the women about their initial days of using Swahili with Tanzanians. Kate contrasts her first efforts to speak Swahili with her experiences learning European languages, highlighting Tanzanians’ receptiveness towards L2 speakers. Transcription conventions (see Appendix) are adapted from Atkinson and Heritage (1984). Evaluative comments are in bold, reported speech in the form of constructed dialogue is in double quotes, and inner dialogue appears in single quotes.

(1) Kate

1 C: How did they respond to you when you made the effort to speak Swahili?
2 K: Totally different from Spanish and German because there-people could tell that you didn’t know their language very well so automatically they would switch into English. Like, ‘why are we bothering,’ like they make you feel kind of-like maybe embarrassed or definitely just like ‘don’t bother’ to learn, we’ll just speak English.’ Where it’s like (. ) the opposite here. People are very enthusiastic. I feel like their attitude changes with you if they realize that you can speak some Swahili.
3 C: Yeah, I’ve experienced that I think. Yeah.
Similarly, Diane explains that in spite of her initial low-level language skills, her learning was aided by Tanzanians’ friendliness towards her:

(2) Diane

1 D: I have no recollection of what I must have been saying (1.0)
2 cause I must have had very basic Swahili. But I think I’ve always
3 been quite confident in language learning terms of, ‘you have to
4 get out there and just be with people and talk and ride the
5 difficult moments and the inabilities to say anything.’ And I
6 always found people very friendly and very responsive, which
7 is why I’ve been able to learn (.) particularly the first level of
8 Swahili.

The openness of Tanzanians towards these L2 speakers as cited in the interviews led me to consider how the women discursively positioned themselves in response to the friendly encouragement they received. In my analysis of the data, I found that the women’s stances expressed desired entry into Tanzanian communities, but I also discovered that they largely resisted the possibility of cross-cultural adaptation in their L2.

5.1. Stances that reveal a desire and ability to identity slip

In (3), Kate narrates her positioning as a non-Swahili, followed by another narrative in which she is treated as an insider:

(3) Kate: “I’ll forget that I’m not (Tanzanian)”

1 C: Do you often get called mzungu (‘white person/foreigner’), and
2 how does affect your image of yourself?
3 K: It does bother me because sometimes I’ll even-I’ll forget that
4 I’m not. (.) When I was at university like way back when (.) we
5 would get pictures developed and I’d see the picture and I’d
6 really stand out. ‘I had no idea.’ [laughs] So when they’re all
7 like “mzungu mzungu!” it brings it back in your face again. Then
8 I was like “mswahili!” (‘Swahili person’) (.) “Mwafrika!”
9 (‘African’) (.) I was like, ‘Why are you saying that. Why are
10 you noticing that I’m mzungu.’
Kate describes her reaction to being called *mzungu* in Tanzania, a reaction that I could relate to very well and which is a common complaint among foreign L2 Swahili speakers. Lines 3–6 show how Kate’s self-concept as an insider is disrupted by her realization of her own whiteness, made clear to her in photographs that were taken of her and her friends while she was studying at the University of Dar es Salaam. Her evaluative comment in the form of inner speech, “I had no idea,” (line 6) reveals a gap between how she viewed herself and how she appeared to others. On lines 6–7, she describes how people who did not know her well called out *mzungu, mzungu!* (“white, white!”) to her on the street, which also forced her to recognize her racial difference, and hence, to come face to face with her positioning as an outsider by others. Her evaluative comments in the form of inner speech on lines 9–10 clearly express her displeasure with this form of othering.

As Kate’s narrative continues, however, she provides a counter example in which Tanzanians who know her positioned her as an insider:

(4) **Kate**: “We’re all Tanzanians here”

1. But then one thing that really touched me the other way was,
2. because my husband just recently got his PhD (.) so we went down
3. to South Africa for graduation, and he had arranged this party
4. >there are a lot of Tanzanians at this university< so he arranged a
5. party afterwards for all these Tanzanians. So there was me and his
6. advisor >his supervisor came< who is Zimbabwean. And when I
7. first arrived there people were like, “How are you madam,” and
8. when I used Swahili they would ignore it. And I thought ‘Oh
9. this will be a terrible evening.’ And then (.) there was some
10. speaking by the advisor and friends, and they wanted me to say
11. something. So I got up in Swahili, and I didn’t say much. I said “I
12. want to thank you because your committee was really happy,” I
13. didn’t say much but it was in Swahili. And you could see them go
14. ‘Oh!’ And afterwards one Tanzanian was opening champagne and
15. he was going to say something before it, and before he opened it he
16. said “Well since we’re all Tanzanians here, oh except for Professor
17. Ndule;” and I was waiting kind of waiting for, “except for,” you
18. know, (.) And he didn’t say it, and I was like ‘Oh, thank you!’ It
19. made me feel really good and yeah, it definitely was the Swahili
20. that did it.

Kate’s evaluative comments in the form of inner speech on lines 8–9 reveal her dismay at the idea of being positioned as an outsider. However,
later in the narrative, she uses constructed dialogue to illustrate how she was positioned as a fellow Tanzanian as a result of being able to communicate in the language. Her inner speech that follows on line 18 and her overt evaluative comment (“It made me feel really good”) illustrate her pleasure at being treated as a legitimate member of the Tanzanian community.

In asking Tatu about her desire and/or ability to become an insider, a distinction between *mswahili* (‘Swahili person’) and *mtanzania* (‘a Tanzanian’) emerged. Though *mswahili* can refer to one’s ability to speak Swahili and to one’s identity as a Tanzanian, for Tatu (as for many people), *mswahili* also refers to a person with the type of cunning and shrewd behavior that is necessary to survive in *Bongo* (a well-known street term for Dar es Salaam), whereas *mtanzania* relates more to a general Tanzanian or “local” status. Tatu’s explanation reveals how being *mtanzania* is not monolithic, as her own embodied version of this identity is comprised of behaviors that are associated with the “older generation.”

(5) **Tatu: Mtanzania and mswahili**

1 C: I’m curious—I’ve asked this question to a lot of people but (.)
2 how do you feel about your capacity to be an *mswahili* or
3 *mtanzania*. A lot of people see a difference there. Do you feel
4 that you are?
5 T: I’m not *mswahili*, and I’m just saying *mswahili* because I think
6 *mswahili* is very much, well >I suppose it’s the coast< but I
7 consider it like *Bongo* (.) very: (.) you know ‘go out and get it,
8 drive for it.’ And it’s funny I say that because Tanzania is very
9 <slow paced> but *mjanja* (‘clever person’), cunning, okay. And
10 **I’m not that way.** […] As a matter of fact, **it’s funny** because in
11 some ways people will laugh at me and say “oh my god you’re
12 so old-fash. I remember my mother did that.” You know,
13 whereas, like, nobody does that anymore nobody says that
14 anymore, nobody expects that anymore. And **so that’s funny to**
15 **me** because I’m starting to pick up certain things but I guess it’s
16 from the older generation.
17 C: Like what.
18 T: Um, I suppose you know in Tanzania when you greet somebody
19 like, you shake their hand and you look at them in the eye. And
20 people don’t do that anymore, like my age group and younger,
21 you know we’re all working in offices so we’re too **important** for
that. But I still do that and they’ll go “oh my goodness oh you
still do that.” You know like (.) etiquette things that have been
watered down I guess as times goes on. And they’re so much a
part of me now and I love it (.) But then everybody else is
dropping it and looking at me like ‘what is-what are you doing.’
So mtanzania I think I’m getting a little bit but mswahili (.)
that’s just not who I am.

In using the constructed dialogue on lines 11–12, Tatu positions herself as
someone who is evaluated as an insider by Tanzanians, albeit one with out-
of-date mannerisms. Tatu’s own evaluative comments on lines 14–15 and
24–25 show her positive stance towards being this kind of “old-fashioned”
Tanzanian, particularly when she says “I love it” (line 25). Though she miti-
gates her insider status by describing herself as only “a little bit” mtanzania,
she shows an allegiance to what might be considered more traditional Tan-
zanian manners compared to what she negatively evaluates as urban, cosmo-
politan ways of being that have “watered down” enactments of Tanzanian
culture that she still adheres to.

One of Kate’s stories also revealed that the women noticed how diverse a
Swahili-speaking Tanzanian identity could be. In an email which she sent to
me after our interview, Kate exemplified her success at “passing” as a Swa-
hili/Tanzanian. Her enthusiasm for being able to pass as Swahili is marked
through her evaluative stance, as expressed in an emoticon (line 7):

(6) Kate: Passing as mswahili on the phone

1 When my husband got hired, the university called my cell phone
2 instead of his. I was in the middle of teaching a lesson, so I just
3 explained that I wouldn’t see him till the evening, so “here’s his
4 number, could you call him directly?” I didn’t know it was the
5 head of dept. I was speaking to! And he didn’t know I was an
6 mzungu. (the whole conversation was in Swahili – I can fool
7 people for short phone conversations:-) )He is apparently still in
8 shock to this day that I wasn’t so impressed and thankful that
9 my husband was hired by the university, that I actually suggested
10 he should make another phone call! And the funniest part is he
11 reportedly said to another staff member “Anavyoongea …
12 Anajifanya mzungu.” (‘the way she talks … she’s acting like a white person/
foreigner’)
Due to Kate’s straightforward and hurried telephone interactional style, the Tanzanian who called her described her behavior as *anajifanya mzungu* (‘acting like a white person/foreigner’), a phrase commonly used to describe Tanzanians who are seen as overly westernized (and rude). Still, such individuals are part of the range of possible Tanzanian identities, which Kate treated as a positive sign that she was able to pass as an insider.

5.2. Stances revealing the limits of developing a Swahili self

While the interviews did contain evidence of a desire for and success in cross-cultural adaptation, many of the stories revealed the limits of identity slippage. In this section, I examine three sets of excerpts which reveal these constraints: 1) narratives about cross-cultural interactional styles; 2) narratives about socioeconomic difference and gendered identities; and 3) intercultural identities.

5.2.1. Narratives about cross-cultural interactional styles

Tatu’s experience in (7) shows how she constructs a non-Swahili self through her evaluative language in a retelling of a visit to a mechanic. While she presents herself as having “mastered” the Tanzanian art of “discussing” at the beginning of the narrative, her inner dialogue throughout reveals an ongoing struggle with this performance of an L2 self and shows the limits of identity slippage:

(7) Tatu: A visit to the mechanic

1  C: I wonder if you have any stories or memories of emotions or how
2   to express them that are very Swahili [...] That you’ve been able
3   to master or that you haven’t.
4   […]
7  T: I guess what I have been able to master is (.) discussing. (.) And
8   that’s something that I’ll, I’ll hands down I’ll give Tanzanians
9   credit for. Because like just this morning I went to fix my tire.
10  And the guy was like, had to go and to and find the (.) wrench to
11  (.) whatever. And I was just like ‘c’mon I have to hurry up’
12  and he just kept arguing with me the <whole time>. <The whole
13  time>. And then in the very end I just said to him, >he he wanted
to charge me double< and I said “I’m not giving you double for me wait.” “Oh I didn’t make you wait,” and he goes “Oh you’re so cunning.” And then (2.0) in the end he said “Oh thank you for coming” and he shook my hand and for that whole time I was like ‘oh would you get on with it oh you’re so frustrating.’ But I had to block myself, ‘just engage him, this is, at least he’s working.’ And when he’s fin-it was nothing to him that <whole> arguing back and forth. That’s what I mean he was obviously stressing or whatever. But that’s his way of releasing the tension. Now that adds to my tension but I’ve learned now (.) ‘you (.)<just need to tone it down.>’ So he shook my hand “Oh come again.” And I was like ‘Whoah, I’m exhausted.’

Tatu contrasts her inner feelings with how she speaks to the mechanic through her inner speech (line 11) and through emphasizing the mechanic’s non-stop “arguing” (lines 12–13), or what she had referred to as Tanzanian “discussing” just moments before. Her narrative uncovers a discursive construction of her authentic self, which contrasts with Tanzanian culture. She explicitly points out the clash she feels between her own pragmatics and those that she knows she must use to accomplish the interaction (‘I had to block myself”, line 19). Moreover, her retelling shows that she understands the Tanzanian cultural point of view that leads to such “discussions,” but despite knowing the appropriate ways of going about such interactions (line 24), she has to police herself, an activity that literally exhausts her.

After she finished her mechanic story, I asked Tatu about the internal struggle that I heard in her narrative. Her response in (8) positions her as someone who can perform the Tanzanian art of “discussing,” yet at the same time, she describes this performance as “not who I am”:

(8) Tatu: “It’s not who I am”

28 C: But then you said you were really tired. So there’s still an internal struggle.

30 T: Yes for me, I have to hold it back. So even though I’m taking on the things it’s, <not who I am>. I’m taking it on so that I can get through the situation in a way that’s not going to leave everybody frustrated.
C: Do you think there are components of social life-like that like frustrations or disagreements you have absorbed that-you don’t get tired in experiencing them because they’ve just become part of you now?

T: No, I think as much I hate to agree with them now I’ve become western. [laughs] I am western and they are tiring and they are draining. Some days more than others so, I think it does depend on my state of mind. But I don’t think that that will ever change for me. It won’t go away one hundred percent. It might lessen but it won’t go away one hundred percent.

Here, the L2 self that Tatu constructs clearly lacks identity slippage. She establishes a boundary between self and other through distinctive pronouns (“I” and “they”), clear labeling of herself as “western”, and negative evaluative referential terms (Wortham 2001) of Tanzanians as “tiring” and “draining”.

Similarly, (9) shows how Kate dealt with a situation in her workplace involving different interactional styles. In describing her response to the Tanzanian support staff’s actions of placing valuable schoolbooks on the floor, Kate’s evaluative comments reveal the difficulty she sometimes faces in managing her emotional responses in an appropriately “Tanzanian” way, even though she is fully aware of Tanzanian interactional norms:

(9) Kate: “I kind of lost it”

K: One time when I was criticized because I was being too mzungu about communicating with, something was going on. The support staff, the cleaners had to move some books for us and they had moved the books to the floor. And they were really upset with me for showing my anger at them being too mzungu.

C: Is that not what would have been appropriate?

K: I think it would have been, just to-because (.) I mean I basically just said to their faces and in front of anyone else who was there “what are you doing?” “Look, look what you’ve done to these books.” I kind of lost it. And I should have said very calmly, “well this is not the right thing to do” and then maybe later spoke to them, not in front of everyone, or said it to someone else.
Christina Higgins

Kate’s “I kind of lost it” (line 12) acts as a comment (Crawshaw et al. 2001) which evaluates her own behavior as inadequate for the Tanzanian context. Furthermore, Kate’s comments about the “appropriate” behavior being “tough” (line 7) along with her how evaluation of how she “should have” acted (line 12) point to the existence of a conflict between her L1 self and her perception of how she should behave in Swahili with Tanzanians.

5.2.2 Power and gender as barriers to identity slippage

Beyond differing styles of interaction, the women also talked about the limits of cross-cultural adaptation because of their convictions about hierarchy and power relations, as well as gender differences. In (10), Diane explains that she often feels *mswahili* “on a very simple level,” and she cites Tanzanians’ acceptance as a key element (lines 7–11); however, she goes on to explain that differences in wealth and power are much more significant barriers to identity slippage since they lead to her sense of alienation rather than acculturation:

(10) Diane: “Too many big gaps”

1  C: Um you were talking earlier about this question, how you feel
2  about your capacity to become *mswahili*. And you were talking
3  about insiders and outsiders. How this has changed over the
4  years?
5  D: On a very simple level I feel confident and I think it’s just that
6  incremental process of, if you’re open and you make friends with
7  people, you watch what’s going on. You gradually (.) say the
8  right thing at the right time behave the right way in the sort of
9  different rituals that you get involved in. And I have been
10  fortunate in having a lot of friends who have really brought me
11  into their families and being part of those situations. So on a
12  very simple level I feel quite able to be an *mswahili* and I get
13  accepted as such by people.
14  […]
15  But on a more complex level—I mean there are differences in
16  terms of wealth, which is not a language issue, are so great that I
17  actually feel increasingly alienated. And also some of my work
18  because it’s quite political and I’m an outsider, I actually get-do
19  encounter levels of passive aggressive behavior. I just seem to be
20  an *mzungu* outside person, ‘what are you doing here.’ Not that
people say that but you get that feeling, there’s politics in it. So, I
say in language and ritual and reference, those kind of things I
feel fairly integrated, but in terms of the bigger picture and can I
really belong and be taken on as *mswahili*, no too, there are too
many big gaps.

In addition to labeling herself an “outsider” (line 19), Diane’s use of con-
structed dialogue in line 21 allows her to ventriloquate the voices of Tanzanian
colleagues and to position herself as someone who does not belong, both in
their eyes and in her own.

Gendered identities also became barriers to higher degrees of identity slipp-
page toward a Swahili self. Tatu told several stories in which she positioned
herself as an outsider because of gendered behavior that she oriented to as
feminist in nature. As several other studies on L2 learning, gender, and iden-
tity formation have found (e.g., Siegal 1996; Ohara 2001; Ogulnick 1998;
Pavlenko 1998, 2001), Tatu’s experiences reveal a high degree of difference
between her Canadian and Swahili/Tanzanian gender identities. In (11), Tatu
responds to my query whether being a Tanzanian-born Black woman who
might be taken for a local Tanzanian impacts her possibilities for belonging.
She explains how she is often deemed non-Tanzanian due to how her behavior
conflicts with Tanzanian norms for female ways of interacting with others:

(11) Tatu: “A woman would not speak out like that”

1. T: The fact that I speak out is another thing. **People don’t do that.** I
2. mean I get on the *daladala* (‘bus’) and if they don’t want the kids
3. to sit down and I tell them [to sit], so then I’m *mzungu* because
4. I’m speaking out. **A woman would not speak out like that.** And
5. so (,) they don’t know my background. I think it has nothing to
6. do with that ((i.e., having been raised by Tanzanian parents)) – I
7. think it’s just my behavior-**my mannerisms are not typical of**
8. **here.** And so that’s what they mean, that I’ve lived somewhere
9. else foreign.

Through reference and predication (Wortham 2001), she creates a dichotomy
between herself and Tanzanians through pronouns (“I” and “they”’) once
again, and she highlights the differences between her own *mzungu* actions
and what (Tanzanian) “people” and what a (Tanzanian) “woman” would
and would not do. She expresses awareness of cultural differences and
worldviews, but in the end, she constructs herself as “not typical of here” and
as being “foreign” to Tanzanians.

Tatu’s experiences with her family members offered rich sources for iden-
tifying the limits of cross-cultural adaptation for women. In our conversa-
tion, I learned that of Tatu’s four brothers and three sisters, only the brothers
are married. One of Tatu’s sisters had been married, but was later divorced.
The gender division among Tatu’s siblings was rather stark. In (12), Tatu told
me about how she and her three sisters went “on strike” when they were
adolescents living in Canada, refusing to accept the “African” positioning
of females as responsible for domestic work while their brothers did other
things. She then talked about how this upbringing affected the attitudes of
two of her brothers who live in Tanzania and are married to Tanzanian women
with regard to domestic duties:

(12) Tatu: “The girls had a coup”

1 T: It’s amazing how my brothers have uh, as much as I mean. They
do a lot in the home, and we were brought up. Well,
2 C: mhm,
3 T: Actually we had a little coup. The girls had a coup >cause there’s
four girls and five guys< we had a little coup and we said “If they
don’t help then we’re going on strike.” And we went on strike for
weeks and my mother was like “This isn’t very African,”
[laughs]
5 C: No:o hh.
6 T: But in the end everybody helped .hhh. So they do a lot in their
homes. So their wives think ’Oh wow this is gr ↑ eat. ↑He can
change the diapers, I can leave the kids with him, he can get the
dinner ready, he makes the bed, goes to the parent teacher
conferences.’ But I see it in, myself when I go there. I’m like,
“You can get up and do that yourself you know.” So it’s
interesting how they let certain things you know, the wifely
things. The roles are there and they don’t mind just <sitting back
and allowing them.>
8 C: No.
9 T: So when my brothers do, do stuff, everybody ((high pitch)): “Hey
man look – ↑cinnamon buns,” Big accolades! And I look at
people and I go “Excuse me it’s just a cinnamon bun, he
didn’t build a building” you know.
Tatu and her sisters’ behavior in Canada was clearly marked as not African in the evaluative comment voiced through constructed dialogue from her mother (line 7), and the fact that the girls were able to go on strike against domestic duties shows a great deal of agency on their part, which was surely aided by the cultural context they were in. As Tatu says, the coup was successful since the brothers shared in the domestic work “in the end” in Canada (line 10). Tatu then explains how the Tanzanian wives of her two brothers who also live in Tanzania praise their husbands and consider themselves lucky for their relatively “good” treatment (lines 11–14) as Tanzanian women. Here, she animates the inner speech of her sisters-in-law to show their assessment of their husbands as good husbands and fathers. However, Tatu shifts her footing and provides a vastly different evaluation of her own response to her brothers’ behavior in the form of reported speech (line 15), which indicates that she explicitly tells her brothers to act in more gender-equitable ways in their own homes. She also positions her brothers as undeserving of praise they receive for the domestic work they do (lines 20–21) by using a high pitch to parody the over-enthusiastic response they get for doing what is normally considered “women’s work.” In her narrative, she also indicates how she vocalized her challenge to the praise for her brothers in the form of reported speech (line 22–23).

Gendered positionings were also noted by Kate, whose status as a western woman married to a Tanzanian man prompted me to ask about her gendered behavior around her husband. Kate explained that her husband had likely adapted toward her expectations for gender roles more than she had toward his. She evaluates this circumstance as counter-intuitive through her evaluative framing “even though” (line 10):

(13) Kate: Changes in gendered roles

1 C: Do you share those kinds of [domestic] duties, or has it become
2 female, male?
3 K: We have talked about it. We have a housekeeper now, housegirl
4 now, who does most of that during the day. There was a time
5 when we didn’t have, and it was half and half.
6 C: But it was possible to achieve equal work. It wasn’t a cultural
7 barrier?
8 K: It was something we had to talk about and agree upon. Our
9 lifestyle now is sort of half and half ((half western, half
10 Tanzanian)). **Even though** we’re living in Tanzania he’s maybe
changed his culture like twice more than I have (,) but I think it’s mostly the gender things.

5.2.3. Shared positionalities in an intercultural third place

Diane, Kate, and Tatu often commented on their role in Tanzania as one that served to improve society, to advocate for Tanzanian culture, and to increase international understanding. They were also very interested in their own personal growth through experiencing different cultures and languages. As Diane put it, “I think it’s really healthy to be challenged in a different culture. I mean it’s very hard to evaluate that. I mean I think it’s really important where you get involved with something totally different, because you inevitably grow.”

Rather than remaining firmly in their western viewpoint or adapting to a new Swahili self, these three women’s experiences as social workers, educators, and world travelers appear to have created an intercultural third place (Kramsch 1993; Bhabha 1994) in which they form their identities. Therefore, rather than slipping into a new self, or creating bicultural identities for themselves to shift between, the women’s narratives show evidence of the development of an intercultural self (Byram 2008), i.e., the ability to decenter oneself from both the L1 self and the L2 self, and to view each as socially constructed, contingent, and discursively enacted. The positionality that emerged for them was similar to that of the intercultural couples in Piller’s (2002) study, “citizen of the world,” as well as “intercultural ambassador” and even “intercultural expert.” For example, Tatu discussed how she was able to make sense of people’s actions from an intercultural perspective no matter where she was in the world. Her ability to master two worldviews from an insider’s and outsider’s perspective is apparent in two very different sets of inner dialogue:

(14) Tatu: “My whole mindset changes”

T: I went away to visit my brother in Austria for a month. And there’s a guy ((in Tanzania)) on the street corner who sells flowers. And he said “O:h where have you been I haven’t seen your car go up and down here.” I said “O:h I went away on holiday.” “Oh did you have a good time?” “Yes I did” and I, I was just like ‘ahh, I’m back home.’ You know, and so it takes on a whole different—Now in Canada, if somebody selling flowers asked me “where’d you go for,” I’d say “Mind your own business. What do you want to know that for?” […]
“You’re a real a Swahili!” 187

10 In Canada, if somebody says something, “I’ve noticed your car
11 doesn’t go by,” I’d think “well is he checking up on me,” like
12 so, like my whole mindset changes, you know. Like ‘what is he,
13 a † stalker?’ [laughs].

Similarly, Kate described her ability to act as an intercultural ambassa-
dor, especially in the context of the elite school where she works, where
most expatriate teachers have little knowledge about Tanzania or Swahili.
Kate evaluates the distance between these teachers and the Tanzanian staff
as “awkward,” and she describes herself as someone who can navigate both
worlds in spite of her status as someone with a highly paid teaching position:

(15) Kate: “In different worlds”

1 K: I have friends among the teachers who are largely not interested
2 in Tanzania, they can’t really relate to a large part of the
3 population. And also the relations between the Tanzanian, like
4 support staff and the expats, because the lifestyles are so
5 different. And sometimes I find that a bit awkward. I can be
6 friends with the Tanzanian staff there and yet I’m working
7 closely in the office. And teachers teachers live so different,
8 we’re like in different worlds.

As I learned in the interviews, none of the three women plans to stay in
Tanzania for the remainder of their lives. This mobility seems very likely to
impact their positioning as “world citizens” rather than as American/British/
Canadian or Tanzanian/Swahili selves. Tatu plans to stay in Tanzania for
a few years and then move to another country for more work experience
teaching English. Kate thinks about moving to a country that is neither
her own home, nor the home of her husband. She explained, “sometimes
it would be good to have a third country where it’s not my home and it’s
not his home, just have a neutral, where we both, neither.” Diane shared a
similar perspective in a conversation about her daughter’s bilingual abili-
ties. She told me that she found it very important that her child was growing
up as a bilingual, and she showed a lot of enthusiasm about the importance
of learning languages in general. When I asked her if there was anything
particular about Swahili or Tanzanian culture that she especially valued for
her daughter’s development, however, she told me that she felt it was more
important to speak at least one additional language, but that it did not matter
what that language was.
Rather than becoming increasingly connected to Tanzania, or more sentimental about their home country, the women seem to have developed a worldly identity not bound by geography or culture. For Diane, this intercultural identity allowed her to grow as an individual, yet it also left her feeling somewhat “stranded” culturally:

(16) Diane: “It’s hard to go back”

Diane: So it’s hard to go back to Europe and feel at ease about the way people are living. Cause most people’s preoccupations are shopping on a Saturday and get the credit card out the whole time. It’s a very different scenario. I don’t think it’s changed me in the sense that I didn’t think the world was like that, but I think I’ve deepened my understanding of why things are so difficult. And it’s made it hard for me to think about living in a developed world situation again.

[...]

Diane: I never used to worry about my sense of belonging because I’ve always been a very consonant person, very happy. But I am starting to have a level of anxiety about where I belong, cause I’ve increasingly felt less like I belong here. But then as I say when I go back to Europe my reference points also, they’ve been changing, like I feel a bit alienated in that context.

Given her positionality as someone strongly dedicated to improving human rights, women’s equality, and development, Diane evaluates life in the UK as uncomfortable after having lived in developing nations for a large part of her life. At the same time, she questions her sense of belonging in Tanzania, and the result seems to be that she does not feel that she belongs in any particular place.

As our conversation continued, it became clear that Diane feels most at home with other “citizens of the world” who have had many cross-cultural experiences and have also developed a high degree of intercultural awareness. In (17), she evaluates her friends from Europe who live in other countries as her “good friends,” and she assesses her comfort with her Zanzibari friends who live in London very positively.

(17) Diane: Citizen of the world

C: Yeah like there is no way to go home again. Are there people who you connect with really well?
26  D: Well most of my **good friends** from kind of Europe or say (.)
27 when I was studying-have similar kind of interests and concerns.
28 Like me they live in different parts of the world so we don’t meet
29 that often. (1.0) But you know I have good Tanzanian friends in
30 the UK as well. One particular family I’ve known for years,
31 they’re Zanzibari. I **enjoy the fact that I can go back to**
32 **London and hang out with East Africans and kind of feel**
33 very comfortable. So that’s good.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has examined how long-term, expatriate L2 Swahili speakers negotiate their linguistic and cultural identities within a context that offers them the possibility to identity slip. Compared to other language learners’ stories (e.g., Armour 2001; Kinginger 2004; Miller 2003; Norton 2000; Ohara 2001) in which access to the linguistic and social aspects of the target language communities of practice were more difficult, the Tanzanian context seems to have afforded Tatu, Diane, and Kate with many opportunities to cross-culturally adapt to a Swahili L2 self. However, these three women did not take these opportunities up because of a number of obstacles stemming from their western-identified selves and from their high degree of intercultural awareness and worldliness. While gender differences seemed to be the most salient cultural difference that prevented the women from identity slippage, it is important to acknowledge that gender roles among Tanzanian women are (slowly) becoming more equitable, and that these changes will eventually allow for an expansion of gendered positions in Tanzanian culture (Mbilinyi et al. 2003; Stambach 2000). Just as there is more than one kind of Swahili at the interactional level (e.g., Tatu who is characterized like an “old-fashioned Swahili,” and Kate, who is treated as a “Swahili who acts like a westerner”), the parameters of gender will also surely become more amenable to change.

Perhaps more significant than gender, however, is the strong identity held by all the women that they are intercultural adventurers without a firm concept of “home,” people who enjoy crossing cultures because of the personal growth they experience. In other narrative and ethnographic studies, language learners who study abroad for significant periods of time (Crawshaw et al. 2001; Dufon and Churchill 2006; Kanno 2003) and intercultural couples (Piller 2002) seem to maintain a strong attachment to their first languages and cultures as central to their identity formation, even as they
become bicultural and bilingual. In contrast, the narratives told by the women in this study highlight their intercultural, hybrid, and in-between positioning over and above any attachments to their particular L1s/L2s or cultural affiliations. Moreover, their worldliness is further symbolized by their commitment to language learning in all contexts where they have lived, as each language and cultural experience that they add to their repertoires contributes to a multiply intercultural self.

Appendix

(adapted from Atkinson and Heritage 1984)

“talk” constructed dialogue or reported speech
‘talk’ inner speech
>talk< rapid speech
<talk> slowed speech
talk emphasis
talk evaluative language
. falling intonation
? rising intonation
, continuing intonation
- cut-off speech
↑ pitch rise
( . ) micropause
(1.0) timed pause
(’text’) translated text provided by the author
((comments)) descriptive comments provided by the author
[...] text deleted
:-) emoticon (email)

Notes

1. All names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.
2. In contrast with Uganda and Kenya, Swahili has long enjoyed high prestige in Tanzania as a marker of social unity, egalitarian politics, and multiculturalism. Swahili became an important symbol of Tanzanian brotherhood and economic development in the 1960s under President Julius Nyerere, and it continues to be highly valued by most Tanzanians (cf. Mazrui and Mazrui 1998, 1999). These
associations with Swahili likely enhance likely the possibility that L2 speakers can be treated as cultural insiders.

3. Most of the westerners I had met in Tanzania were women, and it is likely that my own gender made networking with these women more possible. The study has now expanded to include six western women and a Congolese man who entered Tanzania as a refugee during adolescence. Two participants (Kate and Tatu) took brief survey courses on Swahili but acquired most of the language naturally.

4. The term reported speech (cf. Volosinov 1971) refers to quotations (Wortham 2001) which are intended to replicate what was actually uttered in a past event but which are often altered in the act of retelling. Constructed dialogue (Tannen 1989) refers to quotations that may not have actually occurred, but which are more hypothetical. Inner speech refers to thoughts and feelings that are not voiced but rather, are “the locale in which another’s utterance is received, comprehended, and evaluated; it is where the speaker’s active orientation takes place (Volosinov 1986: 118).
Part III. Constructing identities in mediascapes
Introduction to Part III

This final section of the volume investigates the formation of new identities among individuals as they engage with popular culture, the media, and technology-mediated literacy practices. It is clear that the social worlds of many people now involve participation in social networking sites and significant use of the Internet, in addition to the consumption of “older” technologies, such as globally distributed music, television, and film. In Appadurai’s (1990: 9) terms, these mediascapes construct “large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and ethnoscapes to viewers throughout the world,” out of which consumers establish “strips of reality” and scripts for their own lives. In contrast to many ways that individuals may transgress language and culture boundaries (e.g. study abroad or relocation through immigration), mediascapes provide people with the opportunities to experience transcultural flows without having to take part in physical relocation or border crossing. Importantly, and perhaps due to the fantastical nature of much media, “the lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes they see are blurred, so that the further away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct … some other imagined world” (Appadurai 1990: 9).

A good example of how mediascapes shape learners’ identities is found in Kinginger’s (2004) study of Alice, an American university student who studied abroad in France. Alice’s initial image of France was built on US-centric cultural visions of the nation, as exemplified in travelogues and television shows that present the country as a landscape of architecture and fine art. An episode of the popular animated television series, The Simpsons, which portrayed Bart on student exchange in France, illustrated this clearly, for the landscape that he passed through was dotted with Impressionist paintings (Kinginger 2004: 227). Alice brought these narratives of France with her, and upon arrival, expected that French people would be sophisticated and refined, in accord with the cultural narrative that her mediascape had provided for her. However, she struggled to make meaningful connections with French speakers, and she even became very depressed about her experiences there.
Eventually, she strategized to meet French speakers by organizing dinner parties and attending informal social events. In the end, Alice was successful in getting past the difference between her initial conception of what using her L2 would feel like, and how it actually went. However, her story raises questions for other language learners with regard to how various forms of media shape their visions of L2 cultures and practices, and how this in turn affects their own identity development.

The effects of popular culture and Internet-mediated activities have gained increasing attention in applied linguistics literature over the past decade. Studies on identity are still relatively few in number though, as much of the literature focuses on how pop culture can be used as a motivating device for learners. Among the studies that focus centrally on identity issues are Norton and Vanderheyden (2004), which analyzed how young English learners’ consumption of Archie comic books provided them with the chance to share common ground with their Canadian-born peers. Other research has highlighted the way that pop culture references have permeated classroom discourse across subject areas, thereby making learning a challenge for those unfamiliar with the references. Duff (2004) and Zuengler (2004) both explore how teachers in North America often refer to American television shows and films to make their teaching more accessible to their students. However, for many of their L2 English students, such references may often make the lessons more opaque.

Additional research on popular culture and language learning includes the study of popular music, and particularly hip hop, as a resource for identity construction. Here, Awad Ibrahim’s (1999) research is foundational for demonstrating how learners align with new racialized identifications (e.g., Africans “become Black” in Canada) by consuming hip hop music, taking on aspects of African American English, and wearing clothing styles made popular by hip hop artists. Hip hop is not limited to ethnic identifications, however, as studies of global hip hop have shown (Alim et al. 2009). White immigrants to the United States have also found a hip hop identity appealing, not specifically for its racial orientations, but for its affiliations with a transnational youth culture which allows for defining oneself on one’s own terms (Cutler 2010).

At first glance, the Internet has appeared to receive much more attention in the field of language learning due to the broad set of questions researchers can ask. With regard to studies of identity formation, however, there are still relatively few studies. Eva Lam (2000, 2004, 2009) has provided foundational work in this area that explores how immigrant youth in the United
States utilize their multiple languages online to build and maintain social networks. Other strands of research on identity that involve computer-mediated communication focus on the development of intercultural awareness (e.g., Belz and Thorne 2006; Li 2008; O’Dowd 2003), a focal concept discussed in Part II of this volume.

The final part of this volume begins with two chapters that examine learners’ identification with linguistic and cultural forms connected to the global spread of hip hop culture. In chapter 9, Angel Lin and Evelyn Man report on a project carried out in Hong Kong’s working class high schools in which local hip hop artists were invited as resident artists to conduct “ELT Rap” workshops over the course of one semester. The artists collaborated with an English tutor in embedding English phonological awareness instruction in the production of hip hop lyrics and in the teaching of rap skills in workshops. Though many of the students were not invested in English learning in general, they were very engaged in the project and dedicated themselves to practicing oral English through composing and performing hip hop lyrics and dance. The research team used questionnaires and focus-group interviews to assess how well the project worked, and recordings of the raps were made as students worked with the resident artists and their English teacher toward their final goal, a performance that was attended by the entire school. Lin and Man discuss the project as an opportunity to expand the students’ vision of themselves as “deficient” language learners and to embrace a new and more empowered identity as English users who compose raps in Cantonese, English, and hybrid varieties. Situating their theoretical perspectives in Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of *habitus*, Lin and Man discuss how a curriculum that focuses on hip hop provides access to the cultural capital of English while drawing on the students’ own investments in global youth culture.

In chapter 10, Awad Ibrahim also explores how transnational hip hop culture offers L2 learners particular linguistic and cultural identities, though his work examines the “underlife” of educational institutions (Goffman 1961). He reflects on his work on a critical ethnographic research project (Ibrahim 1999, 2004), to discuss how young African immigrants in Canada form racialized ESL identities as a result of their access to transnational hip-hop culture and rap lyrical and linguistic styles. His chapter demonstrates how a group of French-speaking immigrant and refugee continental francophone African youths who are attending an urban Franco-Ontarian high school enter a social imaginary – a discursive space in which they are already imagined, constructed, and thus treated as Blacks by hegemonic discourses and groups. This imaginary is directly implicated in who they identify with (Black America),
which in turn influences what and how they linguistically and culturally learn. In contrast with the learners in Lin and Man’s study, however, the young people in Ibrahim’s study had regular access to mainstream (Anglo) varieties of English in school and in their daily lives. However, similar to the learners in Hong Kong, they enacted their agency as individuals to align with a type of English associated less with schooling or with the majority of (Anglo) people in their supposed community of practice, and more with (Black) popular culture. Ibrahim’s work shows that (ESL) learning is neither neutral nor without its politics and pedagogy of desire and investment. In part, the chapter is also about how the act of language learning, namely ESL learning, is turned into a symbolic act of both resistance and identity negotiation and translation, an act which forms and simultaneously performs a subject formation project where Blackness is central.

In chapter 11, Yumiko Ohara moves the focus to forms of popular culture exported from Japan in her study on L2 identities in Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) classrooms in Hawai‘i. Her study describes her attempts to probe beginning-level learners’ perceptions of Japanese culture, and to challenge them to recognize and accept their own agency in terms of identity construction. Similar to the investments of students in Lin and Man’s and Ibrahim’s studies, the students Ohara researched expressed a great deal of interest in the Japanese they heard in popular culture, rather than the Japanese of their textbooks and teachers. They desired to learn the vocabulary, pronunciation, and pragmatics depicted in anime and manga, rather than standard Japanese. To provide students with more identity options, Ohara researched the consequences of incorporating popular culture language in classroom activities through critical pedagogy. Groups of students in two different sections of a beginning JFL class were instructed to write a script for a dialog and subsequently to act it out in front of the entire class and at a speech contest at their university. The students showed an increased awareness of their role as subjects in the construction of selves and identities after they engaged in classroom activities that focused on the different social meanings attached to words and phrases, and they incorporated gendered language into their dialogs which allowed them to construct themselves as “friendly,” “hip,” and “young” with their peers. Ohara’s analysis thus shows how the students developed a sense of themselves as agents in the construction of their own identity and how they went about constructing identities as L2 speakers by drawing on Japanese pop culture.

The final chapter in this part explores the important role of the Internet in providing L2 learners with new identity options. It is an increasingly common
experience throughout much of the privileged world that everyday constructions of social identity are now mediated by the use of Internet communication tools, web environments, and online gaming spaces. These technologies have enabled the rise of communities and social formations within and between which participants develop, maintain, and modify largely textual presentations of self. In chapter 12, Steven Thorne and Rebecca Black draw on case studies across a range of computer-mediated contexts, including instructed and institutionally located intra-class discussion, transcultural partnerships and structured participation in “open” Internet environments, and interaction in ongoing Internet-mediated environments such as fan fiction communities and online games. Drawing upon socioculturally informed identity research, they describe language development in Internet-mediated interactions with reference to indexical linkages to macro-level categories such as nation state affiliation, cultural/linguistic/ethnic affiliations, functionally defined subject positions (such as student, author, editor, expert, and novice, among others), and fluid shifts in language choice, stance and style that enable participants to personalize, make relevant, and move forward a variety of social actions, including identity formation.

As these chapters make clear, one of the outcomes of identifying with pop culture and web-based communities is that the linguistic forms and literacy practices that characterize these cultural spaces are multilingual, hybrid, and usually far from mainstream language varieties. In the case of hip hop, African American English becomes the source of much linguistic identification, though it may be fused with other codes as well. Similarly, the global spread of anime and manga has led language learners to affiliate strongly with regional varieties of Japanese, as well as yakuza (‘gangster’) and other non-mainstream ways of speaking. On the Internet, hybrid and multimodal forms of communication dominate. Codeswitching, emoticons, and chatroom registers (involving multiple abbreviated forms) are the order of the day. Of course, if we recognize that such ways of communicating are part of many people’s identity practices around the world, including language learners, but certainly not limited to them, then we might begin to treat such practices as normative communicative modes, instead of seeing such linguistic hybridity as exotic or suitable only for informal realms of life. After all, releasing language, and identity, from bounded perceptions is one of the joys of the mediascape that attracts people to it in the first place.
Chapter 9
Doing-hip-hop in the transformation of youth identities: Social class, habitus, and cultural capital

Angel Lin and Evelyn Man

1. A theoretical preamble: Cultural capital, habitus, structure, and agency

Cultural capital is a concept from Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1973, 1977, 1984, 1991; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) referring to language use, skills, and orientations, dispositions, attitudes, and schemes of perception (also called habitus) that a child is endowed with by virtue of socialization into her/his family and community. Bourdieu’s argument is that children of the socio-economic elite are bestowed by their familial socialization with both more and the right kind of cultural capital for school success (i.e., their habitus becomes their cultural capital in the social field of the school). A recurrent theme in Bourdieu’s works is that children from disadvantaged groups, with a habitus incompatible with that presupposed in school, are not competing with equal starting points with children of the socioeconomic elite and thus experience the reproduction of social stratification.

As Skeggs (2008) points out, the notion of social class has not received enough attention in the recent literature on globalization and identity research. While Bourdieu has sometimes been accused of being a theorist of reproduction rather than transformation (e.g., Jenkins 1992; Canagarajah 1993), Luke (2009) remarks that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus does allow for the possibility of transformation, and Bourdieu seems to have managed to find a way between structural determinism and an over-emphasis on individual agency. Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory also seems to provide a solution to overcome the sociological macro–micro, structure–agency theoretical divide by seeing the macro and micro, social structures and agency, as mutually constitutive and shaping. Giddens (1984) sees social action and interaction as tacitly enacted social practices and discusses how they become institutions or routines and reproduce familiar forms of social life:
The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time. Human social activities, like some self-reproducing items in nature, are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves as actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible. (Giddens 1984: 2)

With structuration theory, Giddens attempts to integrate human social action with the larger systems, structures, and institutions of which we are a part. It is the continual repetition of social action and interaction in actions/activities that are more or less routines or repeated practices that constitute what may appear to be the larger social forms or systems. Under structuration theory, structure is not outside of and imposed on social action, but is both constituted/structured by and shaping/structuring social action. This is in line with Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, which is postulated as a “structuring structure.”

Both Bourdieu’s theory and Giddens’ structuration theory thus seem to converge in helping to overcome the structuralist determinism that is sometimes attributed to studies which emphasize the reproduction tendency of social structures too much (e.g., Willis 1980). Precisely because structures and social actions are seen as mutually constitutive and shaping or structuring, there is the possibility of transformation of social structures (such as habitus) through creative, situated social actions. However, this kind of creative agency is not to be over-celebrated as it does not happen easily. In this chapter we tell of the attempts of some education researchers to use an innovative hip hop program to help change the habitus of some children in a secondary school situated in a working class residential area in Hong Kong, and how the project met with both shares of success and difficulties.

In terms of identity formation, the project aimed to introduce Hong Kong students to a prestigious new English speaker identity, *the young emcee*, by creating an alternative and extracurricular program based on hip hop. This identity offered the students an opportunity to enhance their English abilities by identifying themselves as capable learners and, more importantly, as artists who were using their voices to connect with others. We wanted to motivate students to work hard at learning the English rapping, timing, and rhyming skills necessary to become good emcees, rymers, storytellers, and lyricists—all positive and trendy English speaker identities for teenagers unavailable
to them before (cf. Lin 1999). In the following sections, we shall outline the setting, the program, and our findings. In the concluding section, we discuss what we have learnt that might help us to achieve more success if we were to embark on a similar project in the future.

2. Hong Kong: The setting of the story

Despite its international cosmopolitan appearance, Hong Kong is ethnically rather homogeneous. Over 90 percent of its population is ethnic Chinese, and Cantonese is the mother tongue of the majority. English native speakers account for a small proportion of the entire population. They had constituted the privileged class of the society until July 1, 1997 when Hong Kong’s sovereignty was returned to China and Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. The English-conversant bilingual Chinese middle class has, however, remained the socioeconomically dominant group in Hong Kong.

Notwithstanding its being the mother tongue of only a minority, English has been the language of educational and socioeconomic advancement; that is, the dominant symbolic resource in the symbolic market (Bourdieu 1991) in Hong Kong. Even in the post-1997/colonial era, English has remained a socioeconomically dominant language in Hong Kong society. For instance, English remains the medium of instruction in most universities and professional training programs.

It can be seen that the symbolic marketplace is embodied and enacted in the many key situations (e.g., educational and job settings) in which symbolic resources (e.g., certain types of linguistic skills, cultural knowledge, specialized knowledge, and skills) are demanded of social actors if they want to gain access to valuable social, educational and eventually material resources (Bourdieu 1991). For instance, a Hong Kong student must have adequate English resources to enter and succeed in the English-medium professional training programs and in order to earn the qualifications to enter high-income professions. Hence, access to English in schooling acts as a crucial gatekeeper for socioeconomic mobility and helps to reproduce class structures in Hong Kong. However, such access has been constrained by a number of factors, including government legislation in 1998 that reduced the number of English-medium public schools, as well as the varying quality of English instruction in both English-medium and Chinese-medium schools (Evans 2008; Lin 2000). Public secondary schools in Hong Kong are generally
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classified into three bands that are based on competitive entry requirements. Band 1 schools admit the approximately top 33 percent of primary school leavers, Band 2 schools admit the middle 33 percent, and Band 3 schools admit the lowest 33 percent. The banding label has been criticized, but it has been a well-established administrative fact of the Hong Kong schooling system. This chapter tells the story of a hip hop project piloted in a Band 3 school located in a working-class housing complex in a rural area of Hong Kong. We focus on the ways in which hip hop in English provided working class students with new spaces (or, in Bourdieu’s terms, a new habitus) for developing their identities as English speakers.

3. Piloting an English Language Teaching (ELT) Rap project

We invented the name ELT Rap to indicate to school principals and educational funding bodies that it is a kind of hip hop rap adapted or written for English language teaching (ELT) purposes. Working with a team of English language educators in the Faculty of Education at The Chinese University of Hong Kong from 2006 to 2008, we designed the project as an innovative way of drawing on the popular cultural resources of youths for English language education.

The linguist, Geneva Smitherman, has highlighted eight features of signification (i.e., meaning-making) in rap lyrics:

1. Indirection, circumlocution
2. Metaphorical-imagistic
3. Humorous, ironic
4. Rhythmic fluency and sound
5. Teachy but not preachy
6. Directed at person or persons usually present in the situational context
7. Punning, play on words
8. Introduction of the semantically or logically unexpected (cited in Perry 2004: 62)

A glance at the list will show that, when adapted, rap has great potential in English language teaching. The rhythmic nature of rap lyrics facilitates the acquisition of the stress-timed rhythm of English. This has special significance in Hong Kong, where the majority of learners speak Cantonese, a syllable-timed language, as their mother-tongue. The play on words that is often
a part of rap has great appeal for students when they repeat raps for practice. The rhyming nature of rap lyrics can also heighten learners’ phonetic skills and phonological awareness, and practice rapping has the potential to build confidence among these students as English language users.

3.1. Why is ELT Rap potentially appealing to young people?

In English language education, jazz chants (e.g., Graham 2000) have been some of the activities advocated for improving learners’ pronunciation, especially in terms of rhythm and intonation. ELT Rap differs from jazz chants in that it has a much richer musical dimension that appeals to young people: the rhythm is provided by hip hop music in the background. This popular, musical dimension should make ELT Rap especially appealing to teenage students since it is infused in the popular culture that they consume on a daily basis. Though many of the students in this project were relatively new to hip hop music, it became clear over the course of the project that the appeal of participating in a globally popular youth culture that could easily be localized to represent their experience in Hong Kong struck a chord with the learners.

In addition to the entertainment element, what can also attract teenage students to ELT Rap is its lyrical content: rap is a channel for (young) people to speak out, to unload their personal worries and frustrations, and to speak to and against scenarios of social injustice (Morrell and Duncan-Andrade 2002; Rose 1994). The use of rap as a vehicle for voicing one’s frustrations or concerns about social problems has been well-documented in rap around the world (cf. Alim 2006; Mitchell 2001), but little has been explored with regard to the context of Hong Kong. Given that social class divisions in Hong Kong are often shaped by access to English through education, rap in English became an appealing prospect for connecting to working class students in Hong Kong’s secondary schools. Disassociated from the English of their classrooms and the ideoscpes (Appadurai 1990) that govern the centralized education system, we felt that ELT Rap had the potential to offer them new avenues for creative expression. We developed the project with the idea that many students would find in ELT Rap a space to reconcile their mixed feelings about English: on the one hand, they understand the importance of English to their future; on the other hand, they resent the sense of frustration brought by their perceived inability to master a foreign language that is deemed so necessary for socio-economic mobility. As a hybrid blend of education and the media,
then, ELT Rap provided them with the potential to reconstruct their identities as “deficient” English speakers by using the language for creative expression that melded their interest in music with opportunities for language learning.

3.2. What is an emcee? — building positive English speaker identities among Hong Kong teenagers

The title of our ELT Rap lyrics booklet used in the project is: “The Young Emcee Scrolls”. This title is modeled on the trendy title of the 2006 hip hop poetry collection of the famous American urban poet, Saul Williams: The Dead Emcee Scrolls: The Lost Teachings of Hip-Hop. An emcee is not only a rapper but also a talented artist and storyteller who specializes in using poetic language with rhythm and music to liven up the atmosphere of a party or a concert. A skilled emcee has to go through rigorous language and music training. A skilled hip hop emcee is also sometimes called a “rhymer” as they are good at spontaneously coming up with “cool” rhyming verses to go with the rhythm of the music on the spot (called “freestyling”). In hip hop music culture, it is important for emcees to frequently engage in animated “battles” (i.e., competitions) to test their spontaneous linguistic, poetic, and music talents, as good emcees are skilful in using poetic, verbal signifying (meaning-making) techniques which can be traced back to the oral cultural storytelling discourse practices of African Americans (Lee 1993). To become a good hip hop emcee, one needs to work on expanding one’s speaking vocabulary, remembering a vast number of rhyming words, and needs to read newspapers and books every day to increase one’s knowledge about the world so as to be able to rap about a wide range of interesting, contemporary topics. Through introducing Hong Kong students to the concept of the young emcee in our ELT Rap teaching materials, we wanted to provide them with an identity that would resonate with them and which would lead them to invest in English language learning.

3.3. Piloting ELT Rap as an extra-curricular activity in a school in Hong Kong

With the support of the school principal and vice-principal, we piloted a project entitled “ELT Rap resident artist project” in one Band 3 school from
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September 2006 to June 2007. We started the project with the following set of research objectives: 1) to provide a context in which students would improve their English language proficiency; 2) to enhance students’ interest in and attitude towards learning English; and 3) to improve students’ self-image and self-confidence through positive interactions with hip hop artists and an English tutor.

3.4. Program implementation

To introduce the project to the students and to recruit participants, an “Artists’ Demonstration Session” was organized in September. Though there were more students interested in hip hop dance, a joint decision between the school and the research team was made to keep the original class arrangements for promoting ELT Rap. Over the course of the project, 68 high school students volunteered to join the program. The students were divided into groups according to grade and met on different days to focus on either ELT Rap or Hip Hop Dance. On Thursdays, Group A (comprised of 28 S4–S7 students, i.e. Grade 10–13) met after school to participate in the ELT Rap workshops. On Fridays, Group B (23 students from S3–S6, i.e. Grades 9–12, participated in the ELT Rap workshops, 8 of whom also participated in the dance workshops on Thursdays). Group C (25 S3–S6 students) met on Thursdays to learn hip hop dance styles.

The workshop team consisted of a team of local hip hop artists as instructors (MC Yan, MC Chef, MC ADV, MC Double T). A research team member, Ms M. Ting, served as the English language tutor working closely with the local artists. Together they led a series of afterschool ELT Rap workshops during which they taught seven rap songs (see table 1). Another local break dance artist, Big Mouth, served as the instructor of dance workshops for students:

As the project progressed, the students worked with the workshop team to develop a finale performance program. The finale show was hosted in February 2007 in the school hall and was attended by over 800 students, teachers and parents. A final count of 38 students performed in the February finale show. Based on the focus group interviews, the 56 percent participation rate could be attributed to conflicts in scheduling with other school activities and different expectations of the programs. The performers enjoyed and took pride in their work, while the audience gave positive and encouraging feedback.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RAP Focus</th>
<th>ELT Focus</th>
<th>Description of Group Interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 1: Rapped “How are you?” and Group Names.</td>
<td>Lecture: Introduced letter-sound relationships, and the “Final E” Phonics Rule as in “How are you?”</td>
<td>Used “How are you?” to greet each other.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop 2: Rapped “Bee-lee-blah-lah Boom Boom”; watched “Freestyle” DVD; introduced hip hop components (rapping, breaking, DJ-ing, Graffiti).</td>
<td>Lecture: Introduced “26 Letter Sounds” as in “BLBLBB”. Worksheet with letter shape design was used.</td>
<td>Awarded letter shape design winners for motivation; distributed Halloween sweets to create a relaxing atmosphere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 3: Students rehearsed previous raps and created their own lyrics.</td>
<td>Group Work: Reviewed the 26 letter sounds with groups of 3–4 students. Students read out some nonsense words to practice blending.</td>
<td>Arranged group practices of letter sounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 4: Rapped “B-A-Bay.”</td>
<td>Lecture: Introduced the “Two Vowels Go Walking” Phonics Rule as in “B-A Bay.”</td>
<td>Encouraged students to use their body as metronome to feel the beats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 5: Students rehearsed previous raps and designed ELT Rap logo.</td>
<td>Worksheet: Finished long vowel worksheet while tutor conducted focus group interviews.</td>
<td>Conducted focus group interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 6: Rapped “Rapper’s Delight” and “Chinese Poems Can We Rap?”</td>
<td>Lyrics of “Rapper’s Delight” and “Chinese Poems Can We Rap?”</td>
<td>Moved to the hall and joined the dance group to feel more about rhythm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 7: Watched “Def Society” and “Make You Look” DVDs; rapped “I Have Promises To Keep.”</td>
<td>Lyrics of “I Have Promises To Keep.”</td>
<td>Brainstormed with students about the performance; provided snack to create a relaxing atmosphere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 8: Reviewed all raps and confirmed program rundown.</td>
<td>Reviewed program.</td>
<td>Awarded ELT Rap button design winner for motivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops 9–11: Rehearsals for finale.</td>
<td>Reviewed program.</td>
<td>Distributed ELT Rap buttons and performance props to student performers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5. Research methodology

We used a battery of research instruments for collecting data that would allow us to both assess students’ linguistic competence in English and to understand the identities they were developing in response to the ELT Rap project. Pre- and post-workshop questionnaires were completed by the students in October 2006 and February 2007 respectively. We conducted mid- and post-workshop focus group interviews with high, medium, and low involvement students in November 2006 at the fifth rap and sixth dance workshops, and subsequently in March 2007 at the reunion gathering. Based on the data collected in the mid-workshop interviews, some program implementation strategies were adjusted. For example, we integrated groups of students who were focusing on raps with those focusing on hip hop dance styles in order to create a more authentic experience. We also modified the original curriculum by adding Sugarhill Gang’s “Rapper’s Delight” to the workshop, with less language focus and more focus on music appreciation in order to engage students in the project more fully.

3.6. Language learning benefits of ELT Rap

For the many limited-English-proficiency participants at the school, rapping seemed to be easier to approach as a “speaking” rather than “listening” activity as it requires “speaking” or “spitting the words” at a fast speed; hence, words are often not very clear and comprehension can be difficult. Students with higher English proficiency would take less time to rehearse and could rap at a much faster pace, whereas students with lower English proficiency would have a much slower pace in rapping. Some felt discouraged seeing others rapping so fast when they rapped together.

In spite of these difficulties, the rap songs created a fun, meaningful context to the use of English and seemed to be appealing to the students. The artists’ demonstrations had a strong modeling effect, both in learning ELT raps and in creating positive attitudes toward learning. It became clear throughout the project that the students bonded well with the artists and showed respect for their talents. It was also clear that the English tutor was only able to build credibility if she expressed knowledge about hip hop and rap. Without a “cool” hip hop image, students would only seek language support from the ELT tutor; however, they identified more closely with the artists as role models for their own language learning.
The participating students expressed positive views towards this way of learning English. Some said they have learned useful phonic skills which they can transfer to their regular English learning (e.g., they can now sound out new English words). Most said they have increased their self-confidence through performing their songs in the finale show. After the project ended, some students continued their friendships with the artists, regularly joining in the artists’ local hip hop gigs in community centres. A few of them continue to write Chinese and bilingual raps on their own. Some students have also asked the English tutor to teach them more rhyming words so that they can have more words to write their rap lyrics.

4. Constructing positive identities through lyrics

In this section, excerpts from the workshop participants’ lyrics will be illustrated to see how emergent positive identities are being constructed. These are corroborated with excerpts from interview data to illustrate how the experience through the hip hop program has helped some participants construct identities as better English learners.

Excerpts (1) through (3) are taken from lyrics produced by the students during their third workshop, which was the first time they had the opportunity to create their own raps. The lyrics demonstrate how the students are experimenting with rhyme, syllable structure and beats per line. In addition, these three examples show some positive expressions of identity. In (1), the students voice their enthusiasm for hip hop and their extracurricular activities connected to this “school” practice; (2) reveals how the students link writing hip hop lyrics to an act that requires them to “use your brain”; and (3) arguably presents an attitude of confidence with English through their chosen alias “C-A-N” and their ability to “scare” others with their raps (and with their English).

(1) Workshop 3: Ka-hei & Friends
   We all like hip hop
   Always go to the CD-shop
   When I go back home
   The door is tightly locked.

(2) Workshop 3: Tom, Key & Kin
   Pick up your pen and
   Use your brain!
In the finale show, a group of workshop participants had written a “Thank you Artists” song to express thanks to the artist instructors of the workshops. The song was written mainly in Cantonese and performed in the finale show by the students. Below are excerpts from the song lyrics which illustrate their newfound confidence about their campus and school life. English translations of the lines are provided in the right column:

(4) 電腦設備又係度
不斷更新

There are computer facilities here
Always upgrading …

…

喂個地方唔可以缺少嘅一份子
努力認同求學習就個個都

They [referring to students] are all indispensable here
All are working hard studying diligently

…

唔再俾人砌低
唔再做一頭縮頭烏龜

No longer beaten by others
No longer chicken out like a shy tortoise

…

Thank you Artists!

The expression of confidence and self-worth in these lyrics is very significant, given the habitus of these working class students. Traditionally in Hong Kong, students from low banding schools, which are frequently in low-income housing areas, are stigmatized in society and labeled as “losers” in general. In this song, the students are expressing a message of self-assertion – both asserting the good facilities of the school (the ever-upgrading computer equipment) and the new self-image of students: everyone is hardworking and hence becoming indispensable; they are no longer feeling like losers beaten by others nor chickening out like a shy tortoise who has to hide its head in its shell. They are using metaphors to express a new powerful identity that they are constructing both for their own school and the students at this school. It is significant that they are not referring to themselves directly but addressing this message to everyone in
the school, as they are performing this song to all students and teachers in the finale show in the school hall. Coming from the students’ own creative self-expression, this message is significant.

It might be said that the hip hop music and the rap genre and the self-reliant, self-assertive attitude as embodied by hip hop culture and the artists themselves seem to have inspired these students to feel a renewed confidence about their own school and the students in this school. This newly found confidence is echoed by some other participants in the interview data. The interviews were done right after the finale show by a research team member. The interviews were done in Cantonese and below are English translations of excerpts of the interview data (S6: Secondary Six; i.e., Grade 12; S4: Secondary 4; i.e., Grade 10, etc.).

Many excerpts illustrate how the students recognized their own learning and that they felt their English had improved over the course of the project. Though some of them had not previously been familiar with hip hop, their comments show that they found this medium to be highly motivating and beneficial to their command of English:

(5) Interviewer: What do you think of ELT Rap?
S6 student: It was fun!
Interviewer: Fun…
S6 student: I've learnt English…
Interviewer: Learnt English…
S6 student: And got to know hip hop culture.

(6) S4 Student: At first I'd no idea about hip hop and rap. But after attending these sessions, I learnt that hip hop and rap are so broad! As we usually rap in English, so I also have learnt more English.

(7) S4 Student: I think I'm much better now (呥呥呥). When we first tried to rap “How are you?” I couldn't even rap one sentence! But now I can even rap the more difficult ones.

Excerpt (8) also acknowledges the linguistic benefits of the program, but perhaps more importantly, documents the sense of an empowering habitus that came into being as a result of the project. As an “alternative” curriculum carried out in the form of an extracurricular program, ELT Rap provided the students with a new space for identification. In contrast to their “deficient” identities in their mainstream classrooms, ELT Rap gave them the chance to identify positively as members of an English-speaking community who enjoyed each other’s company and formed close social bonds:
(8) (A Group of S5 students becoming good friends)

Girl 1: We’ve learnt so much!
Girl 2: The most important thing is Margaret teaching us English.
Girl 3: We’ve learnt more about phonics.
Girl 4: It was fun! Really fun!
Girl 2: Yeah! It was fun! And we also got to make new friends! I didn’t know them before. And now we’ve known each other and could even hug each other!
Girl 3: And even to share the same piece of cake! (girls laughing)

Excerpt (9) shows how the students gained confidence by performing in front of their peers, which also enhanced their sense of agency over their learning since they witnessed the practical benefits of “involving themselves” in what they were learning:

(9) (Group of students who performed hip hop dance in the finale show; the group of students are from different grade levels, from S4–S6):

Dancer 1: At first I wanted to stop dancing because I didn’t want to perform on stage. But actually it’s not that frightening on stage. It was fun!
Dancer 2: It’s us who are benefiting … it’s like learning a new skill and you feel good if you can perform.
Dancer 3: I think if you involve yourself in dancing, you’ll enjoy it. And have fun with these good tutors.
Dancer 4: At first when I started practising it was a mess. But it’s ok at the end. Even today’s performance wasn’t a perfect one, but it’s not like [as bad as] the rehearsal.

The artists were also interviewed (together with some of their workshop students who hung around them) right after the finale show. Below are English translations of excerpts from the interview data. Many of the excerpts show that the workshop team observed changes in the students’ willingness to express themselves across time, an important factor in both rapping and speaking English. In (10), MC Chef points out how the students seem to have developed a new sense of self through the project as they cultivated a hip hop persona. This new, more confident self seems to show up in classrooms as well, as one student indicates in (11):
MC Chef: I’ve noticed the students... because of hip hop, they would actually pick up a pen and start writing their own raps. And they’ve changed so much! Maybe this thing [rap]... Because hip hop has changed my whole life, so I want more people can get to know it. In the first lesson, they knew nothing, and now, after the tenth lesson, they had a show, and create raps at home; I noticed that they’ve put hard work into it. They are not playing but serious about it. They can express their feelings and opinions through raps. It’s good ... it’s a means to let others get to know them. Sometimes teachers don’t understand their students’ feelings. But through this chance now ... the teachers can notice that the students have turned into someone else on the stage, becoming more confident ... Although the time given was limited, the students showed great dedication and effort. Their performance ... you can see the result! I really think they are superb!

This new, more confident self showed up in classrooms as well, as reported by the students. Importantly, the students felt they improved not only in their English literacies, but also their abilities in Chinese. One of the Secondary 5 student mentees reported that he received praise from his English teacher, which afforded him the important opportunity to identify as a “good” English speaker in the context of school, as well as in the extracurricular ELT Rap program:

S5 mentee: After learning raps from MC Chef, my Chinese composition improves. And now during the English lessons, when there are words that are a bit challenging, because of the phonic skills learnt in the program, I know how to decode the words. And get more praises from teachers! My English teacher ... I used to be unable to decode the words and pronounce them correctly, but because of the method (referring to phonics) I learnt, I know how to pronounce the words and my teacher praises me for this improvement.

The students frequently reported that they worked very hard once they committed to the project (12)–(14), a behavior often not attributed to working class schoolchildren from low-banding schools. It appeared that the ELT Rap project provided the students with the chance to identify as very capable learners, an identity that is not commonly attributed to working class children (Lin 1999; Willis 1980). By receiving steady encouragement from the artists, whom they admired, they invested in their learning despite it being “hard work”:
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(12) S4 student: Extremely hard work! When they [referring to the artist instructors] comment, “Your rap isn’t good enough, go home and practice many times,” and I went home and practised a hundred times! I almost died because of it! (laughing as she said this)

(13) S4 student: At first my friends wanted to join it, so I joined it. But after really joining it, I’m the only one who has stayed on, not wanting to quit. I have become the one who doesn’t want to quit most.

(14) S6 student: When the program first started, we were with the lower form students. I didn’t know them and I feel strange and bored about it. But after the show, because all of us have put in many efforts and worked together, the bonding became strong, and it was fun!

This hard work was also noted by the workshop team artists who were impressed with the students’ capacity to learn new things in a relatively short period of time. Their comments characterize the students as “quick learners,” “hard workers,” and “highly capable” English speakers and rappers:

(15) Big Mouth: At first the students were not attentive and they only came to play. But when time progressed … Some of them got more serious and could keep on [practising]. I could notice the result of practice between the workshops. Not just breaking for a while during the workshops, but practising outside of the workshops. I could notice their improvement in the following session.

(16) KDG: I’ve watched them rehearse, and I noticed their hard work. What a big difference between the first rehearsal and the show! They’ve shown high collaboration. I just hope more schools can accept this kind of teaching program, letting more people understand hip hop.

(17) MC Yan: It involved many students this time … The more people the harder to control. But as they worked together as a team, working very hard … It shows that students in Hong Kong have great learning capacity, apart from memorizing textbooks or rote learning! Actually, their skills can improve in a short period of time … they can absorb and learn much faster and better than we can imagine. They have benefitted a lot from it in the end.

One of the artists who worked on the project, MC Double T, linked the students’ progress with their confidence in “speaking up” in English, an important factor in identifying as English speakers who have the “power to
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impose reception” (Bourdieu 1977: 648) despite exhibiting working-class language features:

(18) MC Double T: It’s very important not to be afraid of speaking English. After the workshops, I noticed they are more willing to speak up. They realize that isn’t difficult. They might be shy. Their pronunciation might be incorrect. But now through raps and music, they can rap with ease or speak English with ease.

The school’s teachers and administrators were also interviewed after the finale show, and their comments revealed similar observations regarding the students’ growing confidence and their willingness to express themselves in English. Below are English translations of excerpts from the interview data:

(19) School Vice-Principal

Mr. Poon: I’m so proud of my students. They gave their best performance. Although the abilities of our students are not that high, they might not be very good in language or other aspects, but you can notice their confidence on stage and I’ll give 100 marks for their performance. What makes me the happiest is their self-confidence!

Though Mr. Poon draws attention to what the students lack academically, which potentially constructs an identity for them as “deficient,” he remains proud of what they have achieved, noting growth in their confidence. More praise comes from the teachers, who noted the quality of the students’ performances and the importance of performing successful academic identities in front of their school population:

(20) School Teacher

Mr Hon: It’s like working very hard all the time and getting paid off now. The students performed very well, and I expect a good show but I didn’t expect that excellent! Very coherent, and very confident! I’m so happy about the show.

(21) School Teacher

Miss Jie: During the whole event, the students were so engaged, much more engaged than their usual behavior. To them, English poems are quite difficult, but they tried very hard to master the lyrics and rap with rhythm. It’s so encouraging for the students. And it gave them a sense of achievement. They can show themselves to others.
Importantly, the principal acknowledged the benefits of ELT Rap as a productive space for the students to perform their linguistic skills and to be treated as successful learners:

(22) School Principal

Mr. Yan: I believe teenagers need channels to express themselves, and we need to give them room for building self-confidence. So raps, hip hop, performing on stage, are really good opportunities. We really hope that our teaching professions can support this kind of teaching approach, letting more students benefit from it.

5. Coda: Transforming youth identities through the hip hop experience

Upon the completion of this pilot project, 10 students of the school were invited to perform their ELT Rap songs at the English Festival 2007 kick-off ceremony. They performed rapping three English songs and one Chinese song. This was a glorious moment for the school and the students and has boosted the overall morale of the school. The school had originally been up for consideration by the Hong Kong Education Bureau to be closed due to decreasing new student enrolments. However, this event enhanced the school’s public image and has partially contributed to the cancelation of the government’s plan of closing down the school.

Overall, the direction of using hip hop music to engage students in using English to express their own voice, and to enhance their phonological awareness and rhyming and creative verbal skills is promising. Further curriculum research is needed to refine the curriculum for different learning styles and interest levels of students and different school contexts. Based on the data, however, we have come to realize both the potential and challenges of capitalizing on students’ desire for and investment in pop culture artistic identities in transforming their habitus, in particular, their attitude towards and relationship with English. The central difficulty experienced in this pilot project seems to be that the local hip hop artists participating in this project themselves have limited English capital. Our research team has sought to compensate for this with the provision of an English tutor who has worked closely and collaboratively with the artists. However, when it comes to identification with their role models, students tend to identify much more readily with the “cool” local artists than the English tutor.
This difficulty notwithstanding, three of the Form 7 (Grade 13) female workshop participants were highly motivated to learn rapping and started to write their own lyrics for the artists to comment on. They have stayed in contact with the artists even long after the end of the program and have joined in the artists’ music gigs in community centers. Two Form 4 (Grade 10) boys, notwithstanding their limited English proficiency, were eager to rap for fun in their daily conversations with their friends (although mainly Cantonese is used), and expressed an interest in joining an ELT Rap Society at school if such a society is formed. Some students also tried to freestyle on their own (i.e., to come up with rap lyrics on the spot, without pre-drafting them), for instance, by rapping and adapting paragraphs from their geography textbook.

It thus seems that some of the students are acquiring a new identity of a creative language user through developing a hip hop rapper identity – in Cantonese, English or bilingual rapping. The transformation and development of such new self-identities and self-understandings seem to be a result of their informal interactions with the artists and the modeling of such new trans-local hip hop identities by the artists. We argue that when these working class students are doing hip hop, they are also acquiring new, empowered, youth rapper selves that hip hop culture seems to be offering to them. When learning and honing their creative verbal skills in writing and performing Chinese, bilingual and English raps, they also seem to be transforming their social class habitus and are acquiring new cultural capital (e.g., rhyming and rapping skills, knowledge of letter-sound relationships, new attitudes and dispositions towards English).

However, the actual translation of these ideas into a feasible, workable youth empowerment curriculum in the schools still needs further research, exploration, trial and error. These challenges notwithstanding, the observations and lessons that we have learnt from this pilot project have led us to believe that if given the right role models and scaffolding (e.g., hip hop artists with bilingual cultural capital who can share with students both rapping and creative bilingual verbal skills), students coming from working class backgrounds can be helped to break through the learned helplessness acquired through years of negative experience with language learning in the local schooling system that tends to favor students already endowed with the kind of family habitus for school success (Lin 1999, 2005). Through transforming their own identities and acquiring empowered identities such as those of creative rapper-artists, working class students can engage enthusiastically in language learning, including learning English which is, otherwise, not a daily language for them. We therefore need to continue to research and explore
the possibilities that trans-local hip hop cultures can offer to young students, especially those coming from social classes without the habitus and cultural capital required by mainstream schools for literacy success, so that they can exercise their agency to change their habitus and acquire new cultural capital and new identities for empowerment.

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Note

1. Emcee is derived from the acronym, MC (Master of Ceremony, or Microphone Controller). In hip hop music culture, the emcee embodies a prestigious identity.
Chapter 10
When life is off da hook: Hip-hop identity and identification, BESL, and the pedagogy of pleasure

Awad Ibrahim

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that a speaker gets his words!) but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s concrete contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one’s own.

(Mikhail M. Bakhtin)

1. Introduction

The narrative in this chapter is as much personal as it is theoretical or “objective,” as much about my research participants as it is about myself as a researcher/writer. It looks at the impact of desires, investments, identity, and identification on the process of language learning. It is about how the act of language learning, namely learning English as a Second Language (ESL), is turned into a symbolic act of identity negotiation and translation, an act which forms and simultaneously performs a subject formation project where Blackness is central. This chapter, in short, is about the process of becoming Black. It examines the interrelation between race, culture, identity, and language learning. It is anchored on two premises. The first is that, in North America, youths from 11 to 20 years old do not learn ESL inside the ESL classroom. This is not to suggest that youths do not learn at all in the ESL classroom. We know they do. I wish, however, to argue that youths will go extensively beyond what we teach in our ESL classrooms to learn everyday idioms and the conventional ways of using them. After all, as Bakhtin argues, it is not out of a dictionary that a speaker/learner gets her words. The
second premise of the chapter is that youths’ gendered, sexualized, abled, classed, and racialized social identities are directly implicated in the ESL learning process. Indeed, they are its foundations (cf. Cummins and Davison 2007; Ibrahim 2000a, 2000b, 2006; Morgan 1998; Norton 1997; Norton and Toohey 2004), and no learning would be made personal, Bakhtin argues, unless the learner populates the word with his/her own intentions, his/her own accent; hence, appropriating the word and adapting it to his/her own semantic and expressive intentions.

The chapter argues that a group of French-speaking immigrant and refugee continental African youths who are attending an urban Franco-Ontarian high school in southwestern Ontario, Canada, enters a social imaginary – a discursive space in which they are already imagined, constructed, and thus treated as Blacks by hegemonic discourses and groups. This imaginary is directly implicated in who they identify with (Black North America), which in turn influences what and how they learn linguistically and culturally. They learn Black Stylized English (BSE), a subcategory of Black English (BE), which they access in Hip-Hop culture and Rap lyrical and linguistic styles. For them, BE becomes as much a site of language learning as a symbolic space of identification and desire; and the act of learning is not a neutral act. In fact, it raises a number of critical questions. First, why would continental African youths need and want to learn, appropriate, re-produce, and re-perform these symbolic systems (Bourdieu 1991), and, second, what does it mean for a Black ESL learner to acquire Black English as a Second Language (BESL)? That is, at a time when North American Blackness is governed by how negatively it is located in a race-conscious society (Back and Solomos 2000; Dixson and Rousseau 2006; West 1993; Wright 2000), what symbolic, cultural, pedagogical, and identity investments would learners have in locating themselves politically and racially at the margin of representation?

By symbolic system, I am referring to a set of norms, rules, and regulations that are expressly operating together to create an entity, a form, a mode, a structure, or what Foucault (1984) calls “discourse” – an ensemble of discursive formations or frameworks forming and re/transforming who we are and determining what we can and must say (Hall 1996). They are symbolic because they are misrecognized or least visible (Bourdieu 1991); yet, they constitute the deep and infrastructures of any material system. In a dialectic sense, they are constituents of and at the same time constituting these infrastructures. Put otherwise, symbolic systems need material systems (authorized or not) – what Bourdieu (1991) calls champs (‘fields’) – in order to exist and function, however, they also constitute the very grounds upon
which the material system depends and indeed where the latter expresses itself. I have an identity, for example, but my identity would not exist outside the linguistic field where it expresses itself.

Being symbolic, Bourdieu (1991) continues, contrary to its conventional use, does not put it in opposition to the material. A symbolic field or capital can very easily indeed be converted into a material capital. The French language in Canada, for instance, may represent a form of symbolic capital – though highly valued; learning it, however, can be the key for accessing material capital – job, business, and so on. Language is a symbolic system, with its infrastructures, history, and grammar (in its broad semiological sense) and is directly implicated in our everyday material life. Indeed, it is where we express our feelings, who we are or what we have become, and where we invest our desires. Here, language is not, and has never been, just an instrument of communication, as I argued elsewhere (Ibrahim 1999). It is also where power is formed and performed based on race, gender, sexuality, and social-class identity. In what follows, I first explore the idea of becoming Black and, then, I explore how these ideas relate to what I have observed in schooling contexts in Ontario. This is followed by a discussion of the research findings and a conclusion on the need to bridge the gap between what we do in our language, especially ESL, classrooms and the activities taking place outside of them.

2. The day we became black

In her classic La révolution du langage poétique, Kristeva (1974) offers a notion that is central to this paper: sujet en procès (‘subject-in-progress’). It is a becoming of being, or being as a continuous act of becoming (see also Sartre 1980; Deleuze and Guattari 1987). It is a notion which assumes not fixity, but performativity (Butler 1999); not being in a thetic and static sense, but being which is never complete; and for this project, it assumes a being that is becoming Black. The process of becoming Black is on the one hand marked by an identification with and a desire for North American Blackness; and it is, on the other, as much about gender and race as it is about language and cultural performance. In the case of the African youth who participated in my fieldwork, for example, although both young women and men verbalized a strong identification with Blackness during interviews, the situation was different when it came to the intensity of bodily performance. Whereas all male students articulated and performed a strong identification with and a complete appropriation of Hip-Hop and Rap through their dress, posture, walk,
and talk, female students, depending on their age, tended to be more eclectic. The younger girls (12 to 14 years old) had the same linguistic and cultural practice and performance as the boys in their appropriation of Rap and Hip-Hop, while the older girls tended to combine Hip-hop with “traditional” dress without any sense of contradiction (see Ibrahim 2008, for further analysis).

Borrowing from Butler (1999), the idea of performativity is central to my research. It is a concept which assumes not fixity but repetition, parody, and the continual act of becoming. Butler offered gender or the category woman as an example. Echoing de Beauvoir (1949), she argues that one is not born a woman, but rather, one in fact becomes a woman. Hence, gender for Butler is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of recurrent acts, words, gestures, or what Roland Barthes (1967/1983) calls complex semiotic languages. These are signs that are open for signification and different readings since they cannot produce verbal utterances, yet they are ready to be spoken. For Butler, these complex languages are produced and performed on the surface of our bodies: in and through our modes of dress, walk, hairstyle, maquillage, lip gloss; and also in architecture, photographs, and so on. Following Butler, I contend accordingly that we perform our identities, desires, and investments, at least in part, in and through the complex semiotic languages of our dress, walk, and talk.

In becoming Black, being is distinguished from becoming. Being is an accumulated memory, an understanding, a conception, and an experience upon which individuals interact with the world around them, whereas becoming is the process of building this memory of experience. As a continental African, for example, I was not considered Black in Africa; other terms served to patch together my identity, such as tall, Sudanese, and basketball player. In other words, as Hall (1997) would argue, my Blackness was not marked; it was outside the shadow of the dominant other. However, as a refugee in North America, my perception of self was altered in direct response to the social processes of racism and the historical representation of Blackness whereby the antecedent signifiers became secondary to my Blackness, and I retranslated my being: I became Black.

A significant incident in my understanding of what it means to “be” Black in North America occurred on Sunday May 16, 1999 (see Ibrahim 2003 for the full story). That day I was officially declared “Black” by a White policeman who stopped me in Toronto, Canada, for no reason other than, “We are looking for a dark man with a dark bag,” as he put it. When I questioned him about my “darkness,” he said, “We are looking for a Black man with a dark bag.” There is no need to mention that my bag was actually light blue
and that I was metamorphosed from “dark” to “Black.” I cite this experience here for two reasons. First, to frame the overall social context where my research participants circulate and form their identities; that is, to further our understanding of the everyday racism, human degradation, and the general annihilation of Black people in North America. And second, to acknowledge how the present researcher is implicated in the research, and the questions I am asking.

3. Hanging out: Ethnography of performance and Marie-Victorin

The research for this paper constitutes part of a larger critical ethnographic research project I conducted (Ibrahim 1998) between January and June 1996, with a small-scale follow up study in 2007. In both, I asked the following questions: 1) First, what are the roads taken by African youths in their journey of integration in Canadian society, the journey of becoming Black?; 2) What is the role of race and racism in their identity formation?; 3) How are continental African youths positioned and constructed in and out of school?; 4) What are the implications of this construction in youths’ social identity formation?; and 5) What are the outcomes of this journey?

I developed a methodological approach which I call ethnography of performance to understand how African youths in Ontario perform identities, desires, and investments in and through the complex semiotic languages of their dress, walk, and talk. This study of performance allows access to our research subjects’ inner-identity, what they think and desire, and how they long to represent themselves and to be represented. In other words, identities, I am contending, are best accessed in and through observing what people do and perform on the surface of their bodies. And to have a complete picture of our research subjects’ identities, if ever this is possible, we need to follow them extensively in different places, at different times, and over extended periods of time; and ask them to verbalize and reflect upon their own performances/actions.

At both times of the research, I was well acquainted with the school and its population since I had carried out research there for almost two years in the mid 1990s. With permission from the school administration, I began visiting the school in 1996 to hang out with African students at least once a week, and in most cases, two or three times from January to June of 1996. In 2007, I spent half a day each week for two months. I took the role of a
participant-observer, keeping regular field notes. Having determined what they could offer to my research, I chose for extensive observation sixteen students – ten boys and six girls – between the ages of fourteen and twenty. The girls were Somali-speakers from Somalia and Djibouti. Of the ten boys, six were Somali-speakers – from Somalia and Djibouti, two Senegalese, one Ethiopian and one Togolese. I observed them in and out of school. With the consent of students and their parents, I interviewed them, individually or in groups, for an hour to three hours, at the school or at their residences. Interviews were either in English or French; the majority, however, were in French. I also videotaped and on two occasions handed over the tape recorders to students to capture their “natural” interactions among themselves when I was not present. I attended soirées, plays, basketball games, and graduations, and I was delighted to be invited to their residences. I transcribed and translated the interviews and some of the videotapes, and analyzed the data by grouping them by theme, category, and subject.

3.1. The school context

Marie-Victorin (MV) is a small intermediate and high school of approximately 400 students from various ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. Though it is a French-language school, the language spoken by students in the school corridors and hallways was predominately English; Arabic, Somali, and Farsi were also spoken at other times. In both periods of the research, I attended classes at MV, talked to students, and observed curricular and extracurricular activities two or three times per week. Being the only Black adult – with the exception of one Black counselor – and being a displaced subject, a refugee, and an African, gave me a certain familiarity with the students’ experiences. I was able to connect with different age and gender groups through a range of activities, initially hanging out with the students and later playing sports with various groups. I was also approached by these students for both guidance and academic help. Because of my deep involvement in the student culture, at times my status as a researcher was forgotten, and the line between the students and myself became blurred; clearly, we shared a safe space of comfort that allowed us to open up, speak and engage freely.

Notably, MV had a high immigrant population at the periods when research was carried out. In fact, in the mid 1990s, students who were or had parents who were born outside Canada made up 70 percent of the entire school population; in 2007, this population was reduced to 30–40 percent. Among them,
continental Africans constituted the majority. MV administration emphasized the theme of unity within this multicultural and multiethnic population. The slogan that the school advertised was *unité dans la diversité* (‘unity in diversity’). This discourse of unity, however, both recently and in the 1990s, had little material bearing on the students’ material lives – the absence of people of color among the school personnel being a case in point. One could argue that it was the Frenchness of the school that seemed to be the capital (Bourdieu 1991) of its promotion. And given its symbolic value, most African youths come to MV with a highly valued European linguistic norm of French: *le français parisien* (‘Parisian French’).

3.2. Participants

My research participants formed part of a growing continental francophone African population in Franco-Ontarian schools. Their numbers have grown exponentially since the beginning of the 1990s. The participants varied in their length of stay in Canada, their legal status (some were immigrants, but the majority were refugees), gender, class, age, and their linguistic and national backgrounds. They came from places as diverse as the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaïre), Djibouti, Gabon, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, and Togo. With no exception, all of the African students in MV were at least trilingual, speaking English, French, and their mother tongues, with various postcolonial histories of language learning and degrees of fluency in each language.

The research tells the stories of a group of continental Francophone African youths and the formation of their social identity in an urban, French-language high school in southwestern Ontario. Besides their gendered and racialized experience, their youth and refugee status was vital in their *moments of identification*, that is, where and how they saw themselves reflected in the mirror of their society (cf. Bhabha 1994). Put differently, once in North America, I contend, these youths were faced with a *social imaginary* in which they were already Blacks. This social imaginary was directly implicated in how and with whom they identified, which, in turn, influenced what they learned, linguistically and culturally. What they did learn, both in the 1990s and 2007, is Black Stylized English (BSE), which they accessed in and through Black popular culture. They learned by taking up and repositing the Rap linguistic and musical genre and, in different ways, acquiring and rearticulating the Hip-Hop cultural identity.
3.3. Black Stylized English

BSE is a subcategory of Black English (BE), what Geneva Smitherman refers to as Black talk (2000), which has its own grammar, morphology, and syntax. BSE, on the other hand, refers to ways of speaking that do not depend on a full mastery of the language. It banks more on ritual expressions such as whassup, whadap, whassup (‘what is happening’) my Nigga, and yo, yo homeboy [‘cool friend’], which are performed habitually and recurrently in Rap. These rituals, I explain elsewhere are more an expression of politics, moments of identification, and desire than they are of language or of mastering the language per se (Ibrahim 1999). It is a way of saying, “I too am Black” or “I too desire and identify with Blackness.”

Here, Black popular culture refers to films, newspapers, magazines, and more importantly music, such as rap, reggae, pop, and rhythm and blues (R&B). By Hip-Hop I am referring to “. . . everything from music, to clothing choices, attitudes, language, and an approach to culture and cultural artifacts positing and collaging them in an unsentimental fashion” (Walcott 1995: 5; see Chang 2005; Alim et al. 2009). More specifically, I use Hip-Hop to describe a way of dressing, walking, and talking. The dress refers to the myriad shades and shapes of the latest fly gear: high-top sneakers, bicycle shorts, chunky jewelry, baggy pants, and polka-dotted tops (Rose 1991: 227). The walk usually means moving the fingers simultaneously with the head and the rest of the body while walking. The talk, however, is BSE. In patterning these behaviors, African youth enter the realm of becoming Black. In sum, becoming Black is a subject-formation project (i.e., the process and the space within which subjectivity is formed) that is produced in and simultaneously produced by the process of language learning – BESL learning in this case. More specifically, becoming Black means learning BESL; yet the very process of BESL learning produces the epiphenomenon of becoming Black.

With regard to performances involving BESL, I saw almost no difference among the students in the 1990s and 2007. This confirmed the primary tenet of my early research, which was that, once in North America, continental African youths enter a social imaginary: a discursive or a psychic formation in which they are already constructed, imagined, and positioned – and thus treated by the hegemonic discourses and dominant groups – as Blacks. This space of (mostly subconscious) psychic formation does not acknowledge the differences in the students’ ethnicities, languages, nationalities, and cultural identities. Fanon (1967: 116) sums up it brilliantly in writing about himself as a Black Antillais coming to the metropolitan center of Paris:
I am given no chance, I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the “idea” that others have of me but of my own appearance. . . . I progress [italics added] by crawling. And already [italics added] I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. . . . When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle.

The students’ BSE performances confirmed again in 2007 that continental African youths find themselves in a racially conscious society that, wittingly or unwittingly and through fused social mechanisms such as racist representations, asks them to racially fit somewhere. To fit somewhere signifies choosing or becoming aware of one’s own being, which is partially reflected in one’s language practice. Choosing, however, is also a question of agency, which itself is governed and disciplined by social conditions. For example, to be Black in a racially conscious society, like the Euro-Canadian and U.S. societies, means that one is expected to be Black, act Black, and so be the marginalized other (Shaw-Taylor and Tuch 2007; Hall 1991; hooks 1992, 1990). Soon after understanding these abject social conditions of Blackness, continental African youths express their moments of identification in relation to African American and African Canadian cultures and languages, thus becoming Black. Here, it is noteworthy that taking up Rap and Hip-Hop and speaking BSE are performative acts of their desire to belong to a location, a politics, a memory, and a history.

4. Signifying BESL learning: Taking up hip-hop as a subject formation project

Except in Quebec, the English language is normally the medium of everyday interaction in Canada. This creates a situation where African youths would want to learn English rapidly. Popular culture, especially television, as well as friendship and peer pressure are three mechanisms that hasten the speed of learning the language (Ibrahim 1999). The African students felt peer pressure particularly in their early days at the school when they were denigrated for not speaking English. The pressure was even greater since, as Heller (2006) has explained, Franco-Ontarian students use English in their everyday interaction, especially outside class. If African students want to participate in school activities, they have no option but to learn English.
Making friends, and even learning English, is influenced by the popular imaginary, projected through the dominant source of representation: television. I asked students in all of the interviews, “Où est-ce que vous avez appris votre anglais?” (“Where did you learn English?”). “Télévision,” they all responded. However, within this télévision is a particular representation – Black popular culture – seems to interpellate6 (Althusser 1971) African youths’ identity and identification. Because African youths at first have few African Canadian/American friends, they access Black cultural identities and Black linguistic practice through Black popular culture, especially rap music video-clips, television programs, and Black cinema. When Najat (14, F, Djibouti)7 was queried about the most recent movies she had seen, she responded:

(1) Najat: I don’t know, I saw Waiting to Exhale and I saw what else I saw, I saw Swimmer, and I saw Jumanji; so wicked, all the movies. I went to Waiting to Exhale wid my boyfriend and I was like “men are rude” [laughs].

Awad: Oh believe me I know I know.

Najat: And den he [her boyfriend] was like “no women are rude.” I was like we’re like fighting you know and joking around. I was like, and de whole time like [laughs], and den when de woman burns the car, I was like “go girl!” You know and all the women are like “go girl!” you know? And den de men like khhh. I’m like “I’m gonna go get me a pop corn” [laughs]. (individual interview, English)

Najat’s response is of particular interest for two reasons. First, it shows the influence of Black English in the use of de, den, dat, and wicked as opposed to, respectively, the, then, that, and really really good. Secondly, it shows that youths’ social subjectivities, embedded in history, culture, and memory influence what they read and how they interpret it. For example, Najat’s reading of Waiting to Exhale was interpellated by her race and gender identities. She identified with the Black/woman in burning her husband’s car and clothes.

The following is another example (a videotaped moment) demonstrating the impact of Black popular culture on African students’ lives and identities. Just before a focus group interview I had with the boys, Electric Circus, a local television music and dance program that plays mostly, if not exclusively, Black music (Hip-hop, reggae, soul and R&B) began. “Silence!” one boy exclaimed in French. The boys started to listen attentively to the music and to watch the different fashions of the young people on the program. After the show, the boys code switched between French, English, and Somali as
they exchanged observations on the best music, the best dance, and the cutest girl. Rap and Hip-Hop music and the corresponding dress were obviously at the top of their list.

These moments of identification point to the process of identity formation, which is, in turn, implicated in the linguistic norm to be populated (using Bakhtin’s term). A significant aspect to note about identification is that it works over a period of time and at the subconscious level. Omer (18, M, Ethiopia), in the following excerpt, addresses the different ways in which African youths are influenced by their identification with Black representations:

(2) Black Canadian youths are influenced by the Afro-Americans. You watch for hours, you listen to Black music, you watch Black comedy, Mr. T., the Rap City. There you will see singers who dress in particular ways. You see, so. (individual interview, French)

Mukhi (19, M, Djibouti) explored identification by arguing that:

(3) We identify ourselves more with the Blacks of America. But, this is normal; this is genetic. We can’t, since we live in Canada, we can’t identify ourselves with Whites or country music, you know [laughs]. We are going to identify ourselves, on the contrary, with people of our color, who have our life style, you know. (group interview, French)

Here, Mukhi’s identification with Blackness is clearly pronounced. For Mukhi and all the students I spoke to, this identification is linked to their inability to relate to dominant groups, the public spaces they occupy, and their cultural forms and norms. Alternatively, Black popular culture emerged not only as a site for identification, but also as a space for language learning.

5. (B)ESL and the economy of population

For African youths, Rap/Hip-Hop was one site that emerged as more than just a cultural site of entertainment. It was also an influential site for language learning. Yet, importantly, Hip-Hop/Rap was more recurrent in the boys’ narratives than in the girls’, which raises the question of the role of gender in the process of identification and learning. The boys, for instance, seemed to invest substantially in this economy of Hip-Hop and Gangsta Rap language and style, which surfaced on their bodies and in their linguistic style. This
is what I am calling an *economy of population*, an economy of identity, ling-
guistic, cultural, and affective investment, where no investment is haphazard
and most of it takes place subconsciously. The following excerpts are two of
the many occasions on which students performed their investment in Black
North America through the re/citation of Rap linguistic styles.⁹

(4) Sam: One two, one two, mic check. A’ait [alright], a’ait, a’ait.

(5) Juma: This is the rapper, you know wha ‘m meaning? You know wha ‘m
saying?

(6) Sam: Mic mic mic; mic check. A’ait you wanna test it? Ah, I’ve the micro-
phone you know; a’ait.

(7) Sam: [laughs] I don’t rap man, c’mon give me a break. [laughs] Yo! A’ait
a’ait you know, we just about to finish de tape and all dat. Respect
to my main man [pointing to me]. So, you know, you know wha ‘m
mean, ‘m just represen’in Q7. One love to Q7 you know wha ‘m
mean and all my friends back to Q7 . . . Stop the tapin boy!

(8) Jamal: Kim Juma, live! Put the lights on. Wordap. [Students talking in So-

(9) Shapir: Yo, this is Shapir. I am trying to say peace to all my Niggaz, all my
bitches from a background that everybody in the house. So, yo, chill
out and this is how we gonna kick it. Bye and with that pie. All right,
peace yo.

(10) Sam: A’ait this is Sam represen’in AQA [. . . ] where it’s born, represen’in
you know wha ‘m mean? I wanna say whassup to all my Niggaz, you
know, peace and one love. You know wha ‘m mean, Q7 represen’in
for-ever. Peace! [Rap music]

(11) Jamal: [as a DJ] Crank it man, coming up. [rap music] (group interview,
English)

These excerpts are significant for many reasons. First, they demonstrate
the influence of BSE, particularly the language of rap: “Respect for my main
man,” “represen’in Q7,” “kick the free style,” “peace out, wardap,” “‘am
outa here,” “I am trying to say peace to all my Niggaz, all my bitches,” “so,
yo chill out and this is how we gonna kick it,” “I wanna say whassup to all my
Niggaz,” “peace and one love.” Second, when Shapir offers “peace to all” his
“Niggaz,” all his “bitches,” he is indeed repossessing the term *Nigga*, a signi-
fier common in Rap/Hip-Hop culture. It is common, for example nowadays,
to call a Black friend, especially young people, *Nigga* without its traditional
When life is off da hook

racist connotation. However, Shapir is using the sexist language that might exist in Rap (Rose 1991; Ibrahim 2000a). These forms of sexism have been challenged by female rappers like Queen Latifa and Lil Kim and were critiqued by fellow female and male students. For example, Samira (16, F, Djibouti) expressed her dismay at the sexist language found in some rap lyrics:

(12) OK, hip-hop, yes I know that everyone likes hip-hop. They dress in a certain way, no? The songs go well. But, they are really really, they have expressions like fuck, bitches etc. Sorry, but there is representation. (group interview, French)

The question of representation raised by Samira needs further exploration. Samira is addressing the impact that Hip-Hop expressions might have on the way society at large relates to, consumes, and perceives the Black female body, which in turn influences how it is represented both inside and outside Hip-Hop culture. One may even argue that these narratives, which express a psychic representation and mentality, are in part responsible for Samira’s precarious relation with Hip-Hop. Some boys also cited similar language of critique: “Occasionally, rap has an inappropriate language for the life in which we live, a world of violence and all that” (Hassan – 17, M, Djibouti – individual interview, French).

In the above excerpts, there are clear indications of Hip-Hop style, where one starts a performance by “checking the mic”: “One two, one two, mic check.” Then the rapper or the MC either recites an already composed lyric or otherwise “kicks a free style,” displaying the spontaneity that characterizes Rap. The rapper begins the public performance by introducing herself or himself with a true or made-up name – “yo this is Shapir” – and thanks her or his “main man,” or best friend, who often introduces the rapper to the public. Specific to Gangsta Rap, however, one represents not only oneself but a web of geophysical and metaphorical spaces and collectivities that are demarcated by people and territorial spaces: “represen’in Q7,” “a’ait, this is Sam represen’in AQA.” At the end of the performance, when the recitation or freestyle is completed, one again thanks the “main man” and “gives peace out” or “shad out” (shout out) to the people.

In its broader semiological sense, Hip-Hop was obviously an influential site of identification and language learning for the boys, especially Gangsta Rap. Depending on their age, the girls, on the other hand, had an ambivalent relationship to Rap; although both boys and girls used the same three strategies in learning ESL in general, and BSE in particular, through music: listening, reading, and reciting. Jamal, in the above cited extract, for instance,
was listening to the tunes and lyrics while reading and following the written text. Acting as a DJ, he then repeated not only the performer’s words and expressions but also his accent. The girls also used similar strategies to Jamal’s. During a picnic organized by a mixed group of males and females; for example, they listened to music while following the written text and reciting it (complete with accents) along with the singer. The girls’ choice of music (e.g., Whitney Houston and Toni Braxton, who were quite significant in the pop scene in the mid 1990s) differed in that it was softer than that chosen by the boys and contained mostly romantic themes.

As I have indicated, for the most part, the older girls/women (16–18 years old) tended to be more eclectic in how they related to Hip-Hop. Their eclecticism was evident in how they dressed and in the language they populated, engaged, and learned (Ibrahim 2008). Their clothing was either elegant middle class, partially Hip-Hop, or traditional, and their learned language was what Nourbese Philip (1991) calls plain Canadian English. The younger girls (12–14 years), on the other hand, like the boys, dressed in Hip-Hop style and performed BSE. Nonetheless, I was able to detect three features of BE in both the older and the younger girls’ narratives: the absence of the auxiliary be, BE negative concord, and the distributive be (for further details, see Ibrahim 1999).

6. Performative language, identification and acts of desire

African youths’ narratives show that they were quite volitional in their identification with Blackness and that the process of racialization had directly impacted their choices. As Amani (16, F, Somalia) explains:

We have to wonder why we try to really follow the model of the Americans who are Black? Because when you search for yourself, search for identification, you search for someone who reflects you, with whom you have something in common [italics added]. (group interview, French)

Amani was supported by Mukhi in the following conversation where he reflected on the impact of Rap (as just one among many other Black popular cultural forms) on his life and other lives around him:

(13) Awad: But do you listen to rap for example? I noticed that there are a number of students who listen to rap eh? Is . . .
Sam: It is not just us who listen to rap, everybody listens to rap. It is new.

Awad: But do you think that that influences how you speak, how . . .

Mukhi: *How we dress, how we speak, how we behave* [italics added]. (group interview, English)

These linguistic patterns and dress codes that Mukhi is addressing are, on the one hand, accessed and learned by African youths through Black popular culture and, on the other, as I have already noted, do not require mastery and fluency. Indeed, they are performative acts of desire and identification. Agreeing with both Mukhi and Amani, Hassan states:

(14) Hassan: Yes yes, African students are influenced by rap and hip-hop because they want to, yes, they are influenced probably a bit more because it is the desire to belong may be.

Awad: Belong to what?

Hassan: To a group, belong to a society, to have a model/fashion [he used the term *un modèle*]; you know, the desire to mark oneself, the desire to make, how do I say it? To be part of a *rap* society, you see. It is like getting into rock and roll or heavy metal. (individual interview, French)

As I concluded elsewhere, “one invests where one sees oneself mirrored” (Ibrahim 1999: 365). Hassan indicated in an individual interview that it would be awkward to see Blackness allied with rock and roll or heavy metal, as they are socially constructed as White music. On the other hand, he argued emphatically that African youth would have every reason to invest in basketball – constructed as a Black sport – but not hockey, for example.

7. The return of the repressed: Identity in language

Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not “who we are” or “where we came from,” so much as what we might become, “how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. . . . not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our ‘routes’” (Hall 1996: 4).
It is these “routes” that I have tried to walk through in this chapter. In so doing, I explored the roads taken by African youths in their journey of becoming Black and the outcomes of that journey. Here, Hip-Hop was identified as an influential site of identification in African students’ processes of becoming Black, which in turn affected what and how they learned. I have argued that the desire on the part of African youths, particularly the boys, to invest in or “populate” basketball is analogously no different from their desire to learn BESL. Thus creating an economy of population, where learning is neither aimless nor neutral, nor is it without the politics of identity. As I have shown, a second language learner can have a marginalized linguistic norm as a target, depending on who is learning what, why, and how. I have also discussed how these youths are becoming Blacks. Becoming Black, I have argued, is a subject formation project produced by and producing the very process of BESL. To become Black is to become an ethnographer who translates and looks around in an effort to understand what it means to be Black in Canada, for example.

Choosing the margin, then, is simultaneously an act of investment, an expression of desire, and a deliberate counter-hegemonic undertaking. Choosing Hip-Hop must be read as a special act of resistance. Historically, Rap/Hip-Hop has been formed as a voice for voicelessness and performed as a prophetic language that addresses silence, the silenced, and the state of being silenced. My incident with the police was introduced to delineate the socio-political context in which African youths and I circulate and form our identities, as well as to show everyday racisms, human degradation, and the impact of being under the hegemonic gaze. Elsewhere, I have discussed the significance of linking the students’ world with their word, their identities with what we teach and how we teach it (Ibrahim 1999). I have also proposed Hip-Hop as pedagogical sites that can be used in ESL classrooms (Ibrahim 1999, 2000a, 2004).

Here, I want to take a different turn by offering this chapter, retrospectively, as a methodological chapter – an example where micro and macro analyses are used simultaneously and where language is linked, if not returned, to identity and where identity is the governing apparatus of language learning. I am not suggesting that identity can never be separated from language – it is, however, made invisible in our search for “objectivity,” in our search for the learner’s individual characteristics (age, intelligence, aptitude, motivation, learning styles, and so on) and their effects on internalization of linguistic “input” (Toohey 2000).
What I have attempted to show in this chapter is the impact of the macro on the micro; that is, how the larger social identities form and transform our subject-or-selfhood which, in turn, influence our language learning processes and the linguistic norm we populate and eventually learn. We need to return and reposition these subjectivities and social identities back into language learning mechanisms and techniques and link the cultural, the social, the political, the stylistic, with the linguistic. I hope I have done precisely that. Central to this repositioning, however, are notions of identification, desire, and investment. We are yet to desire “the true word” to be spoken, Paulo Freire argued, only then can we desire “the world” differently (1993). This is when life is off da hook: dope, catchy, enticing, attractive, meaningful . . . you got the picture, right?

Notes

3. All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.
4. For Simon and Dippo (1986: 195), critical ethnographic research is a set of activities situated within a project that seeks and works its way towards social transformation. This project is political as well as pedagogical, and who the researcher is and what his or her racial, gender, and class embodiments are necessarily govern the research questions and findings. The project, then, according to Simon and Dippo, is “an activity determined both by real and present conditions, and certain conditions still to come which it is trying to bring into being” (p. 196). The assumption underpinning my project was based on the assertion that Canadian society is “inequitably structured and dominated by a hegemonic culture that suppresses a consideration and understanding of why things are the way they are and what must be done for things to be otherwise” (p. 196).
5. Staying somewhere to familiarize oneself with the place, its people, and their ways of “being” in that space. In the school, these sites are informal, such as hallways, the schoolyards, the school steps, the cafeteria, and the gymnasium, where the people in them are comfortable enough to speak their minds.
6. The subconscious ways in which individuals, given their genealogical history and memory, identify with particular discursive spaces and representations and the way this identification subsequently participates in the social formation of the Subject (identity).
7. Each participant’s name is followed by his/her age, gender (F = female, M = Male), and country of origin; and each extract is followed by the type of interview (individual or group) and the language in which it was conducted. The following transcription conventions are used:

- **underlined text** English spoken within French speech or French spoken within English speech
- [ ] Explanation or description of speaker’s actions
- [. . .] Text omitted

8. Mr. T. is an M.C. of a local Canadian rap music TV program called Rap City which airs mostly American rap lyrics.

9. The participants cited in the extracts are Sam (19, M, Djibouti), Juma (19, M, Senegal), Jamal (18, M, Djibouti), and Shapir (17, M, Somalia).
Chapter 11
Identity theft or revealing one’s true self?:
The media and construction of identity in Japanese as a foreign language

Yumiko Ohara

1. Introduction

The type of students who study the Japanese language has changed drastically in recent years (Galan 2008; Fukunaga 2006; Manion 2005; Parker 2004). Kataoka (1986) found that most students chose to study Japanese to enhance their career prospects in the early 1980s, but more recent observations suggest that the majority of students who take Japanese language classes are enthusiasts for Japanese culture such as videogames and animation. This change has been prompted largely by the ease through which Japanese culture can be accessed all over the world through TV, Internet, and the print media. In particular, animation, commonly known by the Japanese word anime, has created renewed interest in studying Japanese as a foreign language (Fukunaga 2006; Manion 2005). Anime began to be distributed worldwide in the 1980s, and currently approximately 60 percent of the anime shown in over 70 countries is Japanese. As of 2003, 20 anime programs were shown in the US (JETRO Economic Monthly Report 2005), and in 2006 the number grew to 37 (Eliashberg 2006). Subtitled anime that retain actual Japanese speech provide learners the opportunity to develop impressions about Japanese society, culture, and particularly language usage before they engage in formal study of the Japanese language. Hence, when students undertake formal instruction, they may try to mold their language usage to fit their own beliefs about Japanese society and culture. In doing so, students might also attempt to express and even reinvent their own identities in the target language, which may in some cases go against perceptions of what is “accepted” in the pedagogical culture of the Japanese language.

In an attempt to explore the effects of media exposure on identity construction, this chapter examines the identity perceptions and language usage of beginning learners of Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) at a university in
Hawai‘i from a critical pedagogical perspective (e.g., Freire 1970). Through an analysis of procedures such as skit presentations, focus-group interviews, and informal conversations with students who frequently watch anime, this study probes the learners’ attempts to incorporate knowledge learned from the Japanese media into their language repertoire and to create identities for themselves through the target language. By suggesting a strong influence of the Japanese media on learners, this study builds on emerging research which explores the effects of the media on learners of second/foreign languages and their construction of identity (Ibrahim 1999; Kinginger 2004; Piller 2001; Takahashi 2006).

2. Identity and Japanese as a foreign language

The Japanese language and society has offered an interesting site of observation for identity construction among second/foreign language learners. For example, although studies of the linguistic behavior of L1 speakers of Japanese have indicated that social expectations often lead Japanese speakers to employ a higher pitched voice in order to express femininity (Loveday 1986; Ohara 1992, 1997; van Bezooijen 1995), research on learners of Japanese shows that some learners have purposely resisted a higher pitch due to a desire to avoid sounding too cute and feminine (Ohara 1999, 2001). Similarly, it has been found that some syntactic forms which are associated with feminine speech are avoided by female learners of Japanese (Siegal 1994). Moreover, in terms of social expectations, it has been suggested that the “visual” side of identity further complicates the identity construction of non-Japanese since people whose appearance is obviously non-Japanese are not necessarily expected to conform to social norms (Kondo 1990; Ogulnick 1998; Ohara 2001).

Due to perceived differences in social norms pertaining especially to the use of language by women in the United States and Japan, most recent literature on the Japanese language has focused on gender. Yet, increased access to the media adds further complications to identity construction in a foreign language. Accordingly, even before they enter the language classroom, learners who consume Japanese media may be faced with questions in terms of the type of language they want and do not want to employ and the kinds of identities they want to display as they develop their proficiency in the language. Accordingly, the questions I specifically explore in this chapter are: 1) Is the trend of high exposure to the Japanese media through anime, movies, and TV also evident in beginning level students in Hawai‘i?; 2) Does prior
exposure to the media result in better understanding of the Japanese language and culture?; 3) Do beginning level students actively engage in identity construction in the target language? Or, put another way, do the students use the language in creative ways to suit their perceived identity?; and 4) If they do, then to what extent does exposure to Japanese media influence identity construction?

2.2. Current pedagogical practices

The influence of Japanese media on learners of Japanese raises questions about the adequacy of materials and actual courses for studying the language. In the case of teaching Japanese as a foreign language, textbooks have already been criticized for a failure to represent the dynamic relationship between linguistic usage and its situational context, especially of the relationship between language and gender. Although it has been shown that even the most supposedly masculine forms such as sentence final particles and phonological variants are utilized by females in Japanese in some contexts (Matsumoto 1996; Okamoto 1995; Okamoto and Sato 1992), Siegal and Okamoto (2003) discovered a very static view of gender in their examination of seven popular Japanese textbooks. They found that language was dichotomized into female and male language, often with contrastive model conversations for females and males which idealized gender differences. Similarly, analyzing 12 current Japanese textbooks with a business orientation, Thomson and Otsuji (2003) noted that the textbooks “present a stereotypical and exaggerated version of social practices of the Japanese business community” (2003: 185). Some Japanese teachers have indicated that they do not teach gendered speech because they see the differences are disappearing, some teach it as an act of identity that the students can try with difference speech styles and identities, and some teach dichotomized gendered speech because they see it is a part of the culture (Siegal and Okamoto 2003).

Concentrating primarily on gender, these studies of Japanese language textbooks did not focus on the wide array of images that learners might be receiving from the Japanese media. In addition to information about gender and language, viewers of the media hear slang used by young television personalities and *anime* characters, and they are also given a dynamic perspective on Japanese culture itself, including fashion styles (traditional clothing such as kimono versus more modern fashions), hair styles and hair colors, and the pursuit of leisure activities and sports (for example, traditional sports such
2.3. Identity construction and critical pedagogy

Given the variety of information that consumers of the media are provided, it might be argued that the purpose of a language textbook or a language class should be to help learners weave their way through that information by teaching them “proper” ways of speaking and “correct” ways of behaving in that culture. Yet, such an argument would contrast directly with the tenets of a critical pedagogy, in which students are given equal voices in determining the content of their course of study. Developed by Paulo Freire in his attempts to promote first-language literacy in Brazil, critical pedagogy assumes that education is never neutral: it either promotes learners to accept the world as it is presented to them or it encourages them to reflect critically on the materials they are learning as well as their own situation in life (Freire 1970). Students who are encouraged to reflect critically on the content of a class may then be able to use that experience to transform or change their own lives.

Critical pedagogy has been applied in second/foreign language situations (e.g., Benesch 2001; Norton and Toohey 2004; Shin and Crookes 2005), but most of this work has focused on English language pedagogy. One example of critical pedagogy in a Japanese language classroom is found in Ohara, Saft and Crookes (2001), which documents an attempt to counter the general lack of attention given to the changing nature of gender in Japanese as a foreign language classes. Here, the researchers employed a feminist critical pedagogical approach through which a four-day module was used as part of a beginning-level class to provide learners with an appreciation of the dynamic sense of gender in Japanese. This study employed short sociolinguistic articles concerning gendered pitch levels, four Japanese TV commercials, and short skits created by the students based on the commercials to show that it was possible to use even beginning-level Japanese linguistic structures to create diverse gender identities. While the textbook used by the students in this study offered very little information about gender roles in Japanese society, the commercials provided students with images of women and men using different language and playing different roles. One commercial showed a woman with a husky voice advertising chocolate, another commercial featured a man eating soup and talking in a high-pitched voice, a third one had three women eating pies, and a fourth one featured a businessman with a high-pressured life.
While it may be difficult for L2 learners to transform their approach to identity construction based on a four-day module, the results indicated that the students used their viewing of the commercials to explore different ways of using Japanese and to create in short commercials a variety of gendered identities. In the current study, I employ these same approaches in an attempt to understand the different ways that learners are influenced by the media. Rather than just expecting learners to accept the information presented to them in a textbook or by the teacher, I employed methods that would give them a voice in negotiating and exploring their own identities.

3. Methodology

Data were gathered in the form of a questionnaire, a group project of skit-making, focus group interviews, and unstructured and informal conversations with individual students. It was given in three classes, two first semester, first year elementary Japanese classes and one lower level undergraduate class called Japanese culture. In total, 61 students participated in this survey: 37 in the two sections of Japanese language class and 24 in the Japanese culture class.

The skit was designed to challenge students in the two language classes to utilize their understanding of the language and culture to create a coherent discourse and identity. This was meant as an activity to give the students an opportunity to add their own voice to the class and think about and express their own L2 identities. Toward this goal, students were asked in pairs or small groups to write a script for a short skit and act it out in front of the entire class, and to perform it later for a speech contest organized at the college. In order to develop possible ideas for their skits, students viewed a few short clips of Japanese commercials.

In addition, six of the students from the two language classes were asked to participate twice in a focus group discussion in English about the media, identity, and language, before and after the skit assignment. Following the focus group discussions, I engaged in informal conversations in English with two students individually concerning identity and the Japanese language. The focus group discussions and skits were videotaped. The two informal conversations were not videotaped but are reproduced in the next section from notes taken directly after the exchanges occurred.

Given Hawai‘i’s historical and cultural links to Japan, it can be argued that these students might have an added incentive to learn the language. In this study, some of the students were indeed heritage learners of Japanese
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(e.g., Kondo-Brown 2001; Lee 2005), but they were by far in the minority. Of the 24 in the culture class, three were of Japanese ancestry, and of the 37 learners of Japanese, four were heritage learners. Of course, it might still be presumed that Hawai‘i, with its geographic location and large Asian population, provides its residents more access to Japanese culture than other parts of the United States. This may be indeed true to a certain extent, but many of the participants were from states other than Hawai‘i and many participants were from other countries. Furthermore, with the increasing accessibility of the Internet throughout the world, it is difficult to say that current residents of Hawai‘i necessarily have much greater access to Japanese culture than people living in other places.

4. Findings

4.1. Questionnaire

Results from the questionnaire revealed that over 90 percent of the students had extensive exposure to the Japanese media including anime, manga “comics,” drama, video games, and music. In response to the question, “Have media products such as video games, anime, songs, TV dramas, or movies influenced your interest in Japan?”, one student wrote: “Absolutely. After immersing myself in it, I want to speak the language, visit the country, and date a Japanese boy!” Another one wrote, “Yes, anime had a great influence on my interest in Japan.” To the question, “Have media products influenced your interest in the Japanese language?” another noted: “Yes, I want to learn Japanese so I can watch/listen to media without having to read subtitles.” It is interesting to note that there are numerous fan sites on the web where fans discuss and even compare various subtitles given to the same anime program by anime enthusiasts themselves. Furthermore, this motivation to watch the media and understand the language is one of the most frequently cited motivations for learning the language among anime fans (Fukunaga 2006; Manion 2005). Along similar lines, another student answered this question by writing, “Yes, after seeing Honey and Clover I wanted to learn Japanese.” For the question, “Is or was a Japanese media product a big part of your life? If yes, how?” one student wrote “It has always been in my life.” Another student wrote: “There was this one Japanese show I watched in 2003 that opened me to EVERYTHING. It caused me to change the way I dress, talk, act, & the way I perceive foreign languages.” This comment illustrates the dynamic
and reinventive nature of identity as this student changed many aspects of her persona after watching a specific *anime*.

### 4.2. Unstructured conversations with two students

Spontaneous conversations that were initiated by the students shed additional light on the role of the media in the students’ formation of identities. The following exchange (based on my fieldnotes) is a conversation between myself and Fred, a Canadian, Caucasian male. During the Japanese language class, he mentioned many *anime* in which female characters talk like men. The following conversation began after Fred showed me a video clip he mentioned in class:

**Conversation (1)**

*Fred starts the video and we watch it for a while*

1. Yumiko: You were right about her use of language. She talks very
2.   manly.
3. Fred: Yeah.
4. Yumiko: This is great. What do you think?
5. Fred: I like it.
6. Yumiko: Do you watch this kind of stuff a lot?
7. Fred: Yeah, I guess I might appear quiet and to certain extent
8.   normal but I am wild. and crazy inside, and when I speak
9.   Japanese that part of my personality comes alive.
10. Yumiko: You mean like *kusonezumi* ['filthy rat']
11. Fred: Yeah *yakuza* ['gangster'], I really like their way of talking, whenever,
12.   *yakuza* or Osaka. People are in an *anime* or video or
13.   something, I am so drawn to them I want to be able to talk
14.   like them because that’s me, I feel.
15. Yumiko: And *yakuza* ['gangster’] right?
16. Fred: Yeah *yakuza*, I really like their way of talking, whenever,
17.   *yakuza* or Osaka. People are in an *anime* or video or
18.   something, I am so drawn to them I want to be able to talk
19.   like them because that’s me, I feel.
20. Yumiko: You should really go to Japan.
21. Fred: I really like Osaka. I think I should go to Osaka. I really
22.   kinda feel for it, ever-since when I was a kid, I was
23.   fascinated by Osakaben [Osaka dialect].
24. Yumiko: And *yakuza* ['gangster’] right?
25. Fred: Yeah *yakuza*, I really like their way of talking, whenever,
26.   *yakuza* or Osaka. People are in an *anime* or video or
27.   something, I am so drawn to them I want to be able to talk
28.   like them because that’s me, I feel.

Here, Fred talks about his “real” identity (e.g., Benwell and Stokoe 2006) evoked by the target language. It is interesting to note that although Fred is
still in the very beginning stage of JFL acquisition, he has a strong affiliation with some varieties of the target language. As he states in line 10, the affiliation results from his experience of watching Japanese media products. Thus, the level of identification and proficiency do not necessarily have to be matched, which Pavlenko and Blackledge (2003: 6) point out when they claim that “individuals with high levels of identification with the target language group may exhibit low levels of linguistic proficiency.” Without exposure to the media, it is unlikely for a learner such as Fred to have such understanding and feeling toward a variety of a language.

It is thus important to emphasize that despite limited proficiency, Fred has “found” his identity through the Japanese language and the Japanese media as stated in lines 7–9 and 11. In line 10, when I mentioned kusonezumi ‘filthy rat’ (literally ‘shit rat,’ which is used as a derogatory term toward a person), I was referring back to an earlier conversation when he said that he really liked the word which he heard used in some anime and since then tried to use it whenever possible. Note that Fred draws a close relationship to the Osaka dialect of Japanese and to yakuza ‘the Japanese mafia’ in lines 13–15 and 17–20. Members of the yakuza especially are often associated with usage of language that is rough and masculine. It is through his watching of anime that Fred has come to link the yakuza way of speaking with his own “wild” side. Based on his watching of anime, he actively decided the type of identity that he wanted to construct for himself in his foreign language.

The other student with whom I spoke, Deborah, a female Caucasian student from a western state in the US, also claimed to have a strong affiliation with a certain way of speaking in Japanese as indicated in the following exchange. In this conversation, we were talking about the particular teacher whose class she was not happy about:

Conversation (2)

1 Yumiko: So are you going to take the class next semester?
2 Deborah: Yaaadaaa [with exaggerated intonation contour, wide range of pitch, high-pitched, and prolonged pronunciation]
3 Yumiko: What, what is that?
4 Deborah: I heard a girl in an anime saying yaaadaaa and I said that’s mine, I am getting that. It is so cool yaaadaaaa, my friends love it whenever I do it.
5 Yumiko: Why did you want it so much?
6 Deborah: Because it sounds so cute and girly it’s like showing your ultimate femininity, ultimate girliness and you can also use it to say no very directly. It’s awesome.
Yaaadaaa is a phonetic variant of iya da, which literally means ‘it is no’ and which serves as a way for speakers to express a desire not to do something or a dislike for something. When the first vowel sound is dropped and the others elongated as in yaaadaaa, it becomes an emphatic, even exaggerated way of saying “no,” as in “no way.” This expression is known to be typically used by young women in Japan who are often referred to as burikko ‘cuties’ (e.g., Kinsella 1995; Miller 2004). When uttered by a female in a high-pitched voice, it still functions as an expression of negative desire, but it becomes distinctly feminine, allowing women to say “no” but in a cute, exaggerated manner that emphasizes and maintains their femininity.

In line 4, it is clear that Deborah’s connection to this phrase came from her watching of anime which provided her with a range of possible styles and expressions beyond those available in her class and her textbooks. As she states in lines 4–6, she claimed the expression as hers soon after hearing it. Such a statement suggests, among other things, that foreign language learners can act very much as active agents in the construction of their identities in the target language. Deborah might not have known about the expression yaaaadaaaa until she watched anime, but as soon as she heard it, she was able to adopt it as her own to construct herself as a certain person, one who sounds cute and girly, but who is capable of saying her opinion. She appears pleased with both the expression and her identity, as she states that her friends “love it.” Accordingly, then, although Deborah makes a much more explicit connection between her identity and gender than Fred, both conversations indicate attempts of the two learners to actively consider their identities in the target language in relation to the media available to them and to choose particular identities for themselves.

In relation to this, the conversations with Deborah and Fred suggest that, with the spread of the Japanese media around the world, learners very likely are not just relying on their textbooks and formal language classes to find the linguistic resources to express their identities. In fact, if we assume that most Japanese language textbooks tend to present more formal language at the beginning levels (Siegal and Okamoto 2003), then it appears as though learners might forego some of this formal language in favor of the casual or even vulgar language they hear in anime.

4.3. Skits

The informal conversations showed both the influence of the media and the active identity construction of two particular students, and the skits indicated
that this was part of a general trend on the part of the students in my classes. Due to limited space, I will present two of these skits. I focus on sentence final particles and personal pronouns which are generally regarded as indicating gender differences (McGloin 1990; Okamoto 1995; Shurtz 2004). In particular, I refer to the observation that younger people in Japan are tending to use similar types of final particles and personal pronouns regardless of gender (Kobayashi 1993). It is interesting to note that a new form of dialect seems to be developing which is used by young people in casual settings, which employs some characteristics of regional dialects, and which is “defined less by geography than age and popular culture” (Carroll 2001). The skit data also resonates with Miyazaki’s (2004) findings in her study of junior high school students who were using a wider variety of first person pronoun forms. Females used ore or boku, previously thought to be only available to men, while some males used atashi, often labeled a feminine pronoun.

The first skit below shows participants engaged in a casual conversation in which they employ items that are gender marked in accord with the youthful ways of speaking described above. The influence from the media is also apparent. There are three participants: one female Taiwanese (Wang), and two males, a Taiwanese (Chen) and a Caucasian American from Hawai’i (Rob). The topic of the skit focuses on the participants’ preparation for their upcoming Japanese final examination.

Skit (1)

1 Chen: Fainaru no junbi wa susunde iru?
Are you making progress in preparing for the final?

2 Wang: He fainaru? Nani sore?
Huh, final? What is that?

3 Rob: Fainaru ga nani katte? Nanto boketeru no?
Are you asking what is a final? Are you losing it?

4 Chen: Joodan wa yamete yo benkyoo susunderu no? Boku jaa
nihongo wan oo wan no haini ga amari wakaranai tte itteta
kedo.
Stop kidding around. Are you making progress in your studying? As for me, I was saying that I am not sure how much will be covered for JPNS101.

5 Wang: Nani ya nihongo wan oo wan tte kueru no?
What is JPNS101? Is it edible?

6 Rob: Kanojo no koto hottoko kanojo kitto nani ka yotei aru yo.
Let’s just leave her. I am sure she has some kind of a plan.
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9 Chen: *Un tabun ichinichi juu geemu de ason de iru to omou.* Yeah, something like doing games all day, I think.

10 Wang: *Watashi wa ichinichi juu boo tto suru.* I am going to just think nothing about it.

11 Rob: *Datte itsumo bootto shitteru jan.* That’s what you do always, don’t you.

12 Wang: *Sore de ii sugi desho watashi datte atama tsukau toki ga aru n da kara.* That’s too much. I do use my mind sometimes, you know.

14 Chen: *Tatoeba?* For example?

15 Wang: *Etto tatoeba nani o taberu ka raamen ni suru ka rokomoko ni suru ka mayou n da yo nee?* Well, for example, I really get confused about what should I eat, should I eat ramen or should I eat locomoco?10

17 Rob: *Datte atama tsukau a koto zenzen nai desho?* You really never have used your mind much, have you?

18 Wang: *Atashi no okaasan ni mo iwareta.* My mother said the same thing.

19 Chen: *Nande konna yatsu no tomodachi nan da da-daroo.* I do not know why I hang around with her.

20 Rob: *Un dookan.* Ditto.

This skit features numerous expressions that, while typical of young Japanese speakers’ speech and similar to what might be heard in the media, are not found in beginning level textbooks. In particular, Rob’s usage of *boketeru* (‘lose one’s mind’) in line 3, Wang’s use of *kueru* (‘to eat’) in line 7, and *dookan* (‘ditto’) in line 20 are not commonly a part of a beginning learner’s repertoire. *Kueru* is generally referred to as a more vulgar version of the verb *taberu* (‘to eat’). Many Japanese linguists consider this word to be a prototypical item of male language (e.g., Okamoto and Sato 1992). Similarly, Chen’s use of the expression *yamete yo* (‘stop it’) can be seen as feminine and *benkyoo susunderu no?* (‘Are you making progress on your studying?’), which ends with the particle *no* in line 4 has been described as either feminine or neutral. Rob’s use of *jan* (‘isn’t it?’) in line 11 is also interesting. One of the major Japanese dictionaries, Diajirin (1995) states that the word is a variant form of *de wa nai ka* (‘isn’t it?’) and that it is mainly used by youths. It is also a form not something commonly found in Japanese language textbooks.

The only first person pronouns used were *boku* by Chen in line 4, *watashi* by Wang in lines 10 and 12, and *atashi* by Wang in line 18. *Watashi* is
commonly employed by both females and males in formal settings (Miyazaki 2004). *Atashi* is a variant of *watashi* and typically considered feminine. Thus, with the usage of these types of linguistic items, the skit can be viewed as an attempt by the female participant, as well as the two males, to construct identities as young speakers of Japanese. Part of this identity construction, at least for Chen and Wang, is usage of language that goes against the traditional views of gendered language in Japan. Since these forms are not learned from their textbook, they should be seen as an active attempt by the students to use information from outside sources, including the media, to construct a specific type of identity for themselves.

The second skit was one in which gender played a more prominent role. It was performed by Alison and Kate, two female Japanese-Americans from Hawai‘i, Barbara, a Caucasian female from Hawai‘i, Joan, a Caucasian female from the northern part of the US, and Fred, the Caucasian male from Canada also discussed above. This skit is a commercial for candy and features a *yakuza* who steals candy from a group of girls but then transforms into a girl himself after eating the candy:

**Skit (2)**

1. Alison: *Hai onna no ko ga aruite imasu*  
   There are girls walking.
2. Kate: *Kono kayndii wa totemo oishii desu.*  
   This candy is very delicious.
3. Barbara: *Hai howaito rabitto kyandii ga ichiban suki*  
   Yes, I like White Rabbit Candies the best.
   Oh, these are mine [takes the candies away]. Looks delicious.
5. Kate: *Yakuusan ni kayndii o kaeshite kudasai.*  
   Mr. Yakuza, give us back the candies.
6. Fred: [loud laugh] *ima kara kyandii o*  
   I’m going to eat the [he puts it in his mouth]
7. *Kuu zoo.*  
   Candies now.
8. Barbara: *Otoko wa totemo ijiwaru ne.*  
   Guys are really mean.
9. Alison: *Kono kyandii wa tabetara onna no ko ni narimasu.*  
   If you eat this candy, you will turn into a girl. [phone ringing]
10. Fred: *Hai, moshimoshi.*  
   Yes, hello.
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11 Joan: Kyoudii o moratta?
Did you get the candies?

12 Fred: Hai.
Yes [pitch of his voice suddenly gets very high from very low]

13 Shizuka ni.
Be quiet.

14 Joan: Nande sonna koe de?
What’s with your voice?

15 Fred: Hai?
Yes?

16 Joan: Onna no ko mitai ni shaberu n ja?
Why are you talking like a girl?

17 Fred: Nani?
What?

18 Alison: Onna no ko ni narimashita.
He turned into a girl.

[The yakuza cries in a high-pitched voice and runs away]

19 Barbara & Kate: Howaito rabitto kyandii wa oishii desu.
White Rabbit Candies are delicious.

20 Alison: Atarashii aji wa sutoroberii to kohii.
The new flavors are strawberry and coffee.

This skit features a transformation of roles in the form of extremely masculine speech to a very feminine way of speaking. Fred begins this skit using very masculine forms such as ore to refer to himself and the expression kiu zo, the vulgar form of ‘eat’ and the final particle zo, both generally referred to as a male-marked (Okamoto and Sato 1992; Miyazaki 2004). However, after Fred eats the candy, the pitch of his voice becomes very high and he stops using masculine forms, prompting the other participants to comment not only that he talks like a girl but also that he has become a girl. In a sense, this skit was a combination of Fred’s desire to emulate the language and identity of a yakuza and the other participants’ attempt to incorporate female identities into the skit. In the case of Fred, we know that his interest in yakuza and yakuza language came from his consumption of Japanese anime, but we can see that he is not the only one to manipulate the relationship between identities and language to actively construct gendered identities. All of the participants work together to construct Fred’s transformation from a rough-speaking yakuza to a “girl,” culminating with Alison’s statement in line 18 that he has indeed turned into a girl. The very idea of characters transforming
from one form, for example, a human, to another form, such as a superhu-
man, as well as a female to male and vice versa is very common in anime
(Napier 2000). Thus, the transformation of the character in this skit from a
rough-talking man into a feminine-sounding girl is very consistent with the
students’ consumption of anime.

4.4. Focus group interviews

While the skits make it possible to see the students using a variety of lin-
guistic forms that display different identities, it is sometimes difficult to see
a connection between the identities and the students’ consumption of media.
In order to gain a better understanding of where this knowledge was coming
from, I engaged in focus group interviews with a subset of the students. I
chose three Korean students and three Caucasian students since they seemed
to be very representative of the students in first year Japanese classes.

For some of the students, the connection between the media and ways
of speaking was mediated by a larger interest. One of the Korean female
students indicated that the Japanese media influenced her path of study:

Interview (1)

Jiyeon: Actually I saw many animations and I wanna be like uh participating in
making animations, so I am trying to do like computer graphics. So my
major is computer science. I started learning the Japanese when I was
in high school because of the animation, I still watch animations (. . .) Japanese dramas.

Jiyeon then went on to suggest that her own use of Japanese was influenced
by the knowledge she gained from the media. Based on her viewing of anime
and Japanese dramas, she states:

Jiyeon: Japanese girls use yo and cute accent. Friends in Korea they told me that
I sound different when I speak in Japanese especially because I speak in a
dialect maybe because of that but (. . .) speaking Japanese made me sound
more cute.

Here, Jiyeon describes her perception of Japanese girls as using the par-
ticle yo and having a cute accent. Yo is a discourse particle that is often found
at the end of an utterance preceded by a verb, a noun, or other particles.
Depending on the combination in which it occurs, it can express a sense of
insistence, a sense of femininity, or sometimes both (for further discussion of this particle see McGloin 1990). After that, she suggests that her own usage of such characteristics when speaking in Japanese has led her, according to her friends at least, to sound “cuter,” a comment which prompted other female focus group participants to discuss the varying levels of “cuteness” they were willing to produce in Japanese.

Similar to Jiyeon, one of the male Korean students, Min, conceded a long interest in the Japanese media, explaining that the media influenced his language usage. He reported that he used the first person masculine pronoun ore as a result of the influence of Japanese movies and anime. Ore is the first-person pronoun noted by Miyazaki (2004) to be the strongest-sounding of all first-person Japanese pronouns, and thus it is the pronoun form that yakuza as well as the heroes of action anime might be expected to use.

Though Min did not explicitly state that he uses ore in an effort to sound strong, one of the other male students (a Caucasian from Hawai‘i) followed his comment with a direct connection between the media and strong, “masculine” speech styles:

Interview (2)

Trent: When you watch those Japanese programs, you really get a sense that men, especially those leading characters, are supposed to be displaying their toughness by using words like ore and even by grunting a lot [laugh].

Trent thus shows an understanding between a certain style of speech, gender, and also the media. The media, in an effort to portray certain characters as tough and masculine, will use specific linguistic items to accomplish that portrayal. Interestingly, when pressed as to whether he himself would employ such a tough-sounding style in Japanese, Trent indicated that he would have choices in terms of the type of identity he would construct.

Trent: Well, I think it would depend on the situation. I’d like to think that if I needed to, like if someone was challenging me or something, that I could use an ore or two in my speech to let them know I was serious, but I don’t think I would do that all the time—it would be a little extreme-like in the animation programs.

Hence, Trent indicates not only that identity construction is a dynamic process that might vary from situation to situation but also that he thinks he
Yumiko Ohara has the ability to use some of the speech he has seen in anime to create at least one of these styles, a tough style.

5. Conclusions and implications

Through an analysis of data gathered using multiple methods, this study indicates that many beginning level learners of Japanese formed their identities as speakers of Japanese in response to their significant exposure to Japanese media. The findings support Fukunaga (2006), who found that there are linguistics advantages of repetitive watching of anime including word recognition and awareness of various linguistics features. At the same time, the results suggest that many of these same learners incorporated the expressions and linguistic forms that they had learned through their exposure to the media into their own language usage and into their identity construction in the target language. In other words, the learners seemed to recognize that identity is not just a stable and static phenomenon that merely transfers from their first language and native culture. Instead, they were aware that identity construction is a dynamic process and that they were agents who could control to a high degree the type of identity that they constructed in their foreign language. In doing so, many learners went beyond the formal expressions presented to them in textbooks and in classrooms and drew on the knowledge of language and culture they learned from the Japanese media.

This study contributes to an emerging area of research (e.g., Black 2005; Ibrahim 1999; Thorne 2008) that examines the effects of the media on L2 learning and identity construction. The findings suggest that because of the increased accessibility of the Japanese media throughout the world, it is becoming an important site for the negotiation and construction of identity for learners of Japanese. The media, and especially anime, provide the learner with a wider range of possible options in terms of identity construction than is usually available in language textbooks. Based on their consumption of anime, learners can view the speech styles of young and cool characters and then determine what aspects of those styles they themselves want to adopt. Likewise, a learner can view gendered characters using language in different ways and then choose what type of personality they want to create for themselves in their additional language. They may want to employ ore and rough language to emphasize masculine identities, like Fred, or they may want to adopt yaadaa and feminine language resources to underscore their femininity,
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like Deborah and Jiyeon. Such a range of options is not typically found in Japanese language textbooks and classrooms. It is undoubtedly partly for this reason that anime has become so popular among Japanese language learners.

Finally, in terms of critical pedagogy, this study suggests a need to embrace the learners’ exposure to outside media resources. As the discussions and conversations with students in this study indicate, learners bring with them this exposure to even the most beginning levels. In fact, their exposure to the media might indeed be the very reason they decided to study the language. Any teacher who, for example, would tell a learner such as Deborah that she should not use yaaadaa because it was too casual, or who would try to prevent Fred from using vulgar language would risk driving those students away from being interested in the class and possibly discourage them from pursuing the language. This is not to say that language teachers have to encourage students to use casual and vulgar forms, but at the very least students should be given the opportunity to explore the options available to them in terms of identity construction and be offered a voice to explore and negotiate possible identities in the classroom. To be certain, this was a fairly small-scale study, but the learners seemed to excel when given the chance to create different identities in the skits, and some of them, in later discussions and conversations, described their own attempts to use language to actively construct identities for themselves. More research is necessary to examine different classroom methods that could be used to stimulate learners’ identity construction, but this study indicates that teachers may be able to utilize students’ prior knowledge of the language through the media to aid students in finding and creating their desired identities in the target language.

Notes

2. “Honey and Clover” is the title of a popular manga later adapted into an anime series in 2005 in Japan.
3. All the participants are identified with pseudo-names.
4. For example, a description for a Japanese computer game named Yakuza (2006 Sega) says, “In an attempt to capture the rough language of the Japanese gangster subculture, Sega has opted to translate Yakuza with all its cursing (presented in
both voiced samples and in-game text) intact. This, coupled with scenes of stark violence, means that *Yakuza* is definitely not for impressionable children."

5. There are many gender-differentiated personal pronouns in Japanese; however, unlike English, in Japanese, a pronoun is often deleted with person reference understood from context.

6. Unlike many other universities in this part of the US, there are fewer local students or heritage students who take Japanese language at our university. Instead there are many Caucasian students who come from the mainland US and many students from Asian countries such as Korea and Taiwan.

7. The skits were transcribed as accurately as possible including original mistakes made by the students.

8. All the Korean students in my classes and thus also the Korean participants for this study were exchange students who were studying at the university in Hawai’i for either one or two semesters.

9. Slum Dunk is the title of a popular *manga* turned *anime* series featuring high school basketball teams. Domestic circulation of this series in 2007 was 120 million or more, and the average of the volume sales is the highest in Japan (http://ja.wikipedia.org/).

10. “The *Loco Moco* is a dish unique to Hawaiian cuisine. There are many variations, but the essential loco moco consists of white rice topped with a hamburger patty, a fried egg, and brown gravy” (http://en.wikipedia.org/).
Chapter 12
Identity and interaction in internet-mediated contexts

Steven L. Thorne and Rebecca Black

1. Introduction

In a recent fictional short story, Salman Rushdie (2008) describes an epiphany experienced by Akbar the Great. It seems that Akbar, whose reputation was so vast as to be “too much to be a single human personage,” became suddenly aware of the indexicalities evoked by the pronouns “I” and “we” and the ways they contribute to constructing multiple selves and social worlds. In particular, Akbar began to meditate “about the disturbing possibilities of the first person singular, the ‘I’” in application to himself, and reciprocally, he became aware that perhaps his many subjects, who he had always reductively presumed to be monodimensional, were in fact pluralities of selves, “we-s,” just as he was. Akbar’s epiphany resulted in the following realization:

[I]t was accordingly inevitable that the men and women over whom he ruled should also conceive of themselves as “we”s. They saw themselves, perhaps, as plural entities made up of themselves plus their children, mothers, aunts, employers, co-worshipers, fellow-workers, clans, and friends. They, too, saw their selves as multiple, one self that was the father of their children, another that was their parents’ child; they knew themselves to be different with their employers than they were at home with their wives – in short, they were all bags of selves, bursting with plurality, just as he was. (p. 66)

This passage focuses attention on the permeable and contingent “I” as an entity-process that is always constituted in and among webs of culturally organized relationships. Identity work is not something that is done alone. Rather, identity is “the social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 586), a process that is performed and mutually enacted with the contributions, recognition, and confirmation or rejection of other people (Butler 1990). Indeed, current research has critiqued the assumption that identity is a priori or categorically stable (Blommaert 2005; Norton 2000). Rather, as Blommaert has proposed, identity is usefully examined as “particular forms
of semiotic potential, organized in a repertoire” (emphasis in the original, p. 207). This allows for a “performance approach to identities, which focuses on identity as a form of socially meaningful practice” (ibid.: 208). For L2 learners, and more generally for participants in educational settings of all kinds, “learning” fundamentally involves developing new performative repertoires, often semiotic ones, and as such entails gaining the capacity to interactively enact relevant identities and to become, to paraphrase Lave and Wenger (1991), different kinds of persons over time. In this sense, “learning” and “identity” are aspects of dialectical transformation rooted in interactions with experienced or more established members of a community. Researchers utilizing language socialization frameworks have been particularly attuned to this issue and have described the conditions, some facilitative and others not, that help L2 learners develop discrete semiotic resources as well as a sensitivity to expected dispositions, normative patterns of interaction, and status-appropriate identity stances (Duff 2002; Ochs 1993; Tarone 2007).

In this chapter, we revisit and extend some of our earlier research on L2 learning in digitally mediated environments (Black 2006, 2008; Thorne 2003, 2008a, 2009) and focus particularly on the conditions and affordances that L2 participants mobilize in new media contexts. Inspired by Rushdie’s fictional account of Akbar the Great, we want to consider both the temporally emergent, performative, plural, and the malleable qualities of identities while also exploring the ways that humans sometimes seem to maintain a superordinate view of the self, of an “I”, that seems to have transportability across languages and contexts (e.g., Crawshaw et al. 2001). To quote again from Rushdie (2008), on a very hot day many years ago on the plains of India, Akbar asked himself this question:

if his many-selved subjects managed to think of themselves in the singular rather than the plural, could he, too, be an “I”? Could there be an “I” that was simply oneself? Were there such naked, solitary “I”s buried beneath the overcrowded “we”s of the earth?

2. Doing identity in digital environments

The advent of the Internet has given rise to a wealth of online environments through which the everyday construction of identities are mediated by textual and multimodal tools involving what are arguably new literacies and communicative genres. A crucial component of identity construction in such
spaces is ongoing interaction with close social networks of familiars as well as with geographically distant and anonymous audiences. In this chapter, we explore chronologically and in some cases also ontologically new language and literacy practices, such as Internet-mediated intercultural communication, blogging and instant messaging, fan fiction communities, and popular culture blogs and web sites that enable learners to develop language skills as they participate in socially meaningful practices and develop situated identities. In addition, drawing upon socioculturally informed identity research (e.g., Block 2007; Bucholz and Hall 2005; Gee 1996, 2004; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000), we describe Internet-mediated interactions that involve three interrelated dynamics: 1) indexical linkages to macro-level categories (such as nation state affiliation, cultural/linguistic/ethnic affiliations), 2) functionally defined subject positions (such as student, youth, author, editor, expert, and novice, among others), and 3) fluid shifts in language choice, stance, and style that enable participants to personalize, make relevant, and move forward a variety of social actions. Through these analyses, we suggest that language development in online environments is intimately linked to the capacity to construct functional selves (Gee 1999) through interaction, and empirically we assess various Internet-mediated contexts as sites for such engagements.

3. New literacies and communicative genres

A great deal of second language acquisition (SLA) research has focused primarily on linguistic achievement in formal learning environments (see Ellis 2008, for a comprehensive overview; see Thorne 2008a, for a review of L2 learning in digital contexts). However, many, and perhaps most, of one’s significant language development and socialization takes place in community and leisure contexts rather than inside the confines of the classroom (Thorne 2008b). In recent decades, community and leisure, as well as business and academic activities, increasingly involve communication and self-representation in Internet-mediated spaces, especially for teens and young adults. According to a recent Pew Internet and American Life survey, 64 percent of online teens spend time using interactive social media, creating original content, and sharing this content online (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill and Smith 2007). Such activities include creating and sharing artwork, photos, stories, and videos, contributing to webpages, blogs, and online journals, and remixing existing material into their own creative works (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill and Smith 2007). For many youths, full participation in these
activities involves not only traditional, print-based literacy, but also facility with new literacies and communicative genres that are emerging in tandem with Internet-mediated social contexts (Knobel and Lankshear 2007; Jenkins 2006; Thorne and Black 2007).

Research informed by the New Literacy Studies (NLS) tradition (e.g., Bazerman 1989; Gee 1992, 1996; Street 1984) has contributed greatly to current understandings of language and literacy learning as socially and culturally situated, constituted by and constitutive of context, and mediated by various tools and technologies. Recently, Lankshear and Knobel (2006) set out to delineate the “new” in literacy studies by differentiating between paradigmatic and ontological novelty in literacy research and practice. According to the authors, paradigmatic novelty refers to the aforementioned sociocultural conceptions of literacy that view language development and use as one component of learning to participate in socially significant practice. Another crucial component of effective participation is taking on recognizable social roles (Gee 1999) or functional and contributive identities within social practices. This paradigm provides a theoretical and methodological alternative to intra-individual psycholinguistic approaches to literacy (Lankshear and Knobel 2006) and is useful for understanding online contexts where identity and community are discursively constructed through a variety of text-based interactions.

Ontological novelty refers to the new communicative genres and social practices associated with post-typographic forms of text and textually mediated social performances. Lankshear and Knobel argue that ontologically new literacies reflect how “changes have occurred in the character and substance of literacies that are associated with larger changes in technology, institutions, media, and the economy, and with the rapid movement toward global scale in manufacture, finance, communications, and so on” (2006: 24; see also Gebhard 2004; Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996). The concept of ontological novelty encompasses the new literacies and communicative genres associated with technological mediation, but it also emphasizes how such mediation impacts literacy-related social practices along several fronts, including but not limited to scale (e.g., ease of communication with large numbers of people), space (e.g., ease of communication across geographic distance), and sensibility (e.g., emergence of collaborative and remixed forms of knowledge construction).

A number of studies have indicated the capacity for a shift in communicative modality to correlate with changes in communicative dynamics as well as to present opportunities and resources for variable presentations of self,
particularly among adolescents and young people (Jenkins 2006; Merchant 2005; Thurlow and McKay 2003; Turkle 1995; Walther 1996). Relatively early research studies carried out in the 1990s in particular, focused on the power of anonymity in digital, generally text-mediated environments, and the seemingly extraordinary capability of participants to construct relationships, identities, and to produce with others distinctive social ontologies (Lea and Spears 1995; Parks and Floyd 1996; Reingold 1993). Turkle, for example, described Internet information technologies as “doing more than providing an evocative object for our self-reflection . . . it is the basis for a new culture of simulation and a fundamental reconsideration of human identity” (1995: 321). One of Turkle’s informants contrastively described his real life (RL) and digital “realities” as follows: “RL is just one more window and it’s not usually my best one” (1995: 13). While relative anonymity is still common in many online settings, in contrast to reports from Turkle’s informants in the early 1990s, the contemporary era of ubiquitous forms of mediated communication, social networking technologies, online gaming, and Internet interest communities, illustrate a tendency toward interactional and social dynamics that interpenetrate with, and amplify, offline selves (Merchant 2006; Miller and Slater 2000). This is a consistent theme in all of the cases we explore below in the context of chronologically, and what we consider in some cases to be ontologically, new literacy practices, with an explicit focus on how language learners navigate identity construction, social relationships, and linguistic interaction in these Internet-mediated contexts.

4. Internet communication tools as catalysts for evoking and performing selves

Recent research has illustrated that students’ discursive framing of Internet-mediated L2 activity, both inside and outside of formal educational contexts, is significantly influenced by their prior and ongoing participation in an often large number of diverse online social networks (Thorne 2000, 2003). The core argument forwarded in this research is that Internet communication tools, like all human creations, are culturally specific meditational means that qualitatively affect human activity (e.g., Cole 1996; Kaptelinen and Nardi 2006; Shaffer and Clinton 2006). However, we also wish to make clear that our argument for the cultural quality of Internet environments and tools, and the many forms of communicative activity they mediate, are not in any way suggestive of technological determinism. Rather, as Wertsch (1991: 119) has
described, “[o]nly by being part of action do mediational means come into being and play their role. They have no magical power in and of themselves.” In essence, tool socialization results in the establishment of “cultures-of-use”, the idea that technologies come to be identified with specific forms of interaction as well as expectations of genre-specific communicative activity (Thorne 2003; Thorne and Black 2007; Thorne, Black and Sykes 2009).

In application to instructed L2 contexts, the cultures-of-use notion reminds us that technologies are historically structured and structuring forms of culture which evoke preferred and dispreferred social, relational, and interactional possibilities. To illustrate this point, we describe two foreign language classroom related settings within which the use of Internet communication technologies demonstrates opportunities for gaining a sense of self-efficacy using, and to articulate and perform relevant selves through, a new language.

In the spring of 2002, the first author of this chapter helped to organize an Internet-mediated intercultural exchange between students studying French as a foreign language in the U.S. and students studying English in France (Kinginger and Belz 2005; Thorne 2003, 2005, 2006). E-mail was selected as the primary communication medium and surprisingly (to the designers of the intervention), a significant number of the American students refused to engage in age-peer communication using this tool. For these students, e-mail was used exclusively for vertical communication across generational and power lines (e.g., with teachers, parents, employers) but was not suitable for age-peer relationship building, which was the core pedagogical thrust of the project. A few dissatisfied students self-initiated a migration of their interpersonal correspondence to instant messenger (IM), and the effect was enormous.

Two issues are particularly important for the current discussion – the shift to IM, which at this time was the clear communication tool of choice for peer interaction among university-aged youth in the United States (e.g., Shiu and Lenhart 2004), and the subordination of French language study as an educational activity to the use of French (and English) as a resource for the building of personally meaningful relationships. A focal student reported, and provided transcripts to illustrate, daily IM conversations with her French key-pal, some of which extended to multiple hours of mixed French–English communication. The following IM excerpt (which has not been orthographically modified, though certain turns have been removed to save space) illustrates what for Kirsten (the American student) was a pivotal shift in self-efficacy that marked the first moment she perceived herself as a speaker, rather than a student, of French. Note that Oliver is her French interlocutor (both Kirsten and Oliver are pseudonyms):
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(1) 1. **O:** by the way, I don’t know what smart means?
2. **O:** . . .
3. **K:** smart means ..hmmmm
4. **K:** how to describe that
5. **K:** intelligent
6. **O:** I mean what does intelligent mean?
7. **O:** no I know what the word means
8. **K:** it’s the same thing
9. **O:** but I’m not sure I grasp the idea
10. **K:** ooh..
11. **K:** hmmm
12. **O:** kind of philosophical huh?
13. **K:** yeah.. you know.. aux Etats-Unis nous avons deux types d’intelligence [in the United States we have two types of intelligence]
14. **O:** vraiment? [really?]
15. **O:** Je veux savoir!!! [I want to know!]
16. **K:** il y a “l’intelligence des livres” et “l’intelligence dans la vie” [’there is “book smart” and “life smart”’]
17. **O:** donc l’intelligence des livres c’est le savoir? [’therefore book intelligence is knowledge?’]
18. **K:** oui.. et l’autre est “common sense” [’yes.. and the other is “common sense”’]
19. **O:** on peut lire beaucoup et savoir beaucoup de choses tout en étant stupide je suis d’accord [’one can read a lot and know a lot of things and be stupid at the same time I agree’]
20. **K:** oui! [’yes!’]
21. **O:** cool
22. **K:** le ‘common sense’ est . . . par example, j’ai une amie qui sait beaucoup des choses.. mais elle a mis METAL dans le microwave.. [’“common sense” is . . . for example, I have a friend who knows a lot of things.. but she put METAL in the microwave.’]
23. **O:** oups [’oops’]
24. **K:** elle n’a pas de “common sense” [’she doesn’t have “common sense”’]

Kirsten provided her own post-hoc analysis of this dialog. References to the IM transcript are shown in bracket parentheticals [line #]:

4197-012-2pass-P3-012-r03.indd   263
4197-012-2pass-P3-012-r03.indd   263
8/25/2011   9:21:56 PM
8/25/2011   9:21:56 PM
Kirsten explained the significance of this portion of her first three-hour IM session with Oliver as a pivotal shift in her confidence to communicate in French, what Wegerif (1998) terms a threshold moment. Wegerif proposed that success or failure in on-line education (and one might argue in other endeavors as well) depends on participants constructing a space of engagement through which they can position themselves as insiders with a vested interest in the communicative and social activities at hand. The case of Kirsten and Oliver is compelling for it shows that interpersonally “authentic” engagement (e.g., intrinsically motivated activity as defined by van Lier 1996) began as part of a formal educational process but attained its maturity when the interaction migrated into a communicative medium that both participants felt was more conducive to interpersonal relationship building. Based on Kristen’s interview data and the transcripts of her e-mail and IM interactions, the catalyst pushing classroom language learning over the threshold to L2 use for purposes of meaningful communication was tool-related – the move to the use of IM, which was her everyday age-peer communication tool of choice.

The second case we report in this section is drawn from an ongoing research project with American high school students enrolled in an advanced placement (or AP, a designation reflecting university level instruction) Spanish foreign language course. Students in the course were provided with personal blog...
sites, given open or topic driven writing assignments, and were responsible for commenting on their peer’s blog posts on a weekly basis. The students used IM for Spanish language interaction with interlocutors of their choice and turned in transcripts of the sessions as evidence of completing the assignment. At the time of this writing, 28 students have participated in approximately 45-minute ethnographic interviews during which they were asked to talk about their everyday uses of instant messaging, blogging, and other online activities, and to reflect on the uses of blogs and IM for the learning of Spanish. Our overarching focus in this project was to examine the relations between in and out of school technology use and pedagogically, to attempt to establish conditions that would make possible a transformation from L2 learning as a mechanical process to envisaging potentially multiple languages as resources for carrying out significant social actions and performances (Thorne 2009).

Analyzing interrelations between academic and social-personal presentations of self, we found that blog use formed an interstitial communication space where both academic and nonacademic discursive features were articulated through personally relevant expression, in essence that students were writing both to fulfill a class requirement while also writing to and for one another. This hoped-for outcome was confirmed in the interviews:

(3) Student 1: I think [blogging] is helpful in a way, because you kind of find that common ground between your teacher and your peers. You think about how you’re gonna direct and drive your conversation, like you wanna make sure that, you know, your teacher understands how you feel, at the same time you wanna make sure that your peers know what you feel, and it’s just different because your peers might be going through the same thing, but your teacher might not necessarily understand what you’re going through, so you wanna make sure that they both understand. (italics added for emphasis)

In this excerpt, the student explicitly states a sense of agency and self-efficacy, “you think about how you’re gonna direct and drive your conversation.” She also indicates a clear awareness of the need to speak to multiple audiences, “you wanna make sure that [students and the teacher] both understand.” The student’s repeated emphasis on her intent to successfully represent her feelings in L2 writing suggests that her primary concern is to establish and maintain intersubjectivity with her teacher and classmates.

A surprising finding was that a number of students reported cross-posting Spanish language entries to their personal blog spaces and conversely, translating into Spanish some of their writing that had initially been posted to
their personal sites. Canagarajah (2006) describes these sorts of authorial moves with the term “shuttling,” characterized as instances when writers strategically shift between defined social-textual conventions and make use of a variety of semiotic resources to achieve personally relevant intentions. To paraphrase Canagarajah, writing is not merely constitutive; it is also performative, context-transforming, and acts as an affordance for the ongoing negotiation of voice and presentation of self (2006: 602–3). This is an especially salient point given the importance of blogging, and increasingly social networking environments such as facebook.com, to the social and recreational lives of many young adults. In contrast to earlier research that described the centripetal flow of exogenous online communicative practices into instructed L2 uses of technology (e.g., Thorne 2000, 2003), here we see centrifugal flows of textual practices that were initiated in instructional settings but which also suggest a semiotic ecology that is inclusive of both schooling and students’ broader lifeworld contexts.

The Spanish AP course participants also described what Thorne (2000: 8) has termed a “late modern communicative aesthetic” that appears to operate above the level of any particular language:

(4) Student 2: I’ve noticed that people sort of find their own style of writing blogs or IM and you sort of adopt that as you go whether it be in English or Spanish.

(5) Student 3: You have Spanish IMs, so being clever and using words well and you know how it is . . . you have to make up a personality using words, so you have to do that in Spanish.

(6) Student 4: When I come into class, I would say ‘hola Señora,’ and sometimes I find myself saying that in my Physics class, you know, . . . even online, I’d randomly [IM] my friends in Spanish and I feel like I’m really learning and it’s just, like, becoming more natural.

These student comments suggest that they perceive Spanish as a viable language for performing identity work. At the same time, they rather casually deemphasize the particularities of any specific language and instead focus on doing things with and through language, including the L2 they are studying, such as “finding a style,” “being clever and using words well,” and “making up a personality.” Rampton (2006) has described language crossing and stylization as agentive practices in which young people appropriate semiotic resources and utilize them for their social meaning potentials. In these excerpts, we see the use of ritualized greetings, hola Señora, as a form of
Identity and interaction in internet-mediated contexts

crossing in Student 4’s use of Spanish in her Physics class. Stylization, the strategic use of socially salient features of a linguistic variety for pragmatic purposes, appears throughout the interviews, blog, and IM data as a resource for solidarity building and alignment, production of the self as a multilingual and witty interlocutor, and to serve a variety of ritualized pragmatic functions. Theorizing such communicative activity, in his model of expansive learning, Engeström (2001) describes a broadening of the object of activity (the overall goal or orientation of activity) through the collaborative creation and internalization of new mediational resources. For many of these students, the use of blogs and IM appears to have initiated a new goal associated with Spanish language use and learning, that of figuring out how to become an interesting interlocutor with Spanish as one resource for doing so (data and analysis drawn from Thorne 2009).

In the case of Kirsten using French to engage in IM discussions where she came to function as herself (“that’s me”) but “in French,” and the Spanish AP students forging socially relevant opportunities for “finding a style” and creating a “personality using words,” there appears to be bidirectional attention to both an articulation of a consistent and robust self and thoughtful acknowledgement of its reception and confirmation by others. Examining this creative tension, Paul Ricoeur (1992) formulated two fundamental properties of identity, the reflexive “I” (ipse, “appertaining to the self”) and the categorical identification of oneself as like others (idem, “the same as”). Together, ipse and idem form a dual process – that of an individual’s capacity to manifest a coherent self across time and space, and the agentive capacity to negotiate, and to learn from and appropriate for future use, new forms of expression that emerge in interaction with social structures and actual and/or imagined/constructed interlocutors. Crawshaw et al. (2001: 108) have expressed that for Ricoeur, “[w]hat is vital in this process . . . is that the discourse . . . be uniquely subjective in the best sense of that word, i.e. active and intentional.” As Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000: 170) have argued, this notion is particularly important in the context of L2 learning since “ultimate attainment in second language learning relies on one’s agency. While the first language and subjectivities are an indisputable given, the new ones are arrived at by choice.”

The question of whether the online literacies engaged in by these students constitute ontological novelty is arguable, but the agentive movements between school-based and socially relevant uses of an L2 are clearly evident. Equally important is the ability exhibited by some of the students to recognize a “me,” a “self,” or a “personality” that combined with a keen awareness of the multiple semiotic resources that might be used to realize contingently
useful identities. For applied linguists working in instructed L2 (and particularly foreign language) contexts, linguistically mediated agentive action, in digital contexts, and otherwise warrants continued attention for its potential to catalyze new semiotic repertoires.

5. Language and identity in online fan fiction

While not chronologically new, the practice of fan fiction writing has blossomed via technological mediation and has had a significant impact on many teens’ literacy development and social interaction during the past decade. Fan fiction refers to texts based on existing popular cultural materials, such as books, movies, television shows, and video games, to name just a few. Some early examples of fan fiction could arguably include Robert Henryson’s expansions of Geoffrey Chaucer’s work in the 1400s (Pugh 2005), William Gillette’s play based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s character Sherlock Holmes (Pugh 2005), and even John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* might be considered a form of biblical fan fiction. The advent of online publishing has brought about significant changes in the practice of fan fiction writing, as media aficionados from across the globe meet online to share, read, and discuss each other’s stories. As a literacy practice, online fan fiction provides a salient example of the ontological shifts that Lankshear and Knobel (2006) describe in relation to new literacies. Moreover, as will be discussed in this section, these shifts have discernable implications for the language development and socialization of youth participating in online fan fiction writing spaces.

Data for this section were drawn from a longitudinal study of the largest fan fiction archival site on the web, *Fanfiction.net* (FFN). At last count, the site housed over a million fictions, with nearly 400,000 in the *Harry Potter* section alone. While the demography varies, the majority of texts on FFN were authored by native English-speaking adolescents living in North America. However, the popularity of the site has grown to the extent that FFN now has servers in Europe and Asia as well as the U.S., hosts fictions in over 30 different languages, and has expanded to include a user-base from around the globe. The aim of this study was to examine the literacy and social practices of adolescent English language learners (ELLs) participating in the FFN community. In order to develop a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of literate engagement and social interaction in this space, the second author of this chapter spent three years as a participant observer on the site.
Data included artifacts such as participants’ fan fiction texts, reader feedback or reviews of these texts, public interaction on the site, and interviews with participants.

The FFN website is designed to promote maximum interaction and composition-related collaboration between site members. For example, when an author posts a fiction on FFN, readers have the option to publicly post reviews of the story. By default, these reviews are “signed,” meaning that they provide a link back to the reviewer’s biographical profile on FFN and any stories that they have authored. This hyperlinked system provides a built-in infrastructure for helping new members of the site make connections with other fans and develop social networks to bolster their self-confidence and assist them in improving their writing skills.

The case study participant discussed in this section is a native Mandarin Chinese speaker who moved from Shanghai, China to a large Canadian city when she was eleven. According to data collected through online interviews, when Nanako (pseudonym) first arrived in Canada, she did not speak any English, so she initially struggled with her courses and had difficulty making friends. About two and a half years after moving to North America and beginning to learn English, Nanako began composing and posting her own Japanese animation or anime-based fan fiction texts in English. Her participation in this space was a helpful conduit for her language learning endeavors, as it provided a range of opportunities for authentic interaction with a diverse group of individuals who shared her interest in anime.

Nanako’s process of identity construction on FFN was a dynamic process that shifted over time and involved the appropriation and selective integration of a variety of popular cultural, linguistic, and cultural resources for her fan fiction texts. In her initial forays into writing on the site, Nanako was very humble and somewhat conservative, both in her writing and in her representation of self. For example, the majority of Nanako’s stories began with what is known in the fan fiction community as Author’s Notes (abbreviated as A/N within the community). These notes are the author’s direct commentary to the audience, and they often contain information such as explanatory notes about the storyline, the author’s state of mind while composing, or general asides about relevant topics. In the A/Ns from Nanako’s early texts, she explicitly and implicitly positioned herself as a novice and as an ELL; however, as can be seen in the following A/N introducing her story Complete, she initially framed her novice status in terms of her lack of experience with writing in a particular media canon rather than as related to her status as a novice English writer:
A/N: Konnichiwa! Tadaima! This is my first Beyblade song fic, so please go easy on it. I just love Ray/Mariah fics, they are so kawaii together! ^_^ Read and Review! And no flames! Thank you! By the way, this is in Mariah’s POV on the night when Ray lost his bit beast.

By pointing out that this is her first story about the anime series Beyblade, directly requesting that readers “go easy” on her in their feedback, and emphatically requesting “no flames!” (flames are harsh, hostile forms of critique or commentary), Nanako was attempting to mitigate potential critique of her story. Later in the chapter, Nanako introduced a flashback to explain the emotional bond between the Beyblade characters Ray and Mariah. While it is common practice for fan fiction authors to create their own prequels and sequels to existing media canons, Nanako revealed her uncertainty as a novice writer when she prefaced this flashback with an explanatory note stating “I made this up, I don’t really know much about Ray and Mariah’s past.” At the end of the chapter, Nanako concluded her story with the following A/N, “ok, this is kinda sad, but please tell me if it’s good or not, cause if you guys don’t like it then I won’t write more.”

Taken together, these A/Ns create a picture of a young woman who is unsure of her knowledge and abilities as a fan writer. In the opening A/N, she explicitly referenced her novice status and assumed a potential for pointed critique and/or harsh criticism from the audience. In the next example, rather than claiming artistic license for her authorial choices in creating the flashback, she instead noted that she did not really know much about the characters’ pasts as an explanation for possible discrepancies in the flashback. In the final A/N, she suggested that she would discontinue the story if the audience did not like it. Collectively, these A/Ns contributed to Nanako’s functional identity as a novice author and discursively constructed a writing space in which feedback from a knowledgeable and potentially critical audience was expected.

Nonetheless, as can be seen in the following reviews of the chapter, the vast majority of Nanako’s audience provided feedback in ways that both offered her guidance and impetus for continuing her story and helped to bolster her confidence in her writing abilities. For instance, two reviewers wrote:

Awwwww! This is so cute! You keep bouncing between past tense and present tense, but otherwise, I’ve got nothing to complain about. This is so cute! I love it!
Both of these reviewers provided clear and enthusiastic support for Nanako’s abilities as a writer. Both reviews also offer evidence of the ontologically new qualities of online fan fiction. For example, had Nanako been writing this story for an English class or to share with her offline friends, it is likely that feedback would have come from a somewhat homogenous group of adolescents of roughly the same age and from similar cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. Instead, the digital medium provided Nanako with responses on a much broader scale, drawing from an audience of adolescent and college-age fans from around the world. The reviews also illustrate the collaborative sensibility of composing online fan fiction. For example, one reviewer participated in Nanako’s writing process by offering her specific grammatical feedback, while the other offered pointed requests for a happy ending and a particular romantic pairing. These types of participatory features are common enough in reviews of online fan fiction that they might be considered an integral part of the genre (see Black 2007 for a detailed discussion of the genre of fan fiction reviews). However, as will be discussed in the following section, readers may have been particularly attentive to grammar and spelling in Nanako’s fictions, because at the start of her stories she often self-identifies as an L2 learner and explicitly states that she is trying to improve her English writing.

Over the next few months, Nanako continued writing and receiving reviews on this and her other FFN stories. Around three months later, she posted the first chapter of Crazy Love Letters, a fan fiction based on the anime series Card Captor Sakura. For Nanako, this text provided opportunities for her to index new aspects of her identity, take on different social roles within the community, and to renegotiate her relationship with readers. For example, as can be seen in the following A/N, after posting on the site for several months, Nanako began positioning herself, not as a novice within certain media canons but instead as a novice English user:

(10) A/N: Konnichiwa (‘hello’) minna-san! This is my new story ^^. Please excuse my grammar and spelling mistakes. Because English is my second language. Also, I’m still trying to improve my writing skills. . . . . . .so this story might be really sucks.
In this note, Nanako takes on the functional identity of an ELL who is hoping to improve her English skills by writing on FFN. In this way, she implicitly positions experienced English-speaking audience members as experts who could help her by providing feedback on her stories.

Through their varied responses to Nanako’s self-representation as an ELL, readers actively contributed to the authorial identity that Nanako was constructing. In addition, their comments contributed to the discursive construction of the writing context. Many explicitly referenced Nanako’s identity as an ELL, as in the following excerpt from a review:

(11) Keep up the good work. And I wish you well with all your tests. Don’t worry about English being a second language. Where I come from proper English is a second language to most people, and some never learn it. And I couldn’t find nothing wrong with your grammar off the top of my head.

Other readers, in spite of Nanako’s request that they “excuse [her] grammar and spelling mistakes,” responded by providing explicit grammatical feedback on Nanako’s writing in the form of recasts or focused critique of specific linguistic structures, as in the following review:

(12) lol. Happy early birthday *gives her sugar* I really love your fic. It’s so . . . sugary lol. I like sugar . . . I have a couple of suggestions though. One is this: the past and present tense (sp). Like “I had this to do still”. Two is the spelling every here and there. and Three, like the wording of some things like “And thanks again for cheering me up when I’m losing hopes and upset” in the fic. Okay. That’s all. Sorry for wasting your time. Ja ne. (‘see you later’)

These two audience members responded to Nanako’s self-representation as an ELL author in distinct ways. The first reviewer suggested that Nanako’s English grammar was fine and encouraged her to keep up the “good work,” thus foregrounding her identity as a successful writer. The second reviewer, however, directly responded to Nanako as an ELL looking to improve her writing skills by pointing out grammatical errors in her text. However, this reviewer was also careful to temper the grammatical feedback with a positive introductory comment and a mitigating statement at the end of the review. Both examples are illustrative of the different ways in which the audience actively contributed, not only to Nanako’s skill development, but also to her developing functional identity as a popular writer.
As further evidence of her shifting identity in this space, Nanako went on to index different aspects of her cultural and linguistic background and renegotiate her role within the FFN community. Many of these shifts can be seen in her choices of languages and thematic topics in her stories. For example, in her early months on FFN, Nanako’s texts were primarily written in English with some token Japanese phrases. The token use of Japanese, such as greetings, leave-takings, and popular expressions, is a common practice within the anime fan community and serves as a way for fans to index their enthusiasm for and insider status within the realm of anime fandom. However, it was not until she had been writing on the site for many months, had received hundreds of supportive reviews from readers, and had developed some confidence in her role as a fan fiction author and English user that Nanako began integrating her first language of Mandarin Chinese and more complex Japanese linguistic structures, which she was learning in language classes at school, into her texts. In the following excerpt, Nanako uses Romanized Mandarin as well as traditional Chinese characters to construct a dialogue between two anime characters and then a subsequent A/N:

(13)  Xiaolang, wo hao e ah, wo men neng bu men chi fan ah? Wo de du zhi dou zai gu ji gu ji de xiao le. (‘Xiaolang, I’m so hungry, can we eat already? My stomach is growling.’)

Meiling changed the subject and flashed Syaoran a sweet smile as well. But Syaoran just looked at her in disgust.

Syaoran passed Sakura some of the sushi he made and smiled.

“Here, try some of this, I made it just for you.” He said and gazed at Sakura caringly.

(A/N: just like Er Kang/尔康 from Huan Zhu Ge Ge/还珠格格 ^^;;)

As can be seen with the Chinese in the previous example, she also took on a knowledgeable role in relation to these languages by providing translations of the Chinese and Japanese for her readers. In addition, Nanako’s stories began to focus on themes and topics related to aspects of her identity as an Asian female, such as Japanese and Chinese history and arranged marriage (see Black 2006 for a more detailed discussion). During this time, she also changed the biographical information on her profile page to indicate her Asian heritage and to express her affiliation with a range of pan-Asian popular cultural material, such as Chinese television series and Japanese movies and music.
Readers responded to this shift in Nanako’s writing in several different ways. Some readers expressed appreciation for Nanako’s integration of multiple languages in her fictions, such as, “I’m learning so much Chinese and Japanese every time I read!” Others expressed appreciation for her knowledge of multiple languages, “you are very smart to know so much about these languages.” These reviews represent the ongoing negotiation of functional identity roles, such as expert/teacher, novice/learner, between Nanako and her readers over time. When Nanako first started writing on FFN, she had only been learning English for two and a half years, was unsure of her abilities as a writer, and was worried about how her texts would be received. Readers responded to this by offering encouragement and occasionally by taking on roles as experts, providing their own suggestions for her storylines and offering information about the anime series. Over time, however, she realized that her Asian heritage and knowledge of Asian languages and cultures was a form of capital within this community. Thus, she began to position herself as an expert in this regard. Moreover, as her stories were increasingly well-received within the community, she gained more confidence in her abilities and began to position herself as a successful author within the community by creating a mailing list to let readers know when her popular stories were updated, as well as by taking a less deferential tone in her A/Ns and general interactions with the audience.

Nanako’s participation in FFN provides a clear illustration of how writer–reader interactions around online fan fiction differ from typical peer-review practices in classrooms in ways that represent an ontologically new literacy practice in a number of specific ways. The first is the immediacy and breadth of response that the Internet provides: authors on FFN are able to post their fictions and within moments receive feedback from an audience that spans several continents. A second dynamic involves the potential for collaborative construction of space that such online environments offer. While many aspects of FFN are constrained by the site design and user-interface, as can be seen from the previous examples, there still exists a great deal of flexibility for site members to negotiate social roles and participate in the discursive construction of the writing space. A third marked difference is the collaborative style of writing and the distributed nature of knowledge construction on FFN. In many classrooms, writing papers together and sharing answers is viewed as a form of cheating, and the teacher generally retains the role of expert. However, fan communities provide multiple opportunities for participants to collaboratively author fictions, share various forms of knowledge, and to perform as teachers and learners as well as experts and novices, on various topics.
6. Discussion

Mediational means such as Internet communication and information tools both complicate and help to reveal the dynamics of human communicative activity and our species’ capacity for creative expression and performance of identities. As Lemke has described, drawing upon the metaphors and theory of language forwarded by Bakhtin, “language competence in this sense is as much an ensemble of virtual identities as a language itself is an ensemble of heteroglossic voices” (2002: 68).

In response to the question of integrating digital literacies within instructed L2 practice, in all the cases we described in this chapter, processes of language socialization combined with implicit and explicit feedback systems appear to support the acquisition of linguistic forms, communicative strategies, and resources for performing relevant social identities. In the first set of empirical studies situated more closely to instructional L2 settings, we described the importance of the cultures-of-use of Internet communication tools as mediational means that have the potential to rouse identity performances associated with threshold experiences leading to enhanced perceptions of self-efficacy (e.g., Thorne 2003, 2005; Thorne and Black 2007). An additional research and pedagogical point is that forms of Internet-mediated activity are demonstrably embedded in, and functionally dissociable from, many off-line everyday communicative contexts and social networks. The high frequency of interpenetration between on-and off-line activity has the potential to make developmentally and instructionally oriented uses of mediated communication more relevant and meaningful due to its articulation with students’ broader amalgam of integrated on- and off-line lifeworlds. Extending this argument, digital information and communication tools and human cognitive and communicative activity are irrevocably fused into unified ecologies, what Shaffer and Clinton (2006) term “toolforthoughts – a concatenated creature representing a view of the relationship between artifact and cognition from the perspective of virtual culture” (p. 284). Shaffer and Clinton describe the dialectical and co-constitutive relationship between tools and the cognitive-communicative activities they mediate, as follows:

[J]ust as tools are externalizations of human designs, thoughts are internalizations of our actions with tools. . . . In this view, tools are not distinct from thoughts; rather, the reciprocal relation between tool and thought exists in both. Every tool contains thoughts, and every thought contains tools. Neither exists without the other. (2006: 290)
In this sense, tools do more than mediate; they *re-mediate* human activity to create new morphologies of action. As Shaffer and Clinton (2006) have argued, drawing upon Latour (e.g., 1996), this position both builds upon Vygotskian principles of mediation while it also challenges its dichotomization of tools as distinctive or separate from the humans who use them. In this stronger view of mediation, tools, like people, are also actants and as such, they influence human agents based on their material and ideal properties, histories of use, and contingent roles in ongoing activity. In the context of digitally mediated social activity, humans and their material and symbolic tools, histories, and conventions are argued to interdependently produce what have been termed in this chapter (and volume) “identities” and/or “selves.”

For their part, online fan texts reflect the “changing character and substance” of ontologically new literacies in a variety of ways. Fan fictions, while primarily text-based, reflect the globalized nature of popular culture and the shared aesthetic sensibility of a world-wide youth culture that has come about via technological mediation. In composing their texts, fans draw from a range of multimodal popular cultural materials, such as songs, images, video, and games, remixing them to create new texts that represent the varied literate abilities and cultural understandings that youths bring to these activities. Online fan fiction also offers new potential for the construction of fluid identities that can be negotiated and changed over time. In physical space, L2 learners are often ascribed certain roles based on their physical characteristics, history of classroom interactions, and institutional labels that designate language ability. While these characteristics are not completely eliminated online, the Internet-mediated format for interaction and out-of-school context can provide L2 learners with a greater range of possibilities for self-representation and the construction of identities as capable users of multiple social languages.

The relationship between identities/selves and language learning is a critically important area of research, and despite the considerable body of scholarship that exists, it is one that will remain fresh and continuously emergent as the tableau of human generated tools, cultures, and literacy practices continue to evolve and transform. As the digital cultures researcher Dana Boyd (2008: 154) describes it: “[D]igital networks will never merely map the social, but inevitably develop their own dynamics through which they become the social.” And as for Akbar the Great’s dilemma about whether we are “bags of selves,” or rather, “solitary ‘I’s buried beneath the overcrowded ‘we’s of the earth” (Rushdie 2008), this question will benefit from continued empirical investigation, as Merchant (2006: 242) has suggested:
The online environments that new technology provides offer new challenges and possibilities for self-presentation and impression formation in human communication. Whether or not online environments actually create new people or simply help us to see ourselves in new ways may be a debate that we need to leave behind in favour of a more sophisticated analysis of digital interaction.

Note

1. See Crawshaw et al. (2001) for an excellent discussion of Ricoeur’s model of identity in application to L2 residence abroad. The authors would like to thank Christina Higgins for alerting them to the Crawshaw et al. (2001) study.
Epilogue

Hybridizing scapes and the production of new identities

Christina Higgins

Applied linguistics is usually on the receiving end of theory. Theories developed in other fields – such as communities of practice, feminist post-structuralism, sociocultural theory, and post-colonial theory – often provide departure points for research questions, and they often help to explain the findings at a more macrolevel. This book arguably continues this tradition to a large degree, for it was inspired by theories of the self and identity, and because it is organized around Appadurai’s work on scapes and globalization. Scapes allow us to argue that the global flows of people, technology, money, and mediated cultures are shaping the identities of more and more people around the globe in similar ways. However, the work presented in this volume also seeks to contribute an empirical basis to research on identity in applied linguistics as it relates to new millennium globalization. As the detailed case studies and ethnographic approaches across the volume show, when ideoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, ethnoscapes, and mediascapes intersect and collide, the result is that new contexts for identity formation are born.

As Saxena and Omoniyi (2010) argue, Appadurai’s work may at first be seen as supportive of the McDonaldization thesis (Ritzer 1993) of globalization, which posits increasing cultural and linguistic homogenization around the globe. This is a reasonable claim since the five scapes he outlines emanate from the west, and because these global flows are theorized to be increasingly salient in people’s lives across the globe. This relates well to Held et al.’s (1999) discussion of the hyperglobalist vision of globalization, where western forms of politics, culture, and media are spreading steadily across the globe. However, as the content of this volume repeatedly illustrates, these flows are not always or entirely west-based. Moreover, language learners often transform and reshape these flows, incorporating them into their own local contexts, and they also create their own new spaces for negotiating identity amidst these flows. Hence, the volume argues strongly for the transformationalist approach to globalization, which asserts that we are currently
experiencing a period of significant reshaping not witnessed before in the history of global interconnectivity (Castells 1997).

In asking “what’s new?” about identity construction in the new millennium, then, the volume directs us to focus our attention centrally on context – what is *underneath* and *around* language learning and use – that allows for new identities to develop. The answer, as I see it, is globalizing contexts in the form of shifting and intersecting scapes. Across the chapters of this book, the authors show how global and local flows of people, ideologies, and media create new contexts for identity formation. In accord with Pennycook (2007), who writes about Global Englishes within the context of such globalizing flows, the research presented here strengthens the point that “we need to move beyond arguments about homogeneity or heterogeneity, or imperialism and nation states, and instead focus on translocal and transcultural flows” (p. 6) as opportunities for constructing the self. In Appadurai’s terms, this means exploring how various scapes are intersecting in new ways, investigating how the scapes themselves have changed, and examining the consequences for language learning and identity formation.

Part I explored how the ideoscapes of political and cultural borders in the form of nation states and “target” communities are being revised because of the changing ethnoscape of many transnationals. Moving past ideologies of assimilation, acculturation, and integration, the four chapters in Part I indicate that learners are finding alternative zones for identity construction, including in-between identities and transnational identities that are more closely tied to others who share their experiences, rather than to members of the dominant culture. Instead of searching for belonging in “target” communities, many of the individuals depicted in chapters 2–5 find a sense of belonging in communities made up of transnational people like themselves, and through maintaining connections with people from their prior places of residence.

What does this say about shifting scapes? It calls attention to shifting attitudes and perspectives among transnationals. While “classic migration” can still be found in many nations, which refers to people crossing borders primarily to improve their economic prospects, leaving their pasts behind them in the process, new theories of migration have developed in the past decade to account for “multilevel migration systems” (e.g., Faist 2000; Castles and Miller 2003, as discussed in Block 2007: 31). The multilevel migration system examines the relevance of global economics at the macrolevel and the desire for different life conditions at the microlevel. In addition, however, we have the mesolevel, which focuses on the social ties that migrants have with others who share their experiences in the communities where they live.
As Block (2007) summarizes, “there are progressively more and more . . . individuals who in much of their lives feel more allegiance and affinity to these communities than they do to the national states in which they reside” (p. 32). Such changes indicate shifts in the affiliations people have with the concept of nationality and cultural borders as a focal point in identity formation in the new millennium. These changes also indicate that the ideoscapes connected to the concept of the nation-state are shifting, at least for many transnationals.

Part II examined whether and to what degree sojourners and expatriates come to inhabit the *third space* (Bhabha 1994) of intercultural awareness, ultimately leading to the development of an *intercultural self* (Byram 2008). Different from transnationals, who often shift their primary residency in a more permanent manner, the individuals studied in this Part of the volume are temporary sojourners whose engagements with other cultures and languages are central to their objectives and goals as travelers. Chapters 6–8 demonstrated how intercultural perspectives developed among learners as a result of participating in the ethnoscape of border crossing for the purpose of study abroad and work, where they encountered ideoscapes that differed from their own. We also saw that some individuals resisted the development of an intercultural perspective, and remained tightly identified with their national cultures, thus leading to a lack of language learning opportunity. On the other hand, those who decentered from their home language and culture typically experienced deeper opportunities for language learning and self-development. Rather than having merely cross-cultural experiences, or developing bicultural perspectives, with worldviews neatly compartmentalized by culture, language, and place, the chapters in this section showed that many sojourners developed new viewpoints as a result of contact with another cultural group. In this case, the act of joining ethnoscapes as sojourners provided the means by which ideoscapes could be altered.

Of course, it makes sense that cultural contact could lead to such an outcome. However, in the new millennium, it is important to note the increasing numbers of individuals who contribute to the fluidity of the ethnoscape through study abroad and expatriate living and who potentially form their own intercultural spaces in the process. For example, students who study abroad from the United States have increased fourfold since the 1980s (US Department of State 2009), and programs in the United Kingdom are now being established to provide British university students with the opportunity to study for up to two years (Paton 2011) in BRIC
\(^1\) nations, indicating a connection with the global financescape of the new millennium as well. Similarly, the number of expatriate workers from western nations in developing
countries has steadily increased since the economic reforms of the 1980s began to create development jobs for many foreign workers and free market economics cleared the way for multinational corporations to take root around the world. More research is needed on the language practices of expatriate populations in all contexts, particularly in nations with high numbers of expatriates such as Dubai, where expatriates outnumber UAE nationals by 80 percent, and Singapore, where over one-third of the population are foreigners.

One intriguing example of such an expatriate third space can be found on a Facebook group titled “Stuff Expat Aid Workers Like,” where one of the posts states: “the expat hierarchy: never being seen in public with English teachers or volunteers.” Such are the indicators of a clearly defined identity without reference to borders or cultural connections.

Part III of the volume explored what new identities are formed as a result of experiences in the mediascape. The global spread of popular culture and increased access to the Internet have been central to producing new spaces for new millennium identities to develop. The consumption and appropriation of popular culture and greater participation in cyberspace-based social practices have given individuals more opportunities to connect their imagined selves with opportunities for additional language learning and use. As Appadurai (1996) writes, “The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order” (p. 31). New identities become available to learners as a result of the new spaces afforded to them in their imaginations, and in actual spaces – whether online (as in the case of fanfiction writers, as discussed by Black) or in face-to-face encounters with others who share their zeal for particular practices (as in the case of immigrant African students in Canada discussed by Ibrahim). As several of the chapters in this Part have shown, new identities can also become available due to conscious efforts on the part of educators to invite the mediascape – and its attendant opportunities for facilitating identity construction – into the formal space of the language classroom.

Though many language teachers often use pop culture and the Internet as ways to motivate students or provide them with authentic materials, a concentrated focus on the mediascape as a mode for learning points to a new direction in language education. Direct engagements with the mediascape mean that educators are engaging with learners’ identities first, rather than primarily with the target languages, as key considerations in the language classroom. In doing so, learners and their teachers can imagine language learning as the negotiation of the self through language, in addition to the acquisition of linguistic competence. This change is in line with Kramsch’s
(2006: 251) assertion that “it is no longer appropriate to give students a tourist-like competence to exchange information with native speakers of national languages within well-defined national cultures . . . [Since] language learners are not just communicators and problem solvers, but whole persons with hearts, bodies, and minds, with memories, fantasies, loyalties, identities,” they should acquire *symbolic competence*, or the “ability to produce and exchange symbolic goods in the complex global context in which we live today.”

**The limits of changing scapes**

Thus far, my discussion of identity paints a picture in which language learners enjoy a great deal of agency in their identity construction and use of new languages. Across the chapters, we have seen that learners may be drawn toward non-standard and hybrid forms of language because of the identity affiliations they have with those forms of speech. We also see that learners create their own new communities of practice with their own norms for interaction. However, as Blommaert (2010) reminds us, linguistic resources still carry with them associated socioeconomic values shaped by their spatial distribution, and the result is that transcultural flows and their consequential linguistic forms are constrained by the sociolinguistics of mobility. Despite the liberating elements of forging new identities in new spaces, Blommaert soberly points out that languages used in periphery, contact zone, or transcultural contexts are often devalued vis-à-vis center, standardized varieties and hence, they are treated as deficient. Though “peripheral normativity” (p. 23) might be achieved as a result of language development in new identity spaces, such use of language outside of the periphery or transcultural context would likely be deemed “errorful” or otherwise problematic. Hence, Blommaert encourages us to view the transformationalist thesis of globalization with some precautions. Even as continued mobility and global flows produce new forms of language, culture, and social life in the new millennium, modern ideologies about standard varieties of language, national identities, and clear cut notions of ethnic and cultural identity will still continue to circulate.

The point to be made here is that while the hybridization of scapes arguably provides learners with the opportunity to adapt their new languages for their own purposes, appropriating them for their own local contexts, in the future, we must explore what happens when such learners use their languages in contexts where modernist ideologies operate in powerful ways. We know
that learners might localize languages at the linguistic level, imbuing them with their own cultural nuances, or blending additional languages such as English into their existing linguistic repertoires. However, how such adaptations and appropriations play out in conversations with L1, monolingual language users remains to be investigated. Similarly, we know that learners are free to become members of online communities where additional languages are used in context-specific ways. Transnationals may also use the Internet and other resources to maintain ties with fellow globe-trotters and with friends and family, and they may also forge their own transnational communities on the ground, where they live and work among others who share their first languages and cultures. The issue to explore in the future is whether and to what degree additional language users can – or even need to – move between appropriated forms of language and identity and more traditional forms of communicative competence that are more rigidly tied to the notion of a concrete “target” community with a narrower set of notions about language and identities.

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