Poststructuralist Theory of Identity
—Case Studies of Second Language Learners—

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Introduction

While many SLA (<u>S</u>econd <u>L</u>anguage <u>A</u>cquisition) theorists make the fundamental mechanics of human learning, and more specifically, language learning, as the mystery to uncover during their professional careers, some researchers including Ortega (2009), Norton (2000, 2010), Maynard-Warwick (2007), Talmy (2008), and Canagaraja (2007), have chosen to focus on another aspect of language learning: namely, the issue of identity and language learning. As noted by these researchers, a language learner's experience in L2 (2nd <u>L</u>anguage) learning can be greatly affected by social and psychological (subjective) constraints. The goal of this paper is to briefly outline some of the pertinent concepts within the scope of Poststructuralist Identity Theory and L2 learner identity theories/models in language learning and apply them to analyze experiences of L2 language learners in different settings.

It must be noted that the theoretical framework for this paper will not be explained in full depth due to various constraints. For a more comprehensive overview of the theories discussed within this paper, readers are advised to refer to the original works listed in the reference section. Nonetheless, a minimal introduction to the theories is included in the first two sections of this paper.

Poststructuralist Identity Theory

What is identity?

To describe identity, Kanno maintains, "I use the term identity to refer to our sense of who we are and our relationship to the world. Many aspects of our 'selves' contribute to our

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understanding of who we are: race, gender, class, occupation, sexual orientation, age, among others" (Kanno, 2003, p.3). In this view, identity is one's own sense of his or her position in the world, which means that it is ultimately subjective; nonetheless, it also depends on one's relationship to the world around.

The key distinction between the traditional view of identity and that of Poststructuralist Identity Theory is that "while humanist [Western] conceptions of the individual – and many definitions of the individual in SLA research – presuppose that every person has an essential, unique, fixed and coherent core (introvert/extrovert; motivated/unmotivated), post-structuralism depicts the individual – the subject – as diverse, contradictory, dynamic and changing over historical time and social space" (Norton, 2000, p.125). The core idea here is that identity mustn't be viewed as an inherent property of an individual, but as a state in flux.

Furthermore, Norton maintains that identity is socially constructed and constrained, which she considers it "a site of struggle": "The concept of identity as a site of struggle is a logical extension of the position that identity is multiple and contradictory. If identity were unitary, fixed and immutable, it could not be subject to change over time and space, nor subject to contestation" (Norton, 2000, p. 127). So how exactly is identity socially constructed and constrained?

One of the key concepts within Poststructuralist Identity Theory that plays a crucial role in constructing identity is social *positioning*. "Wortham defines social positioning as 'an event of identification, in which a recognizable category of identity gets explicitly or implicitly applied to an individual'" (Wortham, 2004 as cited in Menard-Warwick, 2007, p.268). In Wortham's view, all social interactions from birth to death are events of identification. This means that there is a constant process of negotiation and renegotiation that is going on within all interactions, which is a characteristic of identity as many scholars such as Ortega (2009), Norton (2000, 2010), Maynard-Warwick (2007), and Kanno (2000) maintain.

Power is another factor that comes into play when constructing/constraining a person's identity. Norton describes power as "the socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which symbolic [e.g. language, education, and friendship] and material [e.g. capital goods, real estate, and money] resources in a society are produced, distributed and validated" (Norton, 2000, p. 7). In other words, within all social interactions, power is—whether implicitly or explicitly—assigned to each individual, and the amount of power that an individual holds within an interaction determines the degree to which social positioning can be influenced. The general principle is that those with more power within a given situation get more say in the matter.

L2 learner identity theory and models

The link between one's own sense of identity and language acquisition may not be obvious or intuitive at first glance; nonetheless, it can be a significant factor in shaping the learning experience of a L2 learner. The goal for this section of the paper is to link the ideas of identity as defined in the previous section to the framework of language learning and to explain how one's sense of identity can play a role in second language acquisition. For that purpose, three examples of Poststructuralist theories/models that aim to explain the socio-psychological factors that play a part in language learning and the behaviors of a language learner will be presented.

Norton's model of second language identity theory

Within the research field of second language identity theory, the most influential theory of all is the one formulated by Norton (2000). There are two concepts within her theory that illustrate how the language learner makes choices that affect his/her language learning experiences. The first is the concept of investment. Norton claims, "If learners 'invest' in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" (Norton, 2010, p. 353). Norton replaces the notion of motivation with investment to emphasize that motivated learners, in the general sense, may not always see all language learning activities and opportunities to be worth his/her investment; hence, highly motivated learners may exhibit unmotivated behavior in certain situations. The second key element is the L2 learners' affective and symbolic affiliations with various communities of practice. Simply put, this is the community that the L2 learner strives to be a part of through the learning/acquisition of a second language (i.e. community of native speakers, class of L2 learners, etc.). Both of the concepts listed above have an impact on the behavior of a language learner and on the rate and nature of language acquisition, which stem from the vision of what kind of identity he/she envisions to acquire/maintain.

Acculturation model

Schumann maintains, "Any learner can be placed on a continuum that ranges from social and psychological distance to social and psychological proximity with speakers of the TL [Target Language], and that the learner will acquire the second language only to the degree that he acculturates" (Schumann, 1986, p. 379). The term *acculturation*, according to Schumann, refers to the action of socially and psychologically integrating oneself into the

target language group.

Schumann claims there are two types of variables that affect the degree and nature of acculturation: social variables and affective variables.

The social variables are broken down into seven factors:

1. *Social dominance patterns.* The political, cultural, technical, or economic superiority or inferiority of a group in a contact situation.
2. *Integration strategies.*
    a. *Assimilation.* Total integration of life style and values with those of the target language group.
    b. *Preservation.* The opposite of assimilation: The language learner rejects the life-styles and values of the target language group and tries to preserve his/her own culture.
    c. *Adaptatio*n. Adopts the lifestyles and values of the target language group but reverts back to their own within intra-cultural communication.
3. *Enclosure.* The degree to which the two groups share the same churches, schools, clubs, recreational facilities, crafts, professions, and trades.
4. *Cohesiveness & size.* The more cohesive or large the language learner group is, the less likely that acculturation will occur.
5. *Congruence/similarity.* The more similarities that the two groups possess, the more likely that acculturation will occur.
6. *Attitude.* The attitude of each of the groups towards each other plays a crucial role in determining the degree to which acculturation occurs.
7. *Length of residence in the target language area.* The longer the intended stay, the more likely that acculturation occurs.

Affective variables are categorized into four factors:

1. *Language shock.* The learner's self-esteem concerning the target language use.
2. *Cultural shock.* Disorientation resulting from encountering a new culture.
3. *Motivation.* The learner's purpose for learning the target language.

  4.   *Ego-permeability*. In short, the flexibility of the learner's sense of
       who he/she is.

Both Norton's model of second language acquisition theory and Schumann's acculturation model place emphasis on the volition of the language learner and how much he/she is willing to integrate him/herself into the community in which the target language is being learnt. In general, the more one integrates oneself, the more successful language acquisition becomes.

Speech accommodation theory

  Coupland, Giles, & Henwood (1988) define speech *accommodation theory* as a "social psychological model that explains and predicts interindividual sociolinguistic behaviors and their effects" (Coupland, Giles, & Henwood, 1988, p.6). Although they may come in several different forms, the core factors of this theory are *convergence* and *divergence*: Coupland, Giles, & Henwood maintain that interpersonal behavior can be explained in terms of these and other *speech accommodation strategies*. Below is a list of the different types of speech accommodation strategies that occur in interaction according to Coupland, Giles, & Henwood:

  1.   *Speech convergence*. Individual's adaptation to the interlocutor's
       speech (i.e. choice of language, pronunciation, dialect etc.).
  2.   *Speech divergence*. The accentuation of one's linguistic differences
       from the interlocutor (i.e. choice of language, pronunciation, dialect etc.).
  3.   *Speech maintenance*. Nonconvergence/nondivergence with interlocutor.
  4.   *Speech complementarity*. Accentuation of factors that are culturally
       perceived to be standard for a certain role (i.e. high pitch speech of
       Japanese women) within inter-role communication.

  Speech accommodation theory, unlike the acculturation model, does not account for the psychological, subjective rationale for the actions that people take in interaction; however, it describes the types of phenomena that occur as a result of the various mental states that the learners possess at a given point in time regarding their sense of identity in relation to the interlocutor.

  The three L2 learner identity theories/models that were outlined in this paper can all contribute in different ways to understanding the complexity of the relationship between language learning and the learner's sense of identity. Norton's model of second language identity theory places emphasis on the notion of *investment* and the learner's affiliation to given communities of practice. Schumann's acculturation model aims to illustrate the social

and affective variables that constitute a learner's willingness/desire to *acculturate* to the target language group. Coupland, Giles, & Henwood's speech accommodation theory focuses on the behavioral variations that occur as a result of a learner's intents.

As has been stated in the introduction, the brief coverage of the theories and models introduced in this paper does not do justice to their richness. Readers are strongly advised to refer to the original works cited in the reference section for a more detailed overview.

Case studies

Immigrants

Immigrants cover a large percentage of language learners around the globe today. The reasons for immigration can be diverse but a good number of immigrants come for economic advantages. In those circumstances, there is an imperative for immigrants to assimilate with people of the host culture. In order to do so, a certain level of proficiency in the language of the host country is often a prerequisite for acceptance into those communities. In order to illustrate the language learning experiences of immigrants, Norton's study (2000) will be taken as an example to show how language learning and issues of identity intertwine.

Norton conducted a longitudinal study of five adult immigrants in Canada. The Method of data collection that she employed for this study were two interviews, a diary study lasting roughly six months, and two sets of questionnaires that took place at the beginning of the study and at the end of the study. The central questions that she addresses in this study are as follows:

> The questions addressed in this book can be collapsed into two broad sets of questions. (i) Since interaction with target language speakers is a desirable condition for adult SLA, what opportunities for interaction exist outside the classroom? How is this interaction socially structured? How do learners act upon these structures to create, use or resist opportunities to speak? To what extent should their actions be understood with reference to their investment in the target language and their changing identities across time and space? (ii) How can an enhanced understanding of identity and natural language learning inform both SLA theory and classroom practice? (Norton, 2000, p.22)

In order to assess the findings and conclusions that Norton draws from this study, two

immigrants involved in this study, Eva and Mia, have been chosen.

Eva

The first participant in this study goes by the name of Eva. Eva is a Polish woman who immigrated alone to Canada when she was 20 with the goal of acquiring economic advantages. For that goal she hoped to study in a university to ultimately acquire a degree in business. Canada was her country of choice because she thought that Canada was one of the few industrialized countries that encouraged immigration. Prior to her immigration to Canada, Eva had spent two years in Italy where she leaned to become fluent in Italian. At the time of immigration, Eva could not speak any English.

Shortly after Eva arrived in Canada, she moved in with a Polish roommate. She claimed that her decision to move in with a Polish roommate was a conscious one and explained that she needed to be with someone who had the same cultural background – someone who would understand her. Little English was spoken at home; thus, her home served as a place of refuge that provided her peace of mind in a foreign city. Eva also found a job at what she called "the Italian store" where she was very much liked by customers due to her fluency in Italian. However, that career was short-lived due to the fact that she wasn't able to practice using English there. She reduced the amount of time working there and entered a language-training program. Upon completion of the program, she found full-time employment at a fast-food restaurant.

During the initial stages of her work at the fast-food restaurant, Eva experienced difficulty assimilating with the Canadian employees. Eva realized that in order to improve her English skills, she had to be somehow become accepted within the Canadian community. However, her status as an immigrant working a low-status job within the workplace and her inability to speak English led her fellow Canadian employees to marginalize her. Because of this, Eva lacked confidence and came to feel anxious about speaking English. Eva's lack of confidence and her sense of anxiety were not traits inherent to her; they were socially co-constructed through social positioning that took place within the interactions she had with her Canadian co-workers.

After several months of marginalization, Eva decided to make a conscious effort to try to earn a spot in the Canadian community at work. She refused to be marginalized, and as a result, she was gradually able to integrate herself into that community of practice. The Canadian employees started identifying Eva as a member of the group, and through this integration, she gained access to other English speaking communities. Two years after her arrival, Eva found solace in her life in Canada. Her identity had made a gradual

transformation from that of an immigrant who lived in an unknown land to a multicultural citizen of Canada.

In Eva's case, it is apparent that she was highly motivated to integrate with the group of Canadians. Being a part of that community was an identity that she strongly strived for. The integration strategy she employed was adaptation (2c of Schumann's acculturation model) wherein she adhered to the cultural standards of the natives at her workplace but reverted back to her home culture at home with her Polish roommate. We also see that she experienced language shock due to her marginalization at her workplace. In the end though, she persevered and successfully integrated/assimilated with the native Canadians, which also led to her success in her linguistic endeavor.

Mia

The second participant involved in this study was named Mia. Similar to Eva, Mia was a young immigrant who immigrated to Canada for a better economic future. She was Vietnamese. Mia, unlike Eva, had never lived outside of Vietnam prior to her immigration to Canada. Contrary to the situation that Eva was in, Mia lived with her brother and several members of her extended family for the first two-and-a-half years after her arrival in Canada. At her home there, three different languages were constantly in use between the residents: Vietnamese, Cantonese, and English.

Similar to Eva, Mia was able to find full-time employment relatively quickly. Due to her prior training in dressmaking that she received in Vietnam, she was able to get a decent position at a fabric factory where she assimilated with fellow employees immediately. None of the fellow employees were Canadian but their diversity led them to communicate in English. Mia was satisfied with the situation that she was in: she had a full time job in which she was able to communicate with fellow employees in English and she felt that her sense of identity in Canada was stabilizing. At the same time, her development in English fluency led her to become the go-to person at home where she mediated many interactions between other residents. This led to her to gaining trust from her nephews, which buffered the ill treatment that she was receiving from the other members of the home.

Unfortunately, things changed after the company laid-off a number of employees working at the factory due to recession. After the lay-off, Mia's co-workers, who all ended up being Italians, resorted to using Italian as a means of communication at the workplace. Because of this, solidarity between her and her fellow employees was lost. As a result she was marginalized at work and everything seemed to have gone downhill until she got married in 1992—two-and-a-half years after her arrival in Canada.

When we compare the stories of Mia and Eva, we can immediately see the differences in their lives in Canada. Eva started off struggling to be accepted as a member of the community but gradually worked her way in. On the contrary, Mia started off quite smoothly with no issues concerning assimilation; however, due to a turn of events beyond her control, she lost access to the English speaking community and became a victim of marginalization at her workplace. In each case, we can see that the participants' sense of identity has been an integral part of their decision making.

Returnees/kikokushijo

Studies targeting returnees (or *kikokushijo* in Japanese) are not as common as those targeting immigrants. Returnees are usually the sons or daughters of parents who are transferred abroad for business reasons; thus, it is temporary. The biggest distinction between the experience of returnees and that of the immigrants is the fact that the returnees have to make two big adjustments: assimilation with the host community during their time of stay abroad, and assimilation back into their home country community at the time of return. The mere awareness of there being a return to their home country in the future also separates them from the immigrants. Returnees often, either from their own will or through parental influence, must envision a future that is far ahead. How do they want to identify themselves when they return to their home country? What are their goals when they return? What kind of identity must they seek during their stay abroad? These are some questions that returnees must contemplate during the entire process of living abroad and for some time after their return.

For the purpose of illustrating the social and subjective lives of returnee students, I'd like to use the study conducted by Kanno on Japanese returnee students from Canada as an example. For this study, Kanno conducted a longitudinal study (three years) on four returnee students by collecting data via interviews, letter/journal exchange, telephone calls, and e-mails which were conducted in the form of narrative inquiry (which has become a legitimate and popular form of data collection in the study of identity). All four returnees were students of Kanno's at the hoshuko (Japanese Saturday school) that she was teaching at in Canada. The theoretical framework for this study is also that of poststructuralism.

Sawako

The first participant in this study goes by the name of Sawako. Sawako was born in Kyoto, Japan, and was raised there until the age of seven, when she moved to Los Angeles due to her father's transfer. She stayed there until the age of ten when they moved to

Chicago. Sawako, during her time in Los Angeles, went to a regular American school where she was treated very kindly by her classmates and her teacher due to the teacher's background as a Japanese-American. Sawako explained that Mrs. Sato actively tried to help her assimilate and learn English. During this time, her fluency in English developed very rapidly and was starting to replace her Japanese as the dominant language. This was a classical case of subtractive bilingualism in a submersion context. However, her parents view that preservation of Sawako's Japanese identity was of upmost importance led them to enroll her in *nihonjingakko* (a full-time Japanese school) when they moved to Chicago.

During Sawako's three-year stay in Chicago until the age of thirteen, the nihonjingakko helped her dramatically improve her Japanese skills. At the same time, however, she had lost the opportunity to socialize with people in English, which put a halt to her development in English fluency. Sawako eventually returned to Japan at age thirteen and stayed there for two years until she finally moved to Canada at age fifteen where she was placed in the ESL program.

Having seen success with integrating into the American community at the time of her move to Los Angeles, Sawako anticipated a similar sense of acceptance with the Canadian community; however, things did not go as smoothly this time around. She found herself being stuck in a quintessential case of catch-22: meaningful communication with the members of the Canadian community was a prerequisite for her acceptance but she could not acquire the necessary skills for that without being able to socialize with the native speakers of English. Sawako was eager to gain acceptance by the host community because she felt that spending time and being accepted by the members of the Canadian society was the only way to make her experience living in Canada 'real'. Even though she got along with some of the other students from the ESL program, all her fellow students in the ESL program, regardless of the fact that some had Canadian citizenship, were in her mind, second-rate citizens whose approval she did not seek. She wanted to be at the center of the culture. That was her ideal identity at the time. In the end, Sawako's effort to be accepted by the Canadian population proved to be futile. She was never able to fully assimilate. However, her life at the hoshuko, where she felt at home and accepted, became the highlight of her life in Canada. More on Sawako will be covered later after all the participants have been introduced.

Kikuko

The next participant in this study is Kikuko. Although Canada was not the only foreign country that she had lived in, Kikuko's background of living abroad was not as complex as Sawako's. Kikuko was born in Kobe and raised there until the age of thirteen, when she

moved to Atlanta due to her father's transfer. Due to her non-existent English skills, Sawako was initially placed into the sixth grade at her school in Atlanta; however, when her parents found out that a student her age should be in the eighth grade, she was moved up to the seventh grade. This caused a big problem with integration, because by the time she arrived to the seventh grade, the students' dynamics had already been established. Nonetheless, Kikuko did not feel any sense of urgency to learn English, nor become accepted by the American community. She had one Japanese classmate who she became close friends with. In the end Kikuko never felt the need to be accepted by the host community during her time in Atlanta.

At the age of seventeen, Kikuko's father was transferred to Canada. Things were not very different for Kikuko in Canada from when she was in Atlanta: she was not accepted by the English-speaking communities. Although, from time to time, she expressed frustration with being isolated, she was a lot quicker in adapting than was Sawako. Unlike Sawako, Kikuko felt no hesitation identifying with members of the Japanese community. She actively sought to equip herself with knowledge about Japanese pop culture and socialized with Japanese friends as if they were in Japan. She came to refer to the Canadians as 'gaijin' (foreigner), which reflected her psychological distance from them. Kikuko found solace in maintaining her Japanese identity.

Kikuko's integration strategy was preservation (2b of Schumann's acculturation model). She did not see assimilation with neither the American nor Canadian communities as worthwhile investments, and that resulted in full rejection.

Kenji

The next participant on the list is Kenji. Kenji was born Japan and was raised there until age 12, when he moved to Canada. Unlike the previous two participants, Kenji only lived in one foreign country. Kenji, despite his low fluency in English, found immediate success in integrating with the Canadian community. The reason for this was his athleticism and the popularity that accompanied it. These factors alone were enough to gain acceptance into the Canadian community. We all know that athleticism is a very strong asset for high school students. As a result, Kenji's assessment of the characteristics of his fellow Canadian peers was extremely positive. Unlike Sawako and Kikuko's opinions concerning their peers in their host country, Kenji said that his Canadian peers were extremely warm and supportive. As a result, Kenji was able to establish his ideal identity from the start, and there was little struggle on his part.

Rui

The last participant of this study is Rui. Rui was born in Japan but moved to Australia at the age of three when his father was transferred. Rui was young enough to acquire English naturally in school and at home, and could be considered a bilingual. Rui was also given Japanese instruction at home from his parents, which turned out to be very effective in developing his Japanese proficiency even while living in Australia. Rui returned to Japan at the age of nine when he was enrolled in the third grade. His parents had equipped him well with the necessary Japanese skills to keep up, and he showed little sign of lagging behind. By the time he was in fifth grade, he had become accustomed to living in Japan again. He claims that he was back to being 'Japanese' again.

It was when he was fifteen years old that he had to move again. This time, it was to Canada. We must note that Rui was an exceptionally gifted child. He was very athletic, his grades were always at the top, he was very charismatic, and he was artistically gifted. On top of that, Rui was practically a balanced bilingual. Hence, unlike the other three participants, Rui had no issues with integration. He was quick to make friends of many different ethnic backgrounds. However, due to being the most bicultural of the four, Rui made a conscious effort to stay in touch with his Japanese roots because, ultimately, Rui wanted to be seen by others as a Japanese. He went to hoshuko every week and tried to spend time with the Japanese community there in order to maintain his Japanese identity.

Now that the participants' lives up to their graduation from high school has been prsented, it is now time to examine the changes that happened after their return to Japan. Interestingly, there were two different approaches that the students took when they returned to Japan. Kenji and Kikuko made efforst to fit into Japanese society. Kenji joined a very tough sports club to reawaken his Japanese identity and Kikuko took drastic measures to become more Japanese than the Japanese through fashion and knowledge of Japanese pop culture. We can see that Kenji and Kikuko did not see the images associated with the label 'kikokushijo' as something they'd like to keep as a part of their identity. The label brings along both positive and negative images.

Rui and Sawako both decided to accentuate their backgrounds as returnees. Sawako thought that the merits and leverages that come along with the label of being a returnee outweigh the negative connotations that the label entails. Here, we see that, unlike Kenji and Kikuko, Sawako's affiliation towards the imaginary community of 'kikokushijo' is a positive one. Therefore, Sawako's subjectivity gravitated towards that identity, whereas Kenji and Kikuko decided to stay clear from it. Rui was sort of an outlier in this study. After his ultimate return to Japan Rui came to the conclusion that he was no longer Japanese.

Although he put in so much effort to keep his identity as a Japanese, the reality was, he couldn't identify with the Japanese. Another interesting point about all the participants' point of view regarding English was that, for the first time, English became 'their language' after their return to Japan. They did not have to fear being judged by others for their linguistic flaws, and they could speak English freely. It was as if the curse was lifted.

By about one-and-a-half years after the participants' return to Japan, time had helped them to reassess their unique experiences. The polarized attitudes of the participants, by this point, had reached a middle ground; they were all affiliated with different communities of practice and came to terms with their unique hybrid identities. Like the steps involved in the process of grief, many changes had to take place in order to reach acceptance.

My case study

For this study, I wanted to interview an L2 speaker of English who has high communicative competence but has a different history than the participants described in the aforementioned studies. In order to do so, I looked for a person who had had experience being immersed in multiple foreign cultures. As a result, I ended up choosing a student from an American university in Japan. For this study, I conducted a three-hour interview to get a subjective, retrospective view of the participant's sense of identity and how it shifted throughout her life. The following sections are based on information I got from this interview.

Hanako's background

First of all, I'd like to describe the general upbringing and language learning background of my participant, Hanako. Hanako was born in Kanagawa, Japan, into a family of four (she has one older sister). Both her parents were Japanese, and she was raised as a monolingual Japanese girl just like most other Japanese girls. She went to a Japanese school until the age of sixteen when she had to move to England due to her father's transfer. She stayed in England for approximately one year. After she came back to Japan, she attended a Japanese high school and university. After Hanako graduated from university with a degree in German, she worked for a Japanese company for a while before she became an English teacher and started attending graduate school to get a degree in TESOL from an American university in Japan.

Before going to England

When I asked Hanako about how she had viewed herself prior to her leaving for England, she said, "I was maybe a bit different in some ways because I wasn't kind of a

typical Japanese girl, grouping, and doing everything together. I never liked it. I had more guy friends than girl friends." This revealed that Hanako saw herself as an oddball within her Japanese peers even before her departure. At the same time, she also reflected, "I don't know. I was there. I had no choice." She meant to say that the circumstances forced her to take on the role of a Japanese. She knew she was different, but she didn't have any other options.

It was one year before Hanako left for England that she found out that she was going to be moving. At the time, she was sixteen, and she was in the second grade of high school in a Japanese public school. From the time that Hanako found out about her leaving, she started going to English conversation school. She attended the school for half a year but came to the conclusion that it was a waste of time and she had learnt nothing there: "I mean compared to real life, it was nothing, there." Thus, she left for England with very limited communication skills in English. The next section will deal with the time Hanako spent in England with respect to her own sense of identity throughout her stay.

Her time in England

When Hanako first arrived in England, she attended a language school in Cambridge to improve her English before going to the private school that she was set to go to in Devon. The majority of the students attending that language school were Turkish. The rest of the students consisted of Chinese, Spanish, Italian, a few Japanese, etc. During this time, she says she avoided making friends and decided to spend time alone, as she says, "You can kind of… have a day without speaking. You just go to school, and you're too shy, I think I was in that stage." We see here that her situation there did not inspire Hanako to converge or acculturate with the people there. If we dissect the situation, we can see that the factors comprising the acculturation model were not positively fulfilled for her to make an effort at acculturation (i.e. length of residence, attitude towards the classmates culture, and language shock).

After the two months of studying at the language school in Cambridge, Hanako moved to Devon to attend a renowned private high school there. The initial stages of her life there posed a very serious problem for Hanako in terms of her sense of identity. "I was very lost. My identity was wiped off. It didn't mean anything", was Hanako's recollection of her state during this time. She said that nobody seemed to recognize her existence at the school and the teachers considered her a visitor. She had strong feelings to be accepted by the British students, but she was "invisible" to them. The shock was so great, she says, that there was no frustration or anger; she just had to accept the situation and cope with it.

Upon contemplating about her situation, she gradually came to the realization that, in

order for her to be accepted, she had to become British ("H" refers to Hanako, and "I" refers to me, the interviewer, in the following dialogue):

> I: Did you want to be one of them (British)?
> H: I had to be. There was no choice.
> I: … it's only one year … you could choose to distance yourself from the
>   others.
> H: I didn't have that philosophy. I thought I had to overcome it. The only
>   way to do   that was to become British.

In order to "become British", Hanako consciously tried to gather information about British popular culture in order to participate in conversations with the other British students; however, her lack of competence in English did not allow this to happen smoothly. The conundrum of assimilation and communicative competence strikes again here in Hanako's situation: in order to be accepted by the target language community, communicative competence usually has to be relatively high: however, in order to develop communicative competence, the learner must interact with target language group members.

The dark ages of Hanako's experience at the high school in Devon came to an end after her second month there. She started dating a very popular Japanese student who was a star player in the rugby team at the school. This became a gateway for her to gain access to the other British students in the school. Her English proficiency quickly improved after this. As a result, by the end of her stay in England, she says upon looking back, she was completely British. She had thrown out her Japanese identity in order to survive at the school. Although she looked Japanese, she thought and spoke like the British.

Hanako's story of her stay in England demonstrates that identity is non-unitary and co-constructed in interaction. She found that she had to try to change her own sense of identity and at the same time, be accepted by the people she wished to identify with. Fortunately, for Hanako, she was successful in achieving this goal, but the outcomes do not always play out in the learner's favor as can be seen from some of the other case studies outlined before. In the next section of the paper, I will go into illustrating Hanako's experience after her return to Japan.

Her return to Japan

Hanako came back to Japan at the age of seventeen and was put in the third grade of high school (senior year) where all her classmates (most of whom she was friends with before

she left for England) were busy preparing for university entrance examinations. Although this time it was due to bad timing, she ended up spending a lot of time alone. Her high school social life became nonexistent and she ended up spending most of her time alone for the next six months until high school graduation.

Life in university did not go very smoothly for Hanako either: she felt ostracized by the people in her department due to her proficiency in both English and in German (which she picked up naturally in classes). During the four years of being a university student (and the many years after that), she had to contemplate who she must become. She said, "I put so much time and effort in becoming British in one year, and can I just let it go? Should I just keep it? Should I stay in Japan? Should I go back to Britain?"

Hanako explained that her experiences since her return to Japan at the age of sixteen had mainly been colored with a sense of marginalization. Because of the fact that she put in so much effort into becoming culturally British, she could not let it go. Consequently, her Japanese peers and colleagues at her subsequent jobs viewed her as a foreigner although she was 100% Japanese by blood and nationality; however, she was able to make many foreign friends and got along very well. She also added, "It wasn't until like a year ago that I became comfortable with my own identity. Now, I can say with confidence, 'this is who I am'."

By the time of the interview, Hanako was finally able to accept her cultural diversity: she knew she is Japanese by blood, but she related more to western culture; she could accept and respect Japanese culture, but she was aware that it was not hers. She claimed that she is British at heart and it is a core part of her sense of identity.

I asked her about her experience being at the American university and how she felt about her experience there. In response, Hanako said that the people at the American university (mostly Americans) are very interesting, and she felt very comfortable spending time with them; however, she was becoming worried that her British identity may slowly fade out. The reason that she was worried about this was because, she claims, "I find myself unconsciously speaking in American English pronunciation; for example, I usually say "butter" (with a /t/), but sometimes, it comes out "butter" (with a flap instead of /t/). Well, I can't fight it, you know. It's an unconscious process. I just hope that I don't lose my British identity."

Hanako's upbringing may have enriched her with a diverse multicultural background, but it is also clear that she had her share of struggles, both external and internal. These types of conflicts can occur to any language learner anywhere, and for us language instructors, we must be aware of the fact that language cannot be isolated from culture. It becomes crucial in the modern world of intercultural communication to be sensitive about the

subjectivities of language learners in general, and also at the individual level. I hope that the case studies I have illustrated in this paper may reveal a side of language learning/teaching that has often been neglected, and that it can provide us with a better understanding of SLA.

Discussion

By taking into account the non-unitary, ever-evolving nature of identity, there is the possibility of a drastic revision in how SLA is envisioned. At this point, the mainstream theory of SLA lies in the cognitive perspective of language learning. If more SLA researchers were to adopt the sociolinguistic notion of identity into the realm of SLA, a new form of language teaching may arise. However, more research in this field must be conducted to come to any defining theory of SLA rooted in Sociolinguistics. Nonetheless, the use of narrative inquiry has proven to show that it is a powerful tool in knowing the nature of language, society, and identity. The central theme for this field, I think, should be: A) How can theory of sociolinguistics be utilized to help language instructors to better facilitate learners? B) How can we better understand learners' mentality within the context of language learning?

Conclusion

The topic of this paper has been the identity of language learners. In the first section of the paper, I gave a brief overview of the poststructuralist theory of identity, and explained that the main idea of this theory was to reconstruct our understanding of the nature of identity. The traditional Western view sees identity as being an essential, fixed, unitary core of an individual, which is not subject to change. Post-structuralism claims the opposite: that identity must be seen as multiple, non-unitary, and ever-changing. Furthermore, identity is not something that is possessed but is socially constructed within interaction through negotiation and social positioning.

The second half of the paper looked into the reality of language learners' subjectivities. As the learners strived to gain fluency in a language, we saw why learners made the choices they did, what was envisioned by them, and how their sense of identity and affiliation changed over time. By understanding the rationale behind the choices that learners make, there seems to be hints as to what language instructors could do in order to facilitate a better learning experience.

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