Language, Identities, and ESL Pedagogy

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The multifaceted ways in which English Language Learners (ELLs) engage in ‘acts of identity’ (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985) through their language use have created new challenges for ESL pedagogy. Heterogeneous identities have called into question the native speaker construct and the assumed links between ethnicity and language expertise. Drawing on the research of identity theorists along with samples of completed student questionnaires, I argue in this paper that new paradigms are needed in second-language acquisition (SLA) theory, linguistic categorisation of students, and teacher preparation for ESL pedagogy. A pedagogical framework based on Language Identity, Awareness, and Development (LIAD) is proposed as one way of expanding on current language acquisition models.

Keywords: acts of identity, linguistic identities, linguistic minorities, ELL, ESL pedagogy, bilingualism.

Although the postmodern notion that identities are fluid, complex, and multifaceted has been well documented (Bakhtin, 1981; Bourdieu, 1977; Cummins, 1996; Peirce, 1995; Weedon, 1987; West, 1992), the effects of this phenomenon on English as a Second Language (ESL) pedagogy merit further exploration. Such identities, whether self- or otherwise ascribed, have created new and unsettling challenges for language teaching, particularly so in the ESL classroom, where previously taken-for-granted notions such as ‘native/non-native speaker’, ‘bilingualism’, ‘first’ and ‘second language’ are being called into question. Furthermore, the links between specific languages and cultures, and cultural knowledge itself, are no longer to be automatically assumed. This paper will address the effects of the muddled terrain of postmodern linguistic identities on ESL pedagogy. Drawing on the work of selected identity theorists as well as samples of completed student questionnaires, I argue that new paradigms are needed for second-language acquisition theory, linguistic classification of students, and teacher preparation for language teaching.

Theorising Identity

In examining how linguistic identities are constructed and perceived, particularly in the ESL classroom, I begin by drawing on the seminal work of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) who assert that we engage in ‘acts of identity’, revealing through our use of language both our personal identity and sense of social and ethnic solidarity and difference. They argue further that there are conditions that affect one’s desire to engage in acts of identity:

We can only behave according to the behavioural patterns of groups we find it desirable to identify with to the extent that: (i) we can identify the
groups; (ii) we have both adequate access to the groups and ability to
analyse their behavioural patterns; (iii) the motivation to join the groups is
sufficiently powerful, and is either reinforced or reversed by feedback from
the groups; (iv) we have the ability to modify our behaviour. (Le Page &
Tabouret-Keller, 1985: 182)

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller are suggesting here that identity formation can be
attributed to a high level of individual agency, thus framed as ‘acts’, and that
such acts are motivated by the desire for establishing social/ethnic affiliation
with, or distinctiveness from, identifiable groups. West (1992) echoes this notion
but advances the argument by theorising that not only is identity linked to desire
for affiliation and recognition, but that desire can only be realised through access
to material resources, such that what one is or is in the process of becoming is
directly related to what one can do materially, that is, to one’s socioeconomic
condition, which can shift over time. In this sense, West underscores the larger
structural forces that are simultaneously at play with individual desires to form
identity. How, then, is the interplay of macro structures and individual desires
manifested in linguistic behaviour?

First, although individual socialisation to particular groups can be largely
defined by a common language, the motivation to maintain affiliation with our
ascribed language group(s) is contingent upon the benefits derived therefrom,
both internally and externally. Second, the desire for group solidarity and/or
acceptance is often weighed against the perception of the group’s language (and
by extension, of the group itself) by the society at large. Third, if the ascribed
groups are linguistic minorities such as English Language Learners (ELLs) in the
US, Peirce (1995) would argue that their degree of investment in learning the
dominant language correlates with the investment in their own evolving social
identities. Fourth, self-ascribed linguistic identities and affiliations of many
minority groups may sometimes conflict with identities (and expectations)
ascribed to them by the majority/dominant culture.

The dynamic construction of identity posited by the theorists above is often
at odds with the tendency in educational institutions to ascribe fixed ethno-
linguistic identities to students. Nowhere is this more evident than in the ESL
classroom, where placement therein is premised on being a ‘non-native’
speaker of English, in presumed contrast to what Leung et al. (1997) call an
‘idealised native speaker’ (p. 544). Based on their research with linguistic
minorities in England, Leung and colleagues found that the ‘native/non-
native’ dichotomy, by assigning ‘reified ethnicities’ (p. 543) and fixed linguistic
identities to students, often missed the mark, for many of their students claimed
simultaneous types and levels of relationships with different languages and
language groups (consistent with acts of identity), properly characterised by
Rampton (1990) as follows: language expertise – the actual proficiency in a
language; language affiliation – one’s attachment or identification with a
language irrespective of whether one belongs to the group typically affiliated
with it; language inheritance – one’s being born into a language tradition domi-
nant in one’s family or community without claiming expertise in, or affiliation
with, that language (p. 98). Rampton’s proposed framework, while not claim-
ing to be exhaustive, begins to capture more accurately the complex language
behaviour and attitudes among ELLs today, which reflects the hybridity of postcolonial identities.

Redefining Terms/Rethinking Identities

The field of ESL is replete with terminology for the various populations it serves, e.g. Limited English Proficient (LEP), the now preferred ELL, nonnative speaker, second language learner, and so forth. Underlying the plethora of terms is a tacit assumption of a clearly defined native speaker (of English), and by contrast, a non-native speaker, despite a growing body of research challenging the native speaker construct, as noted earlier (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 2001; Canagarajah, 1999; Leung et al., 1997; Paik eday, 1985; Pennycook, 1994; Widdowson, 1994). Related to the notion of the nonnative speaker is the term bilingual, which has been variously defined in the literature (Baker, 2001; Brown, 2000; Cummins, 1984) as ability on a spectrum ranging from full proficiency in two languages in both productive and receptive skills to lesser degrees of proficiency in productive and/or receptive skills in two languages. Three points are noteworthy here: (1) these terms assign linguistic identities to students as part of a sorting mechanism in education that directly affects student placement and assessment, the amount and nature of language instruction they receive, and attitudes towards the students; (2) depending on whether the terms are self- or externally ascribed, there may be a mismatch between their intended and perceived meanings; and (3) consistent with postmodern constructions, their meanings can and do shift with time and context.

In terms of placement, the ESL classroom is presumed to be a learning environment where students speak limited or no English. But, how is English being defined? If past and current practice is any indication, English is usually defined in a two-fold manner: first, tacitly, in the assumption of an idealised native speaker, usually a monolingual European American; and second, explicitly, as demonstrated proficiency in oral and written (academic) forms of standardised American English (or British English in the UK), typically gauged from performance on standardised tests. This point will be returned to later. The reliance on standardised tests to demonstrate English proficiency has unwittingly placed a small but growing number of ‘generation 1.5’ learners into ESL classes. At the same time, the narrow definition of English not only excludes speakers of other varieties of English such as Caribbean Creole English, thereby misplacing them in ESL classes (Nero, 2001), but it also reinforces an idealised ownership of English tied to specific races/ethnicities, which Widdowson (1994) eloquently cautions against. Furthermore, the monolingual bias underlying the native speaker of English construct in the US goes counter to the multilingual/multicultural identities of many ELLs today.

The pluralistic identities claimed by a growing number of ELLs have also expanded the meaning of the term bilingual. The definitions of ‘bilingual’ offered in the literature as noted above tend to focus on various levels of proficiency in two languages. However, in the US context, students labelled bilingual and assigned to ESL or bilingual classes increasingly complicate the language picture, and bring with them to class a host of sociocultural and political issues that extend far beyond linguistic ability, which are manifested through language
use and language attitudes. Two examples will serve to illustrate this point: First, in their (1999) study of Asian American students at the University of California at Berkeley, Chiang and Schmida report that:

although 91% of the students designated themselves as bilingual, only 37% reported they spoke both their ethnic (heritage) language and English at home. And among the 40% of the Asian American students who labeled themselves as native speakers of English, only 28% of those same students reported learning English as a first language. What this points to is that 12% of the 40% of students who labeled themselves as native speakers of English actually began speaking English as a second language (L2), not as a first language. Perhaps these students label themselves as native English speakers because they think that their primary language – the language of school and economic success in the United States – is and has been English. (p. 84)

As Chiang and Schmida conclude from their study, the students’ self-definition as bilingual individuals was ‘not grounded in a clear or competent ability to speak the ethnic language; instead, it is informed by a sense of cultural identification’ (p. 85). Another example would be a student considered to be a bilingual Hispanic.

In the case of Hispanics, the different historical relationships of their respective home countries with the US are revealed in various attitudes towards the dominant Anglo-American culture. For example, the quasi-colonial relationship in regard to Puerto Rico or the historical aggression vis-à-vis Mexico has engendered feelings of ambivalence (or even resistance) from many natives of these countries towards mainstream US culture, which is often manifested in speaking Spanish or Hispanised English in public as a means of asserting ethnic distinctiveness. Even among Mexican Americans, there are differences in ways their relationship to the mainstream is reflected in language behaviour and attitudes, depending on where they reside in the US (Schechter & Bayley, 1997). Yet, the phenomenon of resistance itself is not absolute – many second- and third-generation Hispanics, even if they harbour resentment towards, or feel isolated from, the mainstream, may choose to speak English and embrace Anglo-American culture and identity in public domains, especially in the classroom, in order to gain public acceptance. In this regard, they recognise what McCollum (1993)
calls the ‘cultural capital’ affiliated with the language of power (in this case, English). Still others selectively embrace Anglo and Hispanic heritage, reflected in use of both English and Spanish, aptly characterised by Canagarajah (2000) as the twin processes of resistance and appropriation, which he sees as part and parcel of the postcolonial experience.

The ESL classroom historically has not been set up to accommodate such seemingly contradictory acts of identity. The idea of labelling a student an ELL is that he or she is to be seen as a clearly defined non-native speaker of English from a particular ethnolinguistic group, a constructed ‘other’ who will learn English (specifically standardised American English), and by implication acculturate towards Anglo-American lifestyle (and perhaps values) over time. Thus, while the ESL class might celebrate cultural diversity in theory, it requires linguistic uniformity in practice. Put another way, there is a strong assimilationist undercurrent in the ESL classroom. This tendency has been reinforced by models of successful second-language acquisition (SLA) proposed by scholars such as Gardner and Lambert (1972) where integrative motivation (the desire to identify with the target language culture) is seen as an important factor. Schumann’s (1978) acculturation model also posits the language learner’s embracing the target language group as a facilitating factor in SLA. Many postcolonial language learners defy these unidirectional models as they ‘quite consciously reposition their identity through shifts in language use’ (Johnson, 2000: 42).

**Student Questionnaires**

In order to examine how students position their identities linguistically, I draw on data collected from an unlikely source – my own graduate students in the MA-TESOL Program, the majority of whom would not be considered ELLs. In the context of graduate school in the US, we tend to think only of certain international students (those whose primary language is not English, and who are in the US on student visas) as ELLs. By this definition, only about 10% (n = 6) of my graduate students would be considered international students. Students who are not classified as international students, which is the case for the majority of my graduate students, are assumed to be English-dominant speakers. Despite the obvious linguistic and cultural diversity of the US, the monolithic stance of US-born and raised, therefore monolingual English speaker, is still pervasive. An analysis of completed student questionnaires (n = 61) of my graduate students in the MA-TESOL Program over six consecutive semesters (Fall 2000 to Spring 2003) yields a very different picture. It is important to note that the questionnaires reflect self-ascribed identities at a particular point in time, based on questions phrased in a specific way. Furthermore, such questionnaires do suffer from some of the shortcomings of self-reporting. Nonetheless, they offer a linguistic ‘snapshot’ of students that serves as a point of departure for how one might begin to construct and negotiate their identities.

**Data analysis**

The questionnaires include ten questions, the first seven of which help us to glean information about each student’s language environment and experience. I tabulated the responses to these seven language-related questions, breaking
down each of the seven categories of responses into pairs. Within the category of ‘native language’ claimed, I isolated those students who claimed English as the native or one of the native languages. Finally, I also broke down the correlation between the native language claimed by the student and the official language of the country of his or her birth (see samples of language-related responses and complete data in Appendix 3). A summary of the salient data tells the following:

- 80% of the students in the sample (49/61) spent their childhood in the US;
- 59% (36/61) speak/write more than one language;
- 44% (27/61) state that more than one language is used in the home;
- 13% (8/61) claim more than one native language;
- 36% (22/61) did not claim the official language of their country of birth to be their native language.

The data suggest that the monolingual English-speaking assumption tied to being born and raised in the US does not hold true, as evidenced by the fact that more than half of the students speak more than one language despite being born and/or raised in the US. Furthermore, within the linguistic repertoire of this group, English is not always claimed as the native language. In the samples of language-related responses, we see that Students 1, 2, 4, and 5 all claim a multilingual repertoire (Greek and English; Spanish and English; Spanish, English, and French). The transnational childhoods of Students 4 and 5 respectively (Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and New York in the case of Student 4; Spain and New York in the case of Student 5) facilitated their multilingual competence. In fact, Student 5 was hard pressed to answer the question, ‘What is your native language?’ Her initial response: ‘Hard to say’, pinpoints the difficulty in trying to reduce a ‘plurilingual’ identity to a monolithic construct.

One can also infer that the official language of one’s country of birth is not necessarily a predictor of the linguistic identity one might claim. For example, Students 1 and 2 were born in the US, but claim Greek and English, and Spanish linguistic identities respectively. Student 3 was born in Bogotá, Colombia, but claims only English. We also see that more than a third of the students surveyed state that more than one language is used in the home. This illustrates Rampton’s (1990) notion of language inheritance alluded to earlier. The data make no claim to the level of proficiency or expertise in any of the languages mentioned – that can only be verified in the context of actual language use. We see, however, that the majority of the students have a rich and multifaceted linguistic repertoire, where language expertise, affiliation and/or inheritance coexist. One might argue that by asking the students to identify their ‘native language’ I am guilty of falling back on the very monolithic construct I am challenging. Yet, their responses defy the premise of the construct, which is very telling.

The information garnered from the questionnaires suggests that most of the students simultaneously have access to, and affiliation with, more than one language and cultural experience, fulfilling some of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller’s conditions mentioned earlier for engaging in acts of identity. Such differential access will have affected the level of proficiency in their respective languages, both receptively and productively, their attitudes towards the languages and affiliated groups, and the cultural knowledge that comes from participating in the various groups. The linguistic identities of my graduate
students, then, might serve as a microcosm of today’s ESL class, and the challenges therein.

**Identities and ESL Pedagogy**

One of the most important areas in which heterogeneous identities affect the ESL class is placement. While students bring a rich linguistic repertoire to school, at the K–12 level in the US placement is primarily based on a narrowly defined part of that repertoire – expertise in standardised forms of oral and written English. In New York City, for example, students were required, until recently, to take the Language Assessment Battery (LAB) if their Home Language Information Survey (HLIS) form stated that they spoke a language other than English at home. Students who scored below the 41st percentile on the LAB would be assigned to an ESL class and required to take a specified number of hours of instruction in English per week. The LAB was created in 1982 by the New York City Board of Education, and designed at the time for the mostly Hispanic, particularly Puerto Rican, population. Unlike most other standardised tests, the LAB could be taken in either English or Spanish. Since 1982, however, New York’s Hispanic population has grown dramatically – now the city is home to thousands of Dominicans, Ecuadorians, Colombians, Mexicans, and other Central and South Americans. At the same time, thousands of Asians, Anglophone Caribbeans and Africans have also migrated to the city. Meanwhile, the Puerto Rican population that has remained is now into its second and third generation, who come with different language needs, attitudes, and ethnic affiliations, as mentioned above. The diversity of the Hispanic population has created real-world challenges for creators of the Spanish version of the LAB. For example, which dialect of Spanish would be acceptable as a target answer on the test? How much and what types of cultural knowledge can/should be assumed? How much L1 knowledge can be relied upon when students have had differential access to schooling and L1 literacy practices? These kinds of questions have challenged the reliability of the originally conceived LAB as a placement instrument. In response, a revised version of the LAB (LAB-R) was recently implemented, albeit not without its own shortcomings. In particular, the test’s continued reliance on multiple-choice answers has proved to be unreliable in assessing students’ full range of linguistic knowledge. Recognising the need for a more comprehensive assessment of students’ linguistic ability, New York State has recently piloted the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT).4

Once students are placed into ESL class, however, their commonality as ELLs (the identity ascribed to them by their performance on the LAB) is quickly overshadowed by their heterogeneity as people, and this becomes readily apparent to the ESL teacher. First, the teacher will notice the diversity among each largely defined ethnic group (Hispanics, Asians, and so forth); next, the range of proficiency even among students who claim the same language will depend on years and level of schooling, which affects L1 literacy; length of residence in the US if born outside the US; social networks, language use in the home, and so forth. Depending on whether students are new immigrants or long-term US residents, their degree of investment in a particular ethnic culture, family tradition and/or larger social structures, and the perception of their affiliated groups by the
society at large, they will invest in their language learning differently at various points in time (Peirce, 1995). This means that the ESL teacher will be hard pressed to rely on common-sense assumptions about ethnicity and language or about language proficiency in general. He or she must now expect to see more complex acts of identity in the ESL classroom – more cultural and ‘language crossings’ (Ogulnick, 2000), reversed stereotypes, language affiliations without parallel expertise, language borrowing, and code-switching among students. While these phenomena present challenges for the teacher, if used as a resource as suggested by Ruiz (1988), they can become critical teaching moments.

At the college level, a similar situation obtains. US-based students whose writing on college placement tests show ‘ESL features’, as well as international students who have taken the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) are all considered to be second-language learners and writers and are assigned to ESL classes. Thonus (2003) notes that these writers, despite the common label ascribed to them by the university, are, in fact, a diverse group falling into three categories:

1. EFL writers who were educated in their mother tongue (L1) and are learning English as their L2 (often referred to as foreign or international students).
2. ESL writers who are recent immigrants to the United States, often with educational backgrounds in their L1.
3. Generation 1.5 writers who are long-term US residents and English learners fluent in spoken English. (p. 17)

Thonus further points out that many of these students frequent university writing centres for assistance with their writing. While writing centre tutors are often trained to address some ‘problems’ of ESL students, the students so labelled may come to the writing centre with very different expectations and needs depending on their backgrounds. For example, Thonus distinguishes between generation 1.5 students, who tend to be what she calls ‘ear learners’ (p. 18) relying on ‘an intuitive sense of what sounds right’ (p. 18), fluent in oral language, but less familiar with writing conventions, and EFL students, who tend to be ‘eye learners’, more familiar with grammatical rules and attentive to correctness in writing, but less fluent in speech. Therefore she correctly calls for pedagogical practices that recognise and respond to the similarities and differences in the backgrounds and needs of this diverse population.

It is also important to note that students’ self-perception shifts over time. ELLs who might consider themselves ‘recent immigrants’ in the first year of college (and therefore identify more with the language of their home country) might feel less like ‘outsiders’ by their senior year, and thus may reject the ESL identity ascribed to them by the college. In this sense, the kind of permanent ‘outsiderness’ to which many immigrants or ethnic minorities are assigned may at times go counter to their own evolving self-perception.

**New Paradigms**

ESL pedagogy must then respond to the nexus of the ELL’s social identity as a student of language and his or her cultural identity as a member of one or more ethnolinguistic groups. This means a pedagogy that strongly addresses
language as form as well as language as constructor of, and constructed by, identities. In terms of language form, this would entail a revision of SLA theories or models, one of the most well-known being Cummins’ (1984) notion of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), the context-dependent, cognitively undemanding language of casual conversation that one develops in two to three years; and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), the context-reduced, cognitively demanding language of school, heavily focused on knowledge of formal writing and speaking conventions, that takes approximately five to seven years to develop. The BICS/CALP model is premised on (1) expertise in a clearly defined L1, especially L1 literacy; (2) the sequential nature of BICS first and then CALP, as well as L2 following a sufficiently developed L1; and (3) L2 CALP building on, and eventually paralleling L1 CALP.

In the first instance, an L1 may not be as clearly defined, particularly in the case of linguistic minorities. Foreign students who are highly educated in the L1 are more likely to have a clearly defined L1 on which to build L2 CALP. Many linguistic minorities in the US, however, as seen from the foregoing discussion, are likely to have developed (1) oral fluency (BICS) in both English and their heritage language(s) simultaneously without matching competence in the written form of these languages; (2) BICS in only English but little or no CALP, with some receptive knowledge of the heritage language(s); or (3) BICS in their heritage language, which is often devalued at school, because of the assimilationist trend mentioned earlier. In each case, the mismatch between oral and written competence is likely to delay L2 CALP, on which much of their success in school depends. Second, immigrant children who tend to travel back and forth between their home countries and the US, such as Mexican migrants or Dominicans in New York City, may experience the negative effects of interrupted schooling, most notably manifested in underdeveloped CALP in one or both of their languages.

Revised models of SLA, then, should take into account the greater disparity between oral and written language competence of linguistic minorities, their often concomitant inability to distinguish between oral and written language, and the non-sequential manner in which their language acquisition takes place because their identities are multiply positioned. Harley et al.’s (1990) research has reinforced the latter point by suggesting that a bilingual’s language competences are dynamic, evolving, and interacting as opposed to sequential or compartmentalised. Related to this is the fact that students who simultaneously identify both English and their heritage language as their L1 may not necessarily see themselves as learners of English, and may not be aware of, or attentive to, any disparities between their perceived and their actual linguistic competence. We see, then, that the notion of first and/or second language may not always be clear-cut, and disproportionately focuses on language form (correctness), which has in many ways limited language teaching and learning in classroom settings, and devalued what most students already know about and do with language. One might therefore consider a broader framework of what I call Language Identity, Awareness and Development (LIAD), influenced by the work of Leung et al. (1997) and Peirce (1995). LIAD would include, but go beyond, language as form, by raising awareness of students’ investment in, and use and knowledge of, language as it correlates with their identities/affiliations, and using this to inform language
teaching and learning. How would this be implemented in a real-life classroom? I propose the following within a LIAD framework, which might be appropriate for high school or college level language learners.

(1) **Get to know the students’ linguistic and cultural identities/affiliations and practices:**

Have students fill out questionnaires (similar to the one in Appendix 1) early in the semester or school year that describe their linguistic and cultural identities/affiliations, language and literacy practices in and out of school. This gives baseline information on what students already know about and do with language, and their attitudes towards, and investment in, language and identity and/or culture. Students can revisit the questionnaires at the end of each year to reflect on any changes in their linguistic behaviour and attitudes.

(2) **Make language itself a central focus of study:**

Language should be examined and discussed in its totality – its forms, functions, diversity, links to identity and culture, power, as well as language attitudes.

(3) **Raise awareness of language through intensive reflection and exploration:**

Use students’ completed questionnaires as a point of departure.

- Encourage honest, open dialogue on the links between language, identity, and culture, e.g. on what basis do students claim a linguistic identity or affiliation?
- Cultivate a metalinguage for language – help students develop the language to talk about form, functions, domains of use, identity, etc., and to see that they already know and use language in diverse ways.

Have students:

- Examine and deconstruct commonly held beliefs about language, e.g. who is a native/non-native speaker? what is a language as opposed to a dialect?
- Analyze language attitudes and prejudices, e.g. how are language attitudes developed, internalised, and disseminated?
- Discuss and write about attitudes towards particular languages and linguistic groups.
- Explore the uses of language in school, especially in the classroom. Particular emphasis should be given to how language form and tone vary based on purpose, audience, location, context, power dynamics, etc.
- Research language use (spoken and written) in their own and other communities. This could include the dynamics of code-switching, dialect variation, and receptive vs. productive language knowledge. Such work can be done through individual or group action research projects, poster displays, interviews, observation reports, and/or miniature case studies.

(4) **Have students read and write regularly and extensively:**

The advantages of sustained and extensive reading and writing in a variety of genres for language learners have been well documented in the literature. Students should be exposed to fiction and non-fiction, essays, research
papers, and articles on a wide variety of topics including language, and should be given multiple opportunities to write in these various genres. Wherever possible, readings should include literature by members of students’ communities. This affirms the students’ language and community.

(5) Create opportunities and assignments for focused language practice and development based on students’ particular needs:

Depending on students’ backgrounds and experiences, they will need to focus on different aspects of language use. For example, students who have already developed an ‘ear’ for English (as is the case with many generation 1.5 learners) may need more time and practice with the language and meta-language of formal writing conventions. Such students can also benefit from some focused contrastive analysis to distinguish oral and written language forms. On the other hand, international students who might have received intensive training in language forms and grammatical rules may need more practice in listening and speaking (especially understanding/using idioms) as well as writing Western-style academic papers. Focused language practice/assignments should be done individually or in small groups, and should be included as part of the overall assessment of students’ work.

The framework and suggestions above are not meant to be exhaustive, but begin to move beyond the dichotomous premises of terms like BICS/CALP, native vs. non-native speaker, monolingual vs. bilingual, which do not adequately capture the full range of students’ linguistic identities and repertoire.

Equally important is the need for a revision of acculturation and integrative motivation models that correlate successful SLA with a unidirectional identification with the target language culture. New sociocultural models might examine the influence of cross-cultural interaction on language acquisition, and would take into account not only the relationship between linguistic minority groups and the target language group but also the diversity among the groups themselves and the concomitant relationships with the dominant culture. We must now consider the interaction among newer and older immigrants, second- and third-generation US-born children, transient migrants, and so forth, and the ways in which each group and each individual within the group has a unique and dynamic relationship with each other and the mainstream, reflected in language use. For example, a US-born grandchild of immigrant grandparents may develop receptive knowledge in the heritage language and productive skills in English in order to serve as a translator for the grandparent who only speaks the heritage language.

At the same time, there is a linguistic impact resulting from the interaction among the groups themselves. For example, in her longitudinal study of the language behaviour of children growing up on a block in a New York City Hispanic community, Zentella (1997) brilliantly captures the influence of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) on the language of young Puerto Rican boys who grew up interacting and identifying with African American boys in the neighbourhood. By the same token, English itself is being enriched by, among other factors, the sociocultural identities and experiences of its multiple users, manifested in the emergence of diverse varieties of the language.
Addressing the multifaceted identities of ELLs would inevitably require new paradigms for linguistic classification of students. Rampton’s model alluded to earlier has already been proposed as an alternative to the limitations of the native speaker construct. It offered a more helpful lens through which I could understand the identities stated by my graduate students in the questionnaires. Cook (1991) has proposed the idea of looking at ELLs as multicompetent language users as opposed to deficient L2 speakers. His model simultaneously affirms multiple acts of identity through language while rejecting the view of a static L2 to which the language learner aspires but could never attain. Multicompetence as a theoretical stance helps the ESL teacher focus on what students can do with language, and thus engenders a facilitative rather than remedial pedagogy.

Finally, a responsive ESL pedagogy must begin with a different kind of training for language teachers. Many MA-TESOL programmes, in which the bulk of certified ESL teachers are trained, are heavily focused on courses in methods and second-language acquisition. In many cases, a monolithic view of both the English language and the language learner still pervades. However, a number of MA-TESOL programmes have begun to redress this view by offering courses in dialects of English and World Englishes to raise student awareness of the diversity of English itself and of its speakers/users (Garshick, 2002). Such courses dispel a monolithic view of the English language, and better prepare prospective and current teachers for students’ various types of identification with, and actual use of, English.

Courses in language acquisition would need to address the ways in which heterogeneous identities foster plurilingualism, and demonstrate how language activities in the classroom might draw on this as a resource. For example, activities that involve performing dialogues, role play, debates, and code-switching can harness students’ diverse listening and speaking skills, as well as give practice in formal and informal uses of language.

Teachers should also be trained in authentic assessment methods (O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996) that tap into the differential language expertise students bring (both in receptive and productive skills) that result from students’ evolving investment in their language learning.

Collaborative research projects between international students and resident students in MA-TESOL programmes could help to build cross-cultural bridges and expose teachers to different perceptions and uses of English and other languages.

In the final analysis, language teachers would be well served by some grounding in the depth and breadth of identity theories, particularly as they shed light on linguistic behaviour in the classroom and beyond.

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Notes
1. Throughout this paper I use the now preferred term ELL to describe the student populations being discussed.
2. Harklau et al. (1999) describe ‘generation 1.5’ students as long-term, marginalised US residents, familiar with US culture and schooling, whose ‘status as English language learners is often treated as incidental’ (p. vii). Thorus (2003) notes that generation 1.5 learners are fluent in spoken English, but this competence is not paralleled in the written form; hence, their poor performance on standardised tests.
3. At the beginning of each semester I ask my ‘new’ students – those who have never taken a class with me – to complete a student questionnaire, providing some sense of their self-ascribed identities, from which I can begin to build a relationship with them. See questionnaire in Appendix 1.
4. The NYSESLAT was piloted in May 2003. It will be used to measure students’ English-language achievement over the course of the school year. The LAB-R will continue to be used for placement purposes.
5. I rely here on the definitions of social and cultural identity offered by Norton (1997). Social identity is the relationship between the individual and the larger social world, as mediated through institutions such as families, schools, workplaces, social services, and law courts. Cultural identity is the relationship between individuals and members of a group who share a common history, a common language, and similar ways of understanding the world (p. 420).

References


Appendix 1: Student Questionnaire

Name _______________________________________________________________

Student I.D. _________________________________________________________

Address _____________________________________________________________

Phone (home, work or cell) ___________________________________________

E-mail __________________________ Major or concentration _______________

Where were you born? _________________________________________________
(Name of country, city, town)

If you were born in another country, when did you come to the U.S.? ________

Where did you spend your childhood? _________________________________
(Name of country, city, town)

What is your native language? _________________________________________

What other language(s) do you speak and / or write? _____________________

What language(s) is (are) used in your home? ____________________________

If you are not a native speaker / writer of English, when did you first begin to
learn English? How old were you? ______________________________________

Give two reasons why you have chosen to study at St. John’s. ______________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Are you currently teaching? If yes, state what subject(s) and grade level(s). If no,
do you plan to become a teacher? State proposed subject(s) and grade level(s).
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

What prompted you to choose your major / concentration? Briefly describe your
research interests and / or agenda. ________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
Appendix 2: Samples of Language-Related Responses

Student 1
Where were you born? ____ New York City
(Name of country, city, town)

If you were born in another country, when did you come to the U.S.? ______

Where did you spend your childhood? ____ NYC
(Name of country, city, town)

What is your native language? ___ Greek and English

What other language(s) do you speak and/or write? ____ Greek, English

What language(s) is (are) used in your home? ______ Greek, English

If you are not a native speaker/writer of English, when did you first begin to
learn English? How old were you? ______________________________________

Student 2
Where were you born? ______ New York City
(Name of country, city, town)

If you were born in another country, when did you come to the U.S.? ______

Where did you spend your childhood? __ Queens, Woodside
(Name of country, city, town)

What is your native language? ___ Spanish

What other language(s) do you speak and/or write? __ English & Spanish

What language(s) is (are) used in your home? ___ Spanish

If you are not a native speaker/writer of English, when did you first begin to
learn English? How old were you? I was seven years old when I started to learn
English. However, I’m sure I was exposed to English earlier in day care and the
community I lived in.

Student 3
Where were you born? ____ Bogotá, Colombia
(Name of country, city, town)

If you were born in another country, when did you come to the U.S.? __ 1975

Where did you spend your childhood? ___ Bayside, New York
What is your native language? _____ English

What other language(s) do you speak and/or write? ______ English

What language(s) is (are) used in your home? ______ English

If you are not a native speaker/writer of English, when did you first begin to learn English? How old were you? ________________________________

Student 4
Where were you born? __ Río Piedras, Puerto Rico

If you were born in another country, when did you come to the U.S.? __ 8 years old

Where did you spend your childhood? Puerto Rico, Venezuela, New York (Bayside, NY)

What is your native language? Spanish/English since as far back as I can remember

What other language(s) do you speak and/or write? English, Spanish, Italian, Hebrew

What language(s) is (are) used in your home? ______ English

If you are not a native speaker/writer of English, when did you first begin to learn English? How old were you? ________________________________

Student 5
Where were you born? ___ Spain

If you were born in another country, when did you come to the U.S.? 1973 (I was 3½ yrs old)

Where did you spend your childhood? Long Island school year, in Spain summers

What is your native language? Hard to say – I don’t recall speaking Spanish first but apparently I did. In my home we only spoke French.
What other language(s) do you speak and/or write? Spanish, English, some French.

What language(s) is (are) used in your home? English.

If you are not a native speaker/writer of English, when did you first begin to learn English? How old were you? I first learned English when I started grammar school.

Appendix 3: Breakdown of Responses to Questionnaire by Students in MA-TESOL Program at St. John’s University, Fall 2000 to Spring 2003, \( n = 61 \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>In the US</th>
<th>Outside of the US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If born out of the US, when did student come here?</td>
<td>Less than five years ago</td>
<td>More than five years ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where was childhood spent?</td>
<td>In the US</td>
<td>Outside of the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Between US and other countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native language claimed</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>More than one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language(s) spoken/written</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>More than one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language(s) used at home</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>More than one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age began learning English if non-native speaker</td>
<td>Pre-puberty</td>
<td>Puberty or later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English claimed as the native or one of the native languages</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native language claimed same as official language of country of birth</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
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</table>