

ŁÓDŹ STUDIES IN LANGUAGE 62

Kamila Ciepiela (ed.)

Language, Identity and Community



PETER LANG

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Language, Identity and Community

The book brings to the fore the issue of collective identity and analyzes it from the linguistic perspective. Addressing the problem, the authors demonstrate ways in which the language we use in everyday life enables us to construct and perform in a flexible and context-bound manner the sense of our belonging in a community. They offer some rich data and present strong arguments in favor of qualitative methodologies for research in the field. Drawing on numerous interactional settings, and amongst different communities, the contributors shed new light on how our language practices and non-verbal behaviors mold our collective identities.

The Editor

Kamila Ciepiela is Associate Professor at the Institute of English Studies, University of Łódź, Poland. Her research interests span issues of the self and identity and how the two are embedded and realized in different discourse practices. She is the initiator of the biennial conference series »Personal Identity through a Language Lens.«

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List of Contributors

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| Zayneb E. S. Al-Bundawi
Cardiff University, UK;
Al-Mustansiriyah University, Iraq | Iga Maria Lehman
University of Social Sciences,
Warsaw, Poland |
| Rob Anderson
Università degli Studi di Milano-
Bicocca, Milan, Italy | James Moir
Abertay University, UK |
| Dominika Baran
Duke University, USA | Katarzyna Maria Nosidlak
Pedagogical University of
Cracow, Poland |
| Andrew Barke
Kansai University, Japan | Joanna Pawelczyk
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland |
| Anne Bruehler
Indiana Wesleyan University, USA | Rosemary A. Reader
Kyushu University, Japan |
| Kamila Ciepiela
University of Łódź, Poland | Aleksandra Sokalska-Bennett
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland |
| Elena Faccio
University of Padova, Italy | Izabela Szymańska
University of Warsaw, Poland |
| Aleksandra Gajda
University of Łódź, Poland | Francesca Turco
University of Padova, Italy |
| Amanda J. Haste
National Coalition of Independent
Scholars, France | Ewa Urbaniak
University of Łódź, Poland |
| Zurina Khairuddin
University of Sussex, UK; Sultan
Zainal Abidin University, Malaysia | Iwona Witczak-Plisiecka
University of Łódź, Poland |
| | Katarzyna Wojtanik
University of Łódź, Poland |

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Iga Maria Lehman and Rob Anderson

Identity Negotiation in Cultural and Pedagogical Contexts: Institutional Possibilities for Selfhood

Abstract: Because negotiating academic identity is an integral part of tertiary students' learning process our purpose in this chapter is to look at both 'institutional possibilities for selfhood', which offer participants opportunities to enrich their academic identities within the context-sensitive, instructional environment, as well as 'institutional constraints on selfhood', which draw attention to the ways in which possibilities for selfhood are institutionally limited. To achieve this objective we build on Clark and Ivanič's conceptualization of writer's voice seen as both 'voice as *form*' and 'voice as *content*' (Clark and Ivanič, 1997, p. 151). These conceptualizations are represented by the concepts of 'the discursual self', which refers to the social notion of voice and is constructed by a "writer's affiliation to or unique selection among existing discourse conventions" (ibid.) and 'the self as author', which refers to "writers' expression of their own ideas and beliefs" and reveals an individualistic, expressive and assertive voice (ibid.). Since cultural context is both reflected in and constituted by discourse we call for the development of 'multivoiced classrooms' (Dysthe, 1996) which overcome the constraints of a homogeneous, institutionalized discourse. Such an approach to culture in pedagogical contexts will foster the formation of a *third space* (Kramsch, 1998), a place in which the *intercultural speaker* (ibid.) is competent in negotiating and mediating discourse, but not necessarily with a native speaker's competence.

Keywords: institutional context, third space, authorial identity, voice as form, voice as content.

The British complained increasingly that the Pakistanis wouldn't assimilate. This meant they wanted the Pakistanis to be exactly like them. But of course even then they would have rejected them. The British were doing the assimilating: they assimilated Pakistanis to their own view [...]. I withdrew, from the park, from the lads, to a safer place, within myself. I moved into what I call my "temporary period" [...] In this isolation, in my bedroom where I listened to The Pink Floyd, The Beatles and the John Peel show, I started to write [...]. This I call "keeping the accounts" (Kureishi, 2011).

Introduction

We start this paper with an excerpt from Kureishi's life story because it provides invaluable insight into what happens in the socialization process when an individual attempts to live with social difference and to develop his/her authorial voice despite unrelinquished resistance to certain aspects of the new culture (see also Lehman, 2018). Kureishi's autobiographical essay explores the experience of being British-Pakistani through themes of race, class, sexuality, politics, religion and his quest for his own voice as a writer. The rough draft of the published essay was originally written in the third person singular and only in the final draft is 'Hanif' repeatedly crossed out. Kureishi reveals that he initially used the third person narrative voice, "because of the difficulty of directly addressing myself to what I felt then, of not wanting to think about it again" (Kureishi, 2011, p. 31). The construction of his own authorial voice involved struggle and negotiation in order to unify dislocated and fragmented aspects of his self. However, this struggle had incredibly liberating potential; his own writerly voice emerged and was reflected in his writing in the form of assertive statements and the incidence of self-mentions (first person pronouns and possessives). This desire for unified identity is akin to Giddens's notion of 'ontological security', a belief in human mental coherence and 'wholeness', which entails a process of ordering chaotic and anxious elements of our environment, including global crises, cultural, gender and religious issues, but also alienation, sickness and death (Giddens, 1991).

Since identity negotiation is also an integral part of a tertiary student's learning process, in this paper we will look at the institutional possibilities and limitations which affect this process. In doing so, we intend to draw on the research findings which cross-cut the fields of identity studies and intercultural rhetoric (Clark and Ivanič, 1997; Matsuda, 2001; Hyland, 2004; Pavlenko, 2004; Lehman, 2014) as well as our personal, classroom observations. Our purpose in this paper, therefore, is to argue that academic writing is an activity through which L2 students' academic identities can be successfully (re)constructed.

Both native and non-native learners need to be schooled in the academic literacies of the discipline's genre (Kramsch and Lam, 2013, p. 57), but it is fair to say that in most English for academic purposes situations, be it English Medium Instruction (EMI) or one of the many incarnations of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), the rhetorical and lexico-grammatical features of discipline-specific texts are rarely presented or taught. And while in the US, teachers are involved in the purposeful teaching of academic writing across academic disciplines, this is not the case, for example, in Poland and Italy where

writing has long been seen as the 'step-child' of the four major skills in second language acquisition.

Institutional relations of power and identity formation

Discipline-specific communities develop their genres through repeated productions of their texts, employing sets of unique combinations of lexico-grammatical features and rhetorical and stylistic strategies to disseminate the community's knowledge, values and beliefs. These discourses are located within institutions and have the capacity to control "[...] our routine experiences of the world and the way we classify that world. They therefore have power to foster particular kinds of identities to suit their own purposes" (Mayr, 2008, p. 1). In linguistic and sociological inquiry into institutions, their discourses and the power relations inscribed in them, language is viewed as the principal means by which institutions construct a coherent social reality that frames participants' sense of who they are within that institutional context (Mumby and Clair, 1997). Since institutions have this potential function of constructing reality and providing participants with a sense of identity the critical question which should be asked with regards to our non-native participants in tertiary education is; how is institutional discourse internalized in and integrated into the practices of a particular academic community and how does it shape the identities of participants in that community?

Institutional constraints on selfhood

When faced with the necessity to produce academic texts in English, L2 students are often constrained by being required to conform to the pre-established rhetorical patterns typical of Anglo-American discourse. The major disparity between Anglo-American and other writing conventions pertains mainly to the communicative purpose and the means of communicating content. For example, matters of high importance to Anglo-American academic writers, such as deductive text organization, careful paragraphing, explicit thesis statement, metatextual cueing and use of concise language, are not familiar features to Polish or Italian academic writers, who value the intellectual depth and stylistic creativity of their works more than a clearly structured form. Ivanič states that these conventional rhetorical features L2 students are asked to accept and use may well be a reason why so many of them find writing difficult; they do not feel comfortable with the notion of 'institutional self' they are forced to portray in their writing; it feels alien and this can lead to a conflict of identity (see Ivanič,

1998). The consequences of this imposed discursive identity are expressed in the opinions of Czech linguists quoted by Čmejrková, who feel uncomfortable employing these Anglo-American academic writing conventions:

I do not feel like stating at the beginning what I want to reach in the end.
The article should read like a detective story, it has analogical principles. I wish my reader to follow the course of my thought.
If I were to formulate the purpose of my article, I would have to repeat my exposition word by word (Čmejrková, 1997, p. 18).

L2 student-writers can also struggle to reconcile the use of L1 rhetorical resources and strategies with those typical of an English academic text as has been documented by a Chinese student enrolled in a freshmen English class:

When I write compositions I come into trouble. There are many good resources I could get from Chinese while I write in Chinese: such as literary quotations, famous old stories, and ancient world wisdom. [...] Unfortunately examples like this are very hard to translate into English [...] [which] is very frustrating and often blocks my writing process (Connor, 1996, p. 38).

However, recently, research has been done on discourse patterns in academic texts which has undermined the concept of academic discourse as simply objectivized statements of knowledge expressed in rhetorical styles and genres typical of a given discourse community, arguing that academic texts are more varied in their discourse patterns and content (see Duszak, 1997) and that they are also typified by a “more natural language and a more human academic” (Duszak, 1997, p. 2; Pennycook, 1997; Ivanič, 1998). Academic writing then can be viewed as not just conveying content by a transparent writer, but also as the representation of authorial stance (see Ivanič, 1998), which entails the expression of writerly authenticity termed *voice*. We use the term *voice* in this paper following the definition proposed by the team of American researchers working on the National Writing Project completed in 2010, “*Voice* is the writer coming through the words, the sense that a real person is speaking to us and cares about the message. It is the heart and the soul of the writing, the magic, the wit, the feeling, the life and breath. When the writer is engaged personally with the topic, he/she imparts a personal tone and flavor to the piece that is unmistakably his/hers alone. And it is that individual something different from the mark of all other writers - that we call *Voice*” (NWREL, 2008a, b).

Institutional possibilities for selfhood

Clark and Ivanič conceptualize the writer’s *voice* as both ‘*voice as form*’ and ‘*voice as content*’ (Clark and Ivanič, 1997, p. 151). These conceptualizations

are represented by the concepts of “the discursive self,” which refers to the social notion of voice and is constructed by the “writer’s affiliation to or unique selection among existing discourse conventions” (p. 151) and “the self as author,” which refers to the “writers’ expression of their own ideas and beliefs” and reveals an individualistic, expressive and to varying degrees assertive voice (p. 151).

Voice as form

We argue that the social notion of voice (*voice as form*), which is consistent with the acceptance and use of disciplinary rhetorical conventions, can be developed through appropriate classroom practices. Anderson (2012, 2014) has called elsewhere for the need for discipline specialists to become familiar with the pedagogical methodologies of second language teaching in order to be able to conduct multilingual, multicultural classrooms more effectively. Suitable classroom activities need to be designed to provide non-native learners with the possibilities to investigate the disciplines’ written discourses in order to identify and reproduce the typically recurring text features and discourse conventions. In such classroom practices there is usually no focus on the writer’s *voice as content* as the purpose of these activities is to make clear “the ways in which patterns of language work for the shaping of meanings” (Christie, 1989, p. 45).

Therefore *voice as form* is concerned with the organizational structure of the text and refers to discourse features which set out the propositions and arguments to meet the reader’s expectations. It can be associated with Cherry’s concept of *persona*, the writer’s ‘fictional’ and ‘social’ self (see Cherry, 1988), which is one of two modes of self-portrayal in discourse, related to how “[w]riters exercise their ability to portray the elements of the rhetorical situation to their advantage by fulfilling or creating certain role (or roles) in the discourse community” (Cherry, 1988, p. 265). The choices related to *voice as form* may include differences in the use of argumentative strategies as well as in different aspects of discourse organization such as, placement of the thesis statement, linearity in form and content, explicitness and distribution of salience. *Voice as form* can also be linked to those aspects of metadiscursive cueing which are referred to by Thompson (2001) as interactive resources and they reflect the author’s management of the information flow in order to guide readers through the text. They include such reader-friendly rhetorical devices as frame markers (‘first’, ‘to sum up’), transitions (‘therefore’, ‘further’), endophoric markers (‘as discussed below’) and code glosses (‘that is to say’).

We agree with Christie that developing an awareness of the discursive possibilities available to writers to make their claims attractive and convincing, is empowering for the non-native writer (Christie, 1989, p. 45). And we argue that a classroom environment should allow the non-native learner to participate in reproducing or challenging the socio-culturally conditioned discourses which embody the values, beliefs and interests of the discourse community, thereby negotiating his/her academic identity within that community. This can be exemplified by recent developments in merging stylistic features of the Hausa language in Western Africa with academic English, leading to the creation of a new form of academic discourse in this part of the world. The emergent discourse styles feature stylistic norms traditionally sanctioned in Anglo-American academic discourse on one hand, and rhetorical devices typical of the Hausa language on the other, including appeals to Allah, citing surahs from the Koran and the use of proverbs and metaphorical phraseology. Also, the legitimization of localized models of English in China (e.g., Chinese Pidgin, New Chinese Pidgin, Chinglish, Chinese English and China English) shows that the degree of writer conformity to the rhetorical standards of Anglo-American academic discourse is culture-specific. Ma (2012) argues that for English to continue to function as a 'lingua franca', certain standards should be imposed on language use by Chinese students in their academic writing. Focusing on selected written data produced by advanced Chinese students, she proposes making a distinction between interlanguage and the variant forms that mark the Chineseness in their writing, where both features can be situated on a continuum of English language proficiency, with the caution that the variant forms should not digress too much from the standard ones, as they may lead to unintelligibility or misunderstanding of the content.

Voice as content

Learners' linguistic expressions are not only influenced by the writers' alignment with their discipline's discourses, the dominant practices and power relations inscribed in them, but also by the unique products of learner's cognition, personalities and life histories, termed by Clark and Ivanič as 'voice as content' or 'the self as author' and used to express the author's authoritativeness over the text. However, our use of the term authoritativeness differs from Bakhtin's (1981) as he defined authoritative discourse as discourse that does not enter into dialogue. Conversely, we use the term authority in a sense of 'capacity to convince others' and create 'credibility'. Therefore, 'self as author' relates to the author's 'voice' in the sense of how the writer's position, opinions and beliefs, as expressed

in the text, establish authorial credibility and how the writer chooses to handle the interpretative process to create a convincing and coherent text situated in a particular socio-cultural and institutional context.

Voice as content has also certain affinity to Thompson's (2001) concept of interactional discourse which refers to the writer's explicit interventions in the text to comment on and evaluate the content. It is also incorporated in Hyland's model of metadiscourse (2001) and includes both authorial stance and engagement features of interaction. Therefore, this aspect of authorial self-representation relates directly to the tenor of the text, and is concerned with portraying the writer as a character called *ethos*, the writer's 'real' self (see Cherry, 1988). It is the other mode of self-portrayal in discourse where "[w]riters garner credibility by identifying themselves as holding a certain position" (Cherry, 1988, p. 265). Interactional metadiscourse includes; boosters ('certainly', 'without doubt'), hedges ('possibly', 'might'), attitude markers ('correctly', 'arguably'), self-mentions ('I', 'me', 'my', 'we', 'us', 'our'), and engagement markers ('consider', 'note'). Since all these features reveal the writer's idiosyncratic choices, they contribute to both authenticity and authority in terms of voice as content in academic writing.

The different ways of establishing voice as content have also been evidenced by the findings of Lehman's semi-ethnographic study¹ (Lehman, 2014) designed to qualitatively test the validity of the hypothesis that, each academic text is an act of identity and expression of unique authorial voice. The research findings revealed that an author's natural habit or characteristic can lead to him/her developing either a widespread or more concise interpretative approach. Therefore, the ability to reflect, to look at ideas from several points of view, is an individual predisposition of each writer, not a skill to be mastered from observation and practice.

We argue that the purpose of the tertiary level classroom is not only to equip students with the discipline-specific, linguistic tools necessary to participate in the discipline's community, but to also find their own voice, which is often formed first in writing. As Kramsch and Lam observe, "Written texts offer non-native speakers opportunities for finding textual homes outside the boundaries of local or national communities. [...] Indeed they make non-nativeness in the

1 This study was a part of my PhD research project on "The co-construction of authorial identity in student writing in Polish and English" which has been published in the on-line series „Studi@ Naukowe” at <http://www.sn.ikla.uw.edu.pl/>.

sense of 'outsiderness' one of the most important criteria for creativity and innovation" (Kramsch and Lam, 1999, p. 71). The awareness that there is no such thing as an 'impersonal academic self', emboldens non-native writers to negotiate their own academic identities.

We therefore suggest that there is a need to change the institutional experience from a social space in which "[...] students succeed only if their class or cultural identity is stripped away in favor of a middle-class or cultural habitus, generating the feelings of loss and alienation" (LeCourt, 2006, pp. 30–31), into a space where students find their 'unique voice', a sense of their academic identity. It is a move from a focus on dichotomies (L1-L2, C1-C2, native speaker-non-native speaker, them-us etc.) to a place of multiple voices and subject positions which are varied and open to change.

Institutional framework for developing the academic self

Therefore, we propose adopting and adapting the notion of a 'third culture' as a way in which discipline specialists create a context-sensitive, learning environment which facilitates the development of an academic writing identity (see Kramsch, 2009).

- 1) Non-native learners learn to use 'imposed systems' such as the discipline-specific discourse features and are then encouraged to create meaning on the margins or in the interstices of the conventional meanings. So, a third culture pedagogy leaves space for idiosyncratic language use.
- 2) Third culture pedagogy does not merely transmit content and have the students practice their L2 linguistic output about that content, it encourages making connections to the dominant attitudes, power relations and world-views as expressed through the discipline's discourses and encourages questioning these beliefs and viewpoints. It actively promotes comparisons between L1/C1 and L2/C2 (Kramsch, 2009).

Conclusions

In adopting a third culture pedagogy, we believe that non-native, academic writers can be given the possibility to recognize and understand the meaning-making function of the discipline's discourse features and to be encouraged to use, adapt or reject these conventional linguistic tools in order to create their own academic identity. We are arguing for "classroom communities of difference" (Kostogriz, 2002, p. 10), in which every time a writer constructs his/her authorial identity he/she is allowed to contest or follow, in varying degrees, the

patterns of privileging² among available possibilities for selfhood. Secondly, we argue that writing in a second language creates the opportunities for successful identity reconstruction in L2 due to the security granted by writing as opposed to the more face-threatening oral communication.

An important line of further research within the new field of discourse studies of identity may be inspired by the following questions:

- (1) To what extent is authorial identity constructed by the *agency* of the writers, their deliberate self-positioning and to what extent is it a product of forced subject positions writers occupy in a particular socio-cultural and institutional context?
- (2) Which subject positions do writers identify with, which do they feel ambivalent about, and which do they reject?

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2 *Patterns of privileging* is the idea introduced by Wertsch who argues that "Privileging refers to the fact that one mediational means, such as a social language, is viewed as being more appropriate and efficacious than others in a particular sociocultural setting" (1991, p. 124).

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