Identity, Good Language Learning, and Adult Immigrants in Canada

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This study examines the process of linguistic-and-cultural-identity formation as experienced by adult immigrants to Canada who consider themselves professionally successful and highly proficient in the target language. It addresses the characteristics of "good language learners" by determining how they negotiated their marginal standing in Canadian society and became successful professionals, proficient in English. It offers insights into the role of human agency in good language learning, and it analyzes the dynamics between identity and internal versus external power. Through a series of interviews with 20 practicing professionals who immigrated as adults, 3 common strategies emerged as essential in their journey of identity construction: generation of a self-motivating inner dialogue as a counter-discourse to the social marginalization paradigm expected by the NS community, finding ways to gain access into the social networks of native speakers in order to improve communicative competence and secure meaningful employment, and symbolic membership in an "imagined community" of successful multilingual and bicultural adult immigrants.

Key words: linguistic and cultural identity, imagined communities, multilingual competence, adult immigrants, internal power, external power

Like the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, Canada has traditionally grown through immigration. While in the past, first-generation immigrants were generally skilled manual workers, over the past 20 years Canada's immigration policy has been strategically designed to attract the world's brightest and best-educated people (Baxter, 1999; Duffy, April 2000; DeVoretz, Hinte, & Werner, 2002) in order to compete in a global economy that is increasingly dependent on a highly skilled workforce. Those seeking to immigrate to Canada are given priority according to a point system that takes into account education, age, professional skills, work experience, and proficiency in either of Canada's official languages. Canada is seeking to replace its aging human resources with young, educated, and skilled newcomers, and by and large, has been successful in achieving a "brain gain."

Sadly, however, many of these new arrivals are not integrating into the Canadian economy as readily as had been predicted (Duffy, 2000). Research findings indicate that high English proficiency has a positive effect on immigrant earnings and employment opportunities in Canada (Chiswick & Miller, 1988; Boyd, 1990; DeSilva, 1997), while low English skills correlate with poorer labour market outcomes (Pendakur & Pendakur, 1997). Stories abound of highly educated

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immigrants driving taxicabs and pizza delivery vans, bewildered at the new reality of life in Canada that falls short of its promises (Mazumdar, 2004). The challenge of acquiring English language proficiency (ELP) to the level required for successful participation in the workplace is one of the barriers faced by these new immigrants.

Norton (1997, 2000b) challenges the view of naturalistic language learning as an ideal process, in which immigrants are surrounded by supportive native speakers (NS) who interact with non-native speakers (NNS) in an egalitarian and accepting manner. According to Norton, NS are more likely to avoid interactions with NNS, rather than provide them with input and help them negotiate meaning in the target language. Immigrants do not have the luxury to interact with whom they choose, as their opportunities to practise English are generally limited and socially structured for them. Under these circumstances, many immigrants become marginalized, introverted, and sensitive to rejection. They take fewer language risks and do not acquire a high level of communicative competence in the target language, which prevents them from securing meaningful employment.

Yet there are examples of immigrants who are able to construct potent L2 speakers' identities that empower them to view themselves as successful in relation to the world and to develop sufficient second-language proficiency to participate once again in various professional fields in the host country, including medicine, pharmacy, engineering, and academe. How do they construct their cultural and linguistic identity in relation to the new world? Previous research (Birdsong, 1999; Cook, 1992; Norton, 2000b) has focused on the cultural identity of immigrants who felt marginalized and relatively unsuccessful in learning English and gaining meaningful employment. The current study addresses the characteristics of "good language learners" who are adult immigrants in Canada by determining how they negotiated their marginal standing in Canadian society and became successful professionals, proficient in English. The article offers insight into the process of identity formation as experienced by immigrants who consider themselves professionally successful and highly proficient in the target language.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Second-language (L2) acquisition is the outcome of interaction among a complex set of environmental factors, innate learning abilities, sociocultural identity, personality tendencies, and strategic choices. Second-language acquisition (SLA) theorists and applied linguists tend to situate their conceptual endeavours within one of the above frameworks. The goal of many studies on good language learning has been to identify the specific combinations of personality characteristics, motivation, attitudes, past experiences, learning styles, and learning strategies that correlate with success in language learning (Bialystok, 1990; Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Krashen, 1982; Ellis, 1985; Gardner, Day, & MacIntyre, 1992). Rubin (1975) suggests that the good language learner: (a) has a strong drive to communicate, (b) is uninhibited, (c) is prepared to attend to form, (d) practises, (e) monitors his or her own speech and the speech of others, and (f) attends to meaning. Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, and Todescu (1978) claim that adult good language learners deploy 5 language learning strategies: (a) active task approach, (b) awareness and exploitation of language as a system, (c) use of language as a means of communication and interaction, (d) management of affective difficulties, and (e) monitoring of performance in the target language.

Schumann (1986) proposes the Acculturation Model to account for the variance of language proficiency levels achieved by L2 learners and claims that the closer L2 learners identify with the L2 group and culture, the better they acculturate and, in turn, the higher their proficiency level will be. Schumann (1986) speculates that the condition for L2 learners to move beyond the pidginization or fossilization stage is to acculturate or become proficient in the L2 culture and interact with NS speakers of the language. Schumann's Acculturation Model has been questioned and empirically scrutinized (Berdan, 1996) through a reanalysis of the original data. The newer findings suggest that in spite of his cultural isolation, Alberto, Schumann's informant, was progressing toward more target-like forms.

SLA research often regards adult language learners as less successful than children. In Cook's study (1992), adult immigrants to New Zealand complain that their children outperform them in speaking English. Supporters of the "critical period" hypothesis claim that children acquire a second language better than adults and that "once this window of opportunity is passed, the ability to learn the language declines" (Birdsong, 1999, p. 1), due to the process of lateralization of the brain (Lennenberg, 1967). A more recent explanation is myelation, which is a progressive process that diminishes the flexibility of the brain. Ioup, Boustagui, El Tigi, and Moselle (1994) propose the term "sensitive period" rather than critical to account for the fact that the level of L2 acquisition attainment after a certain age becomes variable rather than impossible. The idea of variability rather than impossibility is more a realistic theory that is wide enough to include adult learners who are successful language learners. In addition, some recent studies contradict the view that "younger is better" (Swain, 1981; Singleton, 1989). Fathman's (1975) study suggests that younger students are better at phonology while older students outperform them at morphology. Children tend to communicate on a more limited number of topics and use a more restricted lexical range than adults, mainly the high frequency words. Phonologically speaking, they may sound native when, in fact, they may be lacking underlying proficiency and more sophisticated vocabulary.

In the 1990s, SLA research saw an increasing interest in exploring how social and cultural contexts affect good language learning (Auerbach, 1997; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995; Pennycook, 1990). Norton and Toohey (2001) argue that SLA theories that rely only on individual characteristics, learning strategies, language inputs and outputs—without taking into consideration learners' situated experiences and the capital role of a community of practice—fail to explain why some learners are more successful in language learning than others. In Norton's (2000b) study with adult immigrants in Canada, only one of the 5 participants, Eva, became highly proficient in learning English, even though all of them employed all 5 strategies previously identified by Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, and Todescu (1978). In Norton and Toohey's (2001) view, the key difference is that good learners exercise human agency to negotiate their entry into the social networks so they can practice and improve their competence in the target language. Norton and Toohey (2001) call for a focus on learning context, human agency, and identity in SLA research.

The past decade has seen much research interest in the relationship between second-language learning and identity. Researchers have approached this aspect from a variety of perspectives and by using diverse methodologies. New forms of identification and a "crisis of identity" characterize the modern individual (Hall & Du Gay, 1996). West (1992) conceptualizes identity as connected to desire for recognition, affiliation, security and safety, and inseparable from a person's access to material resources in society. In West's view, a person's identity is not a fixed construct, but a mutable one, shifting according to one's access to economic and social resources. According to Ricento (2005, p. 895), sociocultural theorists (Bourdieu, 1991; Lantolf, 2000)

conceptualize identity "not as a fixed invariant attribute in the 'mind' of the individual learner. Rather identity is theorized as a contingent process involving dialectic relations between learners and the various worlds and experiences they inhabit and which act on them."

Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of the relationship between identity and symbolic power to explain how social status influences the "right to speech" (1977, p. 75), which was translated by Norton as "the right to speak" (2000b, p. 8). Norton's longitudinal study of 5 immigrant women in Canada illustrates the complex effects of investment, identity, and power on L2 learning and provides an ethnographic perspective, "crucial in SLA, because instead of considering learners as isolated individuals, it emphasizes the analysis of their histories and local communities" (Potowski, 2001, p. 12). A learner's identity is constantly mediated by the reactions of others to that individual's social status and cultural position, which in turn affects motivation or investment in the target language (Ricento, 2005, p. 899).

Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) focus on the role of intention and human agency in L2 learners' decisions to undergo the complex and often painful process of linguistic and cultural transformation. A learner's identity cannot be separated from power, which is socially constructed and negotiated among individuals and institutions. McKay and Wong's (1996) study explores how those in power may marginalize learners in certain contexts, but some learners may resist marginalization by generating a counter-discourse. Cultural capital, defined by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) as "knowledge and modes of thought that characterize different classes and groups in relation to specific sets of social forms" (cited in Norton, 2000b, p. 10), plays an essential role in L2 learners' resistance to marginalization and negotiation of their identity.

Bosher (1997) found that newcomers to the United States managed to develop a bicultural identity, by adapting to the host culture without giving up affiliation to their L1 and culture. Modern societies are increasingly characterized by the prevalence of cultural hybridity and multilingualism (Ricento, 2005, p. 896), rather than ethnic homogeneity.

In this article, I draw on the advances of poststructuralist critical pedagogy as they relate to "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Norton, 2000b, 2001; Pavlenko, 2003) and "multilingual competence" (Cook, 1999; Pavlenko, 2003) to capture essential steps in the journey of linguistic-and-cultural-identity construction as experienced by adult immigrants to Canada, who perceive themselves to be professionally successful and highly proficient in English.

"Imagined communities" can be generically defined as communities of practice to which individuals seeks entrance. Norton (2001) views the native speakers' group of a country, who have acquired the language since earliest childhood, as an imagined community of gatekeepers, to which immigrants learning the language try to gain access. She considers that gaining acceptance into the social networks of NS is essential for developing high communicative competence, but unfortunately many adult immigrants never feel accepted into the target group. Pavlenko (2003) suggests that L2 speakers gain more by choosing to belong to "an imagined community of multilingual and multi-competent individuals" instead of pursuing the elusive goal of seeking membership into the imagined community of native speakers.

PARTICIPANTS

The sample for this study consisted of 20 adult highly proficient non-native (NNS) speakers, who arrived in Canada after the age of 18 and who are now academically or professionally successful.

The age upon arrival ranged between 18 and 39 years old, with a group average of 28.95 years, while the length of residence in Canada ranged between 5 and 37 years, with a group average of 11.55 years.

Research subjects were selected through theoretical sampling, a common procedure in qualitative research, according to which the subjects are selected based on how likely they are to contribute to the development of an emerging theory (Seale, 2004). The sample for this study was selected to be representative of the "brain gain" immigration wave to Canada of the last 2 decades. All participants belong to the same category of highly educated (17+ years), independent immigrants who came to Canada as young adults. The sample included 10 professional occupations in Canada (accountant, college instructor, computer professional, data analyst, engineer, geologist, interior designer, network specialist, architect, and technical sales representative) and 13 first languages (Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Hungarian, Malayan, Marathi, Polish, Punjabi, Romanian, Serbian, Spanish, and Urdu) spoken by participants.

The researcher approached 12 organizations in a large city in Canada (educational institutions and companies that employ internationally educated professionals) that were likely to know or employ adult English NNS and that could invite them to participate in this study on behalf of the researcher. Intermediaries at these organizations passed along the invitation to participate in the research study to adult NNS who were perceived to have an exceptional command of English, had come to Canada after age 18, had acquired high English proficiency as adults, and were professionals practicing in their field. Potential participants were given the contact information for the researcher and were encouraged to follow through on the invitation at their earliest convenience.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data collection process consisted of a series of 3 interviews with each participant, conducted between November 2006 and June 2007. Participants were also asked to complete a background information questionnaire (Appendix A) to gather demographic information. Open-ended and flexible questions were asked in all interviews (Appendix B) and the third interview was scheduled to explore in-depth aspects that emerged in the first and second ones. Interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed for data analysis. Participants were given the option to use their own name or a pseudonym. In all, the researcher spent between 5 and 6 hours with each participant during the data collection process.

The data were analyzed following the principles of the grounded theory method. The process of data analysis was concomitant with the process of data gathering and began immediately after the first day in the field. Through the constant comparison method, 3 levels of codes were generated. Level I codes, also called in vivo, or substantive, codes, were the exact words that participants used in interviews. Level II codes resulted from comparing and condensing Level I codes. Similar Level I codes or items with shared characteristics fell into the same category. Finally, Level III codes were generated by integrating categories and their properties and raising the data to a higher level of abstraction to generate major themes.

FINDINGS

The interviews revealed a common tendency of the majority of participants to construct their cultural and linguistic identity as immigrants to Canada by combining 3 major approaches or strategies that empowered them to persevere in their efforts to improve their English proficiency and gain meaningful employment. First, they generated and perpetuated a self-motivating inner dialogue as a counter-discourse to the social marginalization paradigm expected by the NS community. Second, they went out of their way to gain access into the social networks of NS in order to practise English in authentic situations and to improve their communicative competence. They understood that without high proficiency in the language of power, they would be condemned to economic disadvantage and would not be able to practice as professionals. Third, they sought symbolic access to an "imagined community" of successful multilingual and bicultural immigrants. Each of these approaches is discussed in a separate section in the rest of the article.

Generating a Counter-Discourse

The first strategy is psychological in nature and represents the first step in the process of the formation of a new linguistic and cultural identity. In the journey toward high competence in the target language, participants felt at times marginalized and ridiculed by NS for their imperfect mastery of English, but they constantly resisted marginalization by negotiating a powerful identity for themselves and generating an inner *counter-discourse* (McKay & Wong, 1996), consisting of thought-reframing techniques such as acknowledgement of their talents and accomplishments, comparisons with themselves at a previous L2 acquisition stage rather than with NS models, and the evaluation of the target-language models as imperfect and susceptible to mistakes.

Comparisons with native speakers' English-proficiency levels were perceived as damaging for L2 learners' self-esteem, leading to the fear that they might never reach a native-like level of proficiency. In contrast, the acknowledgement of their own progress and talents actually boosted their self-esteem. Instead of comparing themselves with NS, participants gained more from valuing their own progress and giving themselves credit for how much they accomplished, compared to a previous stage in their language-learning process.

Veronica: Instead of comparing myself with NS, I chose to compare my English to that of a previous stage in my own language-learning trajectory. That way, I praised myself for how much progress I made and remained confident that I would keep making progress at the same rate.

Ava: I have come a long way since I first came to Canada, and I am very proud of how much my English has improved.

Some participants applied the *deflection* technique of evaluating the language performance of target models (English NS) as imperfect, and susceptible to mistakes:

Adi: Sometimes I made mistakes and I asked people to correct me, but I was never afraid to speak English. I am aware that even native speakers make mistakes, mainly grammar mistakes, and now I can catch them . . . Plus I take pride in the fact that I can speak two languages, unlike many English NS I have come in contact with.

Instead of getting frustrated by the mistakes that were an inherent part of their learning journey, participants reframed their mindset to view themselves as self-confident and competent multilingual individuals.

Self-confidence was perceived as resulting from the positive evaluation of one's worth based on the sum of one's skills and talents. One does not have to be perfect to be self-confident. The recurring view was that confidence results from embracing one's strengths and talents, while acknowledging one's weaknesses:

> Le: I'm not good at everything, I'm aware of that, but I still feel confident, as I'm good at something that other people are not good at. They don't know what I know and that gives me a lot of confidence in everything I do. It gave me a lot of confidence to speak English, even if I knew that it was not perfect.

Participants emphasized that self-confidence was key for gaining high communicative competence and were aware that not everybody is naturally self-confident, but they considered that self-confidence can be constructed or cultivated by reframing beliefs to be more enabling, and expressed in the positive: "I deserve to be successful and I can succeed."

Participants found a comforting source of self-confidence and internal power in taking pride in their status as multilingual individuals. They constantly reminded themselves of the value of their own linguistic and cultural capital, which included the ability to speak two or more languages:

> Iulia: Learning a second language is hard work. I simply refused to have my level of competence in English criticised by people who could speak only one language. In my experience, many NS who are intolerant to a foreign accent cannot speak a second language and cannot understand what it takes to learn it. I am very proud that I am multilingual and admire people who make the effort to learn another language.
>
> Veronica: I am a unique individual with a unique combination of skills and talents. I value the fact that I can speak 3 languages, even if I might never get true native-like ability in all of them.

Embracing a self-constructed identity as confident multilingual immigrants, rather than as perpetual second-language learners, allowed participants to keep experimenting with word uses, without getting discouraged when ridiculed by NS for making mistakes or using awkward lexical combinations. They learned to disregard native speakers' jokes and ironic comments and understood that mistakes were a natural part of the road to high language proficiency:

> Cristina: Take risks and use the words, even if you're not sure of what they mean. People may make fun of you or joke. That happened to me many times. It happened, but you just have to be persistent, I guess, and continue to take risks. My English has improved a lot because I took so many risks in using words.

Rather than perceiving themselves as always deficient L2 learners following an elusive target of native competence, participants constructed a powerful identity of confident multilingual individuals, proud of their linguistic capital. By focusing on strengthening their self-confidence, they gained more courage and created more opportunities to speak English without feeling threatened by an unrealistic model of native-like competence or accepting mockery by a NS with unilingual competence.

Gaining Access to Native Speakers' Social Networks

Another strategy that played a key role in participants' self-construction of a new linguistic and cultural identity as immigrants entailed going beyond mind-reframing techniques to embracing social participation. The participants realized that in order to gain high communicative competence in English, they needed access to the social networks of native speakers so that they could practise the language in authentic situations. As immigrants, they did not feel that they were automatically surrounded by supportive NS who would interact with them in an equal and welcoming manner, provide them with meaningful language input, and help them negotiate meaning in the target language. As a result, they had to find ingenious ways to gain entrance into the "social network of NS" so that they could get authentic language input and practise English. The insights emerging from this study concur with Norton's (2000a, 2000b) findings that NS are more likely to avoid interactions with NNS, rather than to provide them with opportunities to practise the target language. Nevertheless, Norton's (2000a) analysis seems to suggest that immigrants of European descent may have easier access to Canadian social networks than those from racial minority backgrounds. For instance, Katarina, a Polish immigrant, believes that Canada is a great country for immigrants, where she feels welcome and accepted, unlike in Austria. In contrast, Mai, a Vietnamese immigrant, feels perpetually unaccepted and different, but that could be partly due to her own racist beliefs that "perfect Canadians exist and that they are White" (Norton, 2000a, p. 452). In the current study, Caucasian as well as visible minority immigrants felt initially unwelcome and scoffed at for their imperfect English, particularly their accent, but kept persevering in their efforts of finding English-speaking interlocutors and gaining access to Anglophones' social networks.

Unlike most of Norton's (2000a, 2000b) informants who became introverted and sensitive to rejection, participants in this study cultivated extroversion and resilience, in spite of being rejected or ridiculed by NS at times. Not all participants considered themselves naturally outgoing, but those who were not cultivated an extroverted behaviour by going to the extreme of initiating conversations with strangers in public places:

> Jean: I am outgoing, I reach out, like I meet people on the bus or C-train and talk to them. I am comfortable talking to people from everywhere: Canada, India, everybody, and I find interesting topics too. So in the past five years, I have improved a lot. Now, I feel quite comfortable and I can talk about everything.
>
> Nabil: To learn the language, you have to talk to people . . . When you go to a coffee shop or to a bookstore, start talking to someone. Some people help when they see that you are trying to pick their language. Go to the mall, wherever, start talking to anybody, it doesn't hurt. What can happen? They are not going to punish you if you make a mistake.

In the first few months after their settlement in Canada, participants found NS interlocutors in places such as coffee shops, malls, playgrounds, children's schools, bookstores, neighbours, and sports clubs. Some of these encounters did not go beyond the ice-breaking stage of initial conversations, but others turned into opportunities to find regular English-speaking interlocutors and even friends:

Participant:	I learned to pay attention when people were having conversations on the bus or C-train, or I would start conversations myself when taking my kid to the playground, or going to the gym, or running into my neighbours. I invited my neighbours to dinner many times so I could speak English and eventually we became friends.
Arleta:	I became friends with a couple of Canadian mothers I met at the playground I took my kids to. I kept running into them many times and started talking about our lives and, I got a great opportunities to practise my English.

The essential prerequisite of verbal communication is that interlocutors regard each other as worthy to speak and listen (Bourdieu, 1977; Norton, 2000b). Participants in this study felt that in order to command the attention of their NS, they needed to stir their curiosity and make them interested in the value of their human experiences. They imposed reception and gained the status of "worthy to speak" by making use of their cultural capital and narrating parts of their life stories or anecdotal and colourful accounts related to the culture or history of their native country. Even if their mastery of English was far from perfect, the shock value of their human experiences and the sensational or exotic elements of their narratives commanded the attention of their NS interlocutors:

Alin:	The first year I came to Canada, I worked in a warehouse. My English improved a lot, because I used to initiate discussions and come up with interesting topics, related to customs and facts about my country, to make NS talk to me.
Ava:	I used to tell my Canadian co-workers all kinds of stories about my life in my native country and they were curious to find out more. My English wasn't very good but my stories were captivating. Then they opened up and told me stories about their lives and I learned a lot about Canadian culture and way of living.

Participants perceived their life experiences and cultural capital as worthy of being shared and asserted their right to speak the target language, even when their proficiency was not yet advanced.

At times, they were perceived as being inappropriate or insensitive to social conventions for talking too much or being too insistent and following NS around.

Participant:	I was taking some courses to upgrade my engineering education for licensure, and I used to go to my instructors' office hours all the time and ask them all kinds of questions to practise English and understand Canadian way of doing things. One instructor talked to me a lot and helped me in many ways but another one told me that I was inappropriate for being too in his face and that I didn't understand Canadian social conventions. That is kind of a catch 20-20: how can you understand what is appropriate and what not in another culture if nobody talks to you and takes the time to explain the things that are not so obvious to someone from a different culture.

Another way of gaining access to native speakers' social networks was to establish contacts with other immigrants who had been in the country for a long time or who had married into the culture. The older arrivals understood the negative consequences of social isolation due to insufficient language skills and mediated the newly arrived immigrants' access to their circles of friends and acquaintances that included people who were born or grew up in Canada. Making social connections was perceived as an essential step in obtaining the first job in their professional field.

All participants considered that they had immigrated to Canada with very strong professional skills and expertise. They felt that in order to achieve professional success in the new country, they needed to speak the target language very well and get the opportunity to prove what they could do. Most of them reported that their first professional job was hard to obtain, as the majority of employers required Canadian experience. A few of them got hired in spite of lacking Canadian experience. In the previous 10 to 15 years, strong market demands due to the booming economy and workforce shortage had caused many Canadian employers to hire internationally educated professionals with strong technical expertise, but relatively low English proficiency. As a result, some participants were hired for their professional knowledge and given the opportunity to improve their English on the job. Others started as volunteers, worked very hard to prove themselves, and were eventually offered permanent jobs. Some were recommended by other immigrants who had been in Canada for a long time.

In order to fit into the corporate culture, many participants felt they had to mimic the behaviour, demeanour, attitudes, and conversational characteristics of people who were born or grew up in Canada. Initially, they perceived the process as an attack on their L1 identity and a high price to pay for their professional success. They felt compelled to fit into a cultural "mould" and to embrace the Canadian way of doing things.

Even if all participants eventually gained access to the social networks of NS so that they could practise the target language and gain meaningful employment, they never felt that they completely belonged to an imagined community of NS. They realized that waiting for NS to freely grant them symbolic access into their community and consider the participants as "one of them" might never happen, not because their English was not good enough or they did not understand the culture, but because the majority culture conceptualized membership into their group as predetermined by birth or childhood place, rather than by choice. After many years of being torn between the axiomatic paradigms of the L1 and L2 cultures, most participants finally chose to cease viewing their linguistic and cultural identity as conflicting and disharmonious.

Adhering to an Imagined Community of Multilingual Bi-cultural Individuals

Even after mastering English at a high level of proficiency and understanding the target culture well enough to be able to function in the native speakers' group and to achieve professional success, participants did not feel that full membership into the "imagined community of NS" would reflect their evolving cultural identity. As Norton (2000b, 2001) pointed out, negative self-perception with regard to an imagined community may lead to nonparticipation.

In the current study, immigrants chose to fully participate in the social networks of people who were born or grew up in Canada, but symbolically belong to "an imagined community of successful multilingual individuals." They constructed a powerful hybrid cultural identity that combined elements of their first culture and those of their adoptive country. Participants emphasized the importance of perceiving cultural identity as shaped by choice rather than as an immutable concept, determined by birth into a certain social, linguistic, or religious group:

Veronica: Even if I keep my first language identity, I would still say that I am at least 50 percent Canadian. I define myself as Canadian because I chose to belong to this country, so I am a self-made Canadian, and I have met many other successful immigrants who think like me.

This view resonates with Pavlenko and Lantolf's (2000) emphasis on the role of intention and human agency in the linguistic and cultural transformation that L2 learners undergo in the host culture. Many participants in this study expressed an awareness of agency in shaping their cultural identity:

Jean: I don't want to isolate my life in a specific group because I cannot speak English. That's why I want to have a choice to make friends because I want to, not because I have to. I want to feel comfortable in any place, not like I have to go somewhere, because I don't have other choices.

Jean's view emphasizes the importance of choice in constructing one's cultural identity as a language speaker. This perspective is representative of most participants' attitudes toward the L2 group. Most highly proficient adult non-native English speakers interviewed did not want to be constrained to belonging exclusively to the L1 group, only because of L2 barriers, and asserted their right to move in and out of both the L1 group and the L2 group.

Li: I feel much more integrated than I was 5 years ago. That's for sure, and, because of my professional experiences, I feel much more integrated not only into the Canadian community but also into international communities. Right now I'm trying to expand my vision, not only in my home country and in Canada, but also internationally, in a third space. That is something that is making me value my experiences even more.

This participant perceived the concept of cultural identity as being entirely self-constructed and negotiated, as opposed to predetermined. Her constructed cultural identity emerged from her vision, which acted as a harmonizing element that linked her native identity with that of her adoptive culture and, as a springboard into a third space, the international community.

Many participants commented on the temporary alienation experienced as a result of the immigration process, which resulted in a confusing sense of identity, suspended between 2 cultural spaces, "on an island, neither here, nor there." The majority of the participants did not consider themselves assimilated into the target culture and acknowledged the importance of embracing the idea of having 2 homes and of equally belonging to 2 cultural spaces:

Bojana: I go home every year, but this is my home as well . . . I have this feeling . . . after the first 5 years that I spent in Canada, I thought that I was living on an island, neither here, nor there, and now, as time goes by, I can say that it's not only about the language, but it is also about the culture, and when I go to Serbia, lots of things bother me, like the "cleanliness" of the city, crowded buses, people being impolite and swearing a lot. I have a hyphenated identity, as I consider myself to be a Canadian-Serbian.

Iulia: I am Romanian, I am Canadian . . . I speak Canadian, but I'm also Romanian.

Most participants defined their current cultural identity as a hybrid concept, using a hyphenated construction (i.e., Canadian-Venezuelan). All interviewees acknowledged that, in order to become highly proficient in the target language, they needed to understand the new culture, in spite of experiencing a sense of temporary alienation, loss of identity or perceived marginalization as an L2 speaker. They refused to accept an identity of socially marginalized individuals and decided to believe that identities are constructed, negotiated, and shaped by choice and human agency.

Alejandra: I do feel Canadian, I am a Canadian citizen and I felt very proud when I became a Canadian citizen. Nowadays, things in Venezuela are not going that well and when I was there a few months ago, I was disappointed to see how things hadn't improved, but had even deteriorated. I hadn't been there for 6 years and being there was not hard, I felt as being part of that society, but at same time I wouldn't be comfortable with living there again. Eleven years in Canada have changed me, I feel today that Canada is my home, and that I owe it to speak English and be productive in this society. I feel very comfortable here, but if you ask me, I am Venezuelan too. I am a Canadian-Venezuelan.

After reaching a status of highly proficient NNS, the successful immigrants who participated in this study perceived the psychological distance between their L1 community and the target community as short, but did not define themselves as entirely Canadian.

Their self-identification as partially Canadian is not an act of conforming or assimilating into the majority culture, but of dissidence or resistance to being assigned a lifelong label of "foreigner." Participants felt that the mainstream culture still regarded them as outsiders despite their efforts to speak the language well and become proficient in cultural practices.

Elena: Canadians would say to me: "Your English is excellent, but I can hear an accent. Where are you from?" I still get this after 15 years of living in Canada. And my response is "I am from Canada. This is my home."

Participants considered that many NS are more likely to reject immigrants' self-identification as Canadians, in spite their high level of English proficiency or extended length of residence in the country:

Alin: Many Canadians believe that if you were born in different country, you will never be a true Canadian. It's like saying that if you were born a Catholic, you can never become a Buddhist or if your dad was a shoemaker, you cannot be a doctor. What about my choice? I believe that people are free to be whatever they want and live in the country of their choice. I am Canadian, but I am also a citizen of the world.

Taking a transnational stance, reassessing one's cultural affiliation, and constructing one's identity beyond predetermined conditions requires courage, awareness, and appreciation of one's human capital. By viewing themselves as partially Canadian, but also as citizens of the world, immigrants gained a broader perspective of their identity in relation to the environment they live in.

At the current stage of their lives, participants embrace symbolic membership into an "imagined community" of their own, that of "multilingual, bicultural individuals" who engage in a constant balancing act of merging their culture of origin and the host culture into a hybrid, hyphenated identity (e.g., Canadian-Polish), maintaining a relatively equal cultural and psychological distance to both communities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To understand good language learning, it is equally important to look into "the social practices in the contexts where individuals learn the L2" and to examine "the ways in which learners exercise

their agency in forming and reforming their identities in those contexts" (Norton, 2001, p. 318). Human agency can be defined as the ability of individuals to make choices and to enact them in the world, as opposed to being passively affected by deterministic processes.

As good L2 learners, the participants in this study exercised human agency while deploying various strategies in order to find answers to 3 essential questions: (1) *Who did they chose to be?* Competent multilingual and multicultural adult immigrants; (2) *How did they gain access to Anglophones' social networks?* By drawing on their cultural capital and by creating and recognizing opportunities to practice the L2; and (3) *Where did they choose to symbolically belong?* To an imagined community of multilingual and bicultural individuals.

The concept of cultural and linguistic identity appears to be self-constructed and negotiated, as a direct outcome of human agency rather than deterministic and socially inherited, or imposed from the outside. Good L2 learners refuse to be marginalized by the NS group for imperfect mastery of the target language and generate a counter-discourse to boost their self-confidence and continue to make progress in learning the L2.

Human agency is essential in gaining access to target language speakers' networks. In order to improve their communicative competence, good L2 learners go out of their way to create, recognize, and seize opportunities to practice the target language and believe in the strength and value of their cultural capital. They choose to share their stories with NS and assert their right to speak the L2.

Symbolic membership into an "imagined community of multilingual, bicultural individuals" is also the result of human agency. Rather than waiting for NS to grant them access to their imagined community or continuing to belong to the L1 imagined community, good language learners create their own imagined community of multilingual and bicultural individuals, and this stance empowers and helps them to perceive themselves as successful, in spite of still being considered by the majority group as outsiders. In this study, participants' identity formation as "competent multilingual and bicultural individuals" evolved through the constant application of human agency, from a psychological stance to social participation in the native speakers' social networks and, finally, to symbolic membership into their unique imagined community.

As previous research indicated, the process of identity construction cannot be separated from the concept of power (Norton, 2000b; Bourdieu, 1991; West, 1992). On the one hand, greater access to material and symbolic resources determines greater access to power, which positively affects identity (West, 1992). On the other hand, motivation is an investment in a constantly evolving identity, as well as in the target language (Norton, 2000b). Norton inquires into the conditions under which language learners become introverted, sensitive to rejection, and inhibited. All 5 women in her study had difficulty speaking English under conditions of marginalization, but one of them, Eva, managed to impose reception and gain access to Anglophones' social networks by accessing her own cultural capital and symbolic resources: "Once Eva had identified which of her resources (e.g., knowledge of Europe or knowledge of multiple languages) was valuable in this context, she was able to reduce the power imbalance between herself and her interlocutors, and speak with greater confidence" (Norton, 2000b, p. 70). Like Eva, all 20 participants in the current study relied on their own cultural capital of multilingual and multicultural individuals and symbolic resources acquired prior to immigration to boost their confidence and speak the target language, even under conditions of marginalization.

While Norton's (2000b) conceptualization of identity as dependent on relations of power is a useful construct that was missing from SLA, the understanding of "power" as determined solely

by social relations does not completely explain why some language learners (e.g., 4 of the women in her study) become inhibited and lose confidence under conditions of social marginalization, while others (e.g., all 20 participants in the current study and one woman in Norton's study) remain confident and continue to speak and practice the target language. To further refine the understanding of the dynamics between identity and power, I propose a breakdown of the concept of "power" into 2 categories: external power and internal power. External power would fall under the definition of power proposed by Norton (2000b, p. 7) to reference "the socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions, and communities through which symbolic and material resources in a society are produced, distributed, and validated." In opposition to external power, I define internal power as psychologically constructed relations of individuals with themselves. Immigrants' internal power emerges from awareness and appreciation of the symbolic resources they have brought with them into the new country and that no one can take away from them: the sum of their attributes, transferable skills, languages spoken, professional expertise, life experiences, and their absolute worth as human beings independent of the social environment they live in. All the participants in this study heavily relied on their internal power, constructed as highly dependent on the acknowledgement of their cultural capital and symbolic resources acquired prior to immigration (life experiences in their home country, knowledge of multiple languages, and professional skills).

In the first years of their lives in the new country, most immigrants have little external power (limited material resources and access to social networks, no meaningful employment, and little understanding of the environment). They have little control over external factors and events, but they have a choice as to how to react to them. Instead of believing that initial failures in communication, being ridiculed by NS for imperfect mastery of English, and being rejected by the NS community would lead to more marginalization and failure, the participants in this study chose to believe that their perseverance in continuing to speak the target language, even under conditions of marginalization and trying to get access to social networks and meaningful employment, would eventually lead to success and participation. In other words, they displayed atypical expectancy shifts and internal locus of control as opposed typical expectancy shifts and external locus of control. Based on psychology studies (Rotter, 1966, 1975, 1990), individuals with typical expectancy shifts and external locus of control believe that a success or failure would be followed by a similar outcome, and attribute outcomes of events entirely to external circumstances, while individuals with atypical expectancy shifts and an internal locus of control believe that they have some control over the outcomes and that a success or failure would be followed by a dissimilar outcome and attribute. Norton Peirce, Swain, and Hart (1993) suggest that L2 learners relate confidence or lack of confidence to locus of control. In their view, L2 speakers have the locus of control in their favour when they perceive that they can control the flow of information in conversations with NS.

While previous research demonstrated that motivation is an investment in an evolving identity constantly impacted by perceived relations of power, I make a case that internal power and external power are equally important in this dynamic. Understanding the relationship between locus of control and internal versus external power is essential for explaining identity, confidence, and anxiety in SLA. For the purpose of SLA theory, I propose that internal locus of control be conceptualized as focus on internal power and external locus of control as focus on external power. Immigrants have little external power in their first years in the new country. If, in speech acts with NS, L2 learners accept an external locus of control and focus on their limited external

power, then their perceived inferiority as interlocutors may create debilitating anxiety, inhibition, frustration, and fewer opportunities for speaking the target language, which in turn may lead to limited communicative competence and more social marginalization. By positioning their locus of control internally and by focusing on their internal power (perceived equality and worthiness as multilingual and multicultural individuals), their confidence may increase and they may engage in more speech acts, which in turn may lead to higher communicative competence and increased social participation. Instead of limiting the construct of locus of control only to the flow of information in conversations (Norton Peirce, Swain, & Hart, 1993), I suggest that locus of control should refer more broadly to the psychological position L2 learners take in speech acts with NS in relation to perceived internal and external power. Rather than allowing debilitating anxiety to take over by focusing on limited external power or on their perceived inferiority as imperfect speakers of the target language, L2 speakers can maintain an internal locus of control by holding a mental image of equality as multilingual individuals and by deploying some of the strategies analyzed in this study. The findings of this study indicate that a focus on internal power/internal locus of control may gradually lead to more external power. All the immigrants who participated in this study eventually acquired greater external power, access to material resources, social networks, and meaningful employment.

Far from suggesting that responsibility for success in learning the target language should rely solely with L2 learners, I propose a twofold social action paradigm in which the society and learners have joint ownership and investment. On the one hand, it is necessary to raise the level of awareness of people who were born or grew up in Canada about the hardships and realities of marginalization that immigrants experience and their challenges in learning the target language and accessing social networks so that those who were born or grew up in Canada can become more inclusive toward newcomers and extend them more opportunities for communication. On the other hand, L2 learners may gain in the long run by claiming their internal power in order to get greater access to external power and by deploying some strategies extrapolated from the experiences of immigrants who have reached high L2 communicative competence and achieved their career goals in the new country.

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APPENDIX A

Sample Interview Questions

1. What is your current job in Canada? What was your occupation prior to immigrating to Canada?
2. How long have you been working as a professional in Canada?
3. How would you describe your current level of English as compared to when you first came to Canada?
4. Why do you think you were able to improve your English to an advanced level?
5. What are the factors to which you attribute your success in acquiring high English proficiency? (environment, learning style, personality, attitude, etc.)
6. How did you encounter opportunities to practice and improve your English?
7. How did English NS react to your language mistakes and accent? How did you deal with their reactions?
8. To what extent did you feel supported by Canadians in your efforts to practice and improve your English?
9. How do you feel about your ability to speak more than one language?

10. How do you define your current cultural identity? Can you comment on the process of identity formation?
11. To what extent do you consider yourself Canadian? Do you feel that native Canadians or people who have lived here for a long time consider you "one of them"?
12. Can you think of five adjectives to describe your personality? Can you comment on the relationship between your personality and your English level?
13. Why was it important for you to know English well?
14. Can you comment on the relationship between your level of English and your professional success?

APPENDIX B

Background Information Questionnaire

1. Your pseudonym _____ 2. Date _____
3. Age _____ 4. Gender_____ 5. Mother tongue _____
6. Language(s) you speak at home _____
7. Highest level of education attained _____
8. Occupation in Canada _____
9. Occupation in your home country _____
10. How long did you study English before you came to Canada? _____
11. How long have you been in Canada? _____
12. How old were you when you arrived in Canada? _____
13. Do you speak other languages? (Circle one) Yes No
14. How many hours a day do you use English? _____