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## Language learning and identity: Positioning oneself as a language learner and user in the multilingual milieu

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### RESUMEN:

La identidad de un estudiante de idiomas ha adquirido recientemente una importancia propia en el ámbito académico, en torno a la naturaleza del lenguaje y su aprendizaje. El éxito de esta idea en el campo de la enseñanza de idiomas ha sido provocado, por una banda, a causa de los logros postestructurales o posmodernos en los estudios lingüísticos, y por otra banda, gracias al enfoque constructivo o construccionista del aprendizaje humano. Asimismo, los estudios socio-culturales más críticos, tales como el enfoque ecocrítico, destacan el papel activo y relevante del aprendiz en el proceso de la creación de significados en el contexto de segundas lenguas / lenguas extranjeras, por lo que se señala las limitaciones derivadas de tomar al hablante 'nativo' como modelo. El ámbito de la pedagogía de la lengua, bajo un término genérico como el de la autonomía, trata de explicarse a través de los avances en el campo de la lingüística y la psicología, sin embargo, el presente artículo trata de demostrar las dificultades que el alumnado tiene para asumir su nueva identidad como usuarios legítimos de un idioma extranjero. Un análisis del discurso de una entrevista con estudiantes participantes en una estancia de un semestre en un entorno multilingüe y multicultural nos permite profundizar en sus identidades como usuarios y aprendices de una lengua. Este análisis, como método, nos ayuda a definir el discurso pedagógico normativo como un constructo ideológico dominante posicionando la identidad lingüística de dichos estudiantes y exhibiendo su consciencia lingüística.

**Palabras clave:** identidad, docencia de idiomas, EFL, alumnos polacos, permanencia, análisis del discurso pedagógico

### ABSTRACT:

Identity of a language learner has recently achieved an importance of its own in academic considerations regarding the nature of language and its learning. The success of the notion in the field of language education has been triggered by poststructural or postmodern achievements in language studies on the one hand, and constructive or constructionist approaches to human learning on the other. Additionally, critical socio-cultural studies, such as the ecological approach, "assassinated" the native speaker envisaging the agency of the learner in the process of personal meaning making. The concurrent language pedagogy, subsumed under the umbrella term of autonomy, tries to meet the linguistics and psychological advances, yet, as we try to demonstrate it in the present article, students find it difficult to assume new identities for themselves as legitimate users of a foreign language. A discursive analysis of an interview with students completing a semester-long sojourn in a multilingual and multicultural milieu allows us to pursue their identities pertaining to the roles of a language learner and user. A discourse approach helps us define the normative pedagogical discourse as a dominating ideological construct positioning students' linguistic identities and exhibiting underlying language awareness.

**Keywords:** identity, language learning, EFL, Polish learners, sojourn, analysis of pedagogical discourse

## 1. THEORETICAL STANCE: IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

By the present undertaking we aim, in most general terms, to elaborate on the relationship between foreign language (FL)<sup>1</sup> learning and identity. To pursue our objective, we decided to use discourse analysis as a method for our considerations (cf. Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). Before we delve into the empirical part, we present our theoretical stance. This is to prevent possible misunderstandings and to override some critical interpretations during reading.

Theoretical underpinnings to language learning ascribe more and more attention to the issue of identity. Sociocultural approaches to language and its learning, and more critical ones such as the ecological approach (cf. van Lier, 2004) draw on post-structural or postmodern theories which accentuate the agency of the language learner and, ultimately, language user. Making a foreign language learner the subject and creator of the form and meaning of utterances, the newly emerging paradigm and accompanying discourse<sup>2</sup> necessitates conceptual changes in the era of the death of the native speaker, "assassinated" both in the field of academic language reflection and pedagogy (cf. Szczepaniak-Kozak and Wańkiewicz-Firlej, 2013). This, in turn, envisages new identities for the learner as a corollary of the changes. Nonetheless, as we will demonstrate in the empirical part, the perception of new identities by students is rather slow, underscoring deeply engrained cognitive normativity in language education (as exhibited by our discourse analysis) with a concurrent language awareness shaped by the hegemony of normative, pedagogical discourse. In the theoretical part, we consider, respectively, the newly emerging paradigm in the field of language teaching, plurilingualism and languaging, identity and language awareness and, finally, discursive nature of identity itself, all as a frame of reference for the analytical part.

### 1.1 Shift in the methodological paradigm

The shortcomings of the communicative approach based on the assumption of appropriacy, as documented by Fairclough (1992), inspired the Council of Europe to redefine the language policy underlying the communicative paradigm. As a result the Council presented a unified vision for all languages subsumed under the acronym CERF (*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, 2001). The

document radically rephrased the goals of European language policy. Language appropriacy shaped by native speaker's community conditioning communicative effectiveness ceased to be a desired end of language instruction. Instead, all initiatives of the Council of Europe aimed at mutual understanding of languages and cultures<sup>3</sup>. The right of European citizens to work and live anywhere within the EU boundaries changed the status of a foreigner (Janowska, 2011: 38). Sojourns in European countries are not only to develop language competence, they also entail studying, working or in general fighting for a new social status (ibid.). Evoking CEFR, Janowska sees the objective of foreign language learning as a means for the realization of individual communication means, information and opinion exchange as well as communication of feelings and ideas in order to understand the cultural heritage of other people (CEFR, 2001: 14, 39). Although CEFR does not meet all these goals entirely, and is very idealistic in its general approach, still it is a very important document, which sets the tone for European language instruction.

Communicative competence based on appropriacy models could not withstand the challenges posed by CEFR. Integration with the target language community achieved a very critical dimension beyond mere enculturation (contained in cultural embodiment of any language). The new paradigm entails repercussions for language education, namely "a flexible movement from the communicative to the action-oriented without excluding any individual journey, resonating with the idea of personal appropriation of the CEFR by its users" (Piccardo et al., 2011: 30). The corresponding language teaching oscillates around a task-based (ibid. 31) or project-based pedagogy (ibid. 41). Interesting for our further consideration is the comment that "for teachers and learners alike, the CEFR synthesizes useful teaching and learning practices oriented towards plurilingual practices and the development of plurilingual competence, linking languages and their components together rather than separating them into watertight compartments" (ibid. 32). Positioning of a learner as an intercultural and national identity mediator is made transparent in the following extract:

The image of a learner from the action-oriented and intercultural perspective is therefore of a person who is able to effectively manage communicative situations both in well-known and in new contexts with sensitivity and openness. In-

creasingly, this is the portrait of today and tomorrow's language learners, who are competent in, as well as aware of, intercultural perspectives. Such people are open to the language and cultural changes that the continuous evolution of life and work require" (ibid. 41-42).

The newly emerging approach in Europe is well inscribed in existent methodological tendencies (Janowska, 2011: 16) oscillating around the concept of autonomy or autonomization in language learning and teaching. Particularly interesting in this regard is the concept of personal communicative competence elaborated by Wilczyńska (2002a). She assumes bilingual or plurilingual identity as the basis for her concept of personal communicative competence (translation from Polish) and this positioning is ascribed to a truly autonomous attitude towards language learning manifested by a slogan "I do, I am myself"<sup>4</sup> (Wilczyńska, 2002a: 55-56). In the context of developing oral communication skills at the advanced level, she defines personal communicative competence as an invisible link for observable student behavior accentuating agency and language acquisition for the realization of personal needs (Wilczyńska, 2002b: 70). The suggested vision of competence seems to function as a sort of language awareness underscoring authenticity of language use compatible with learner identity. Hence, the issue of identity becomes, as Wilczyńska (ibid.) points out, the central criterion for authenticity. Consequently, academics contributing to the (semi)autonomy project coordinated by Wilczyńska highlight the crucial role of self-awareness and identity for self-regulation in language learning (Górecka et al., 2002: 47). Our stance, additionally, underscores the importance of language awareness regarding the nature of language beyond the normative, compartmentalized fixed codes. Drawing on the use of chaos/complexity theories in language acquisition (e.g. Larsen-Freeman, 1997; Lankiewicz, 2010; 2011), and post-modern sociocultural theories, we bridge the notion of plurilingualism with the concept of languaging in order to work out a frame of reference for analyzing students' discursive practices exhibiting some sort of language awareness.

## 1.2 Plurilingualism and languaging

One way the dynamic ecological approach and the postmodern, as opposed to Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm (Siek-Piskozub, 2001: 9), contributed to the field of language learning and teaching is a revised

perception of communicative competence. The evolution of the term goes in the direction for the recognition of very personal features in the concept, as contained in the notion of personal communicative competence. Sociocultural reality of the modern world, particularly the new sociopolitical constellation in Europe, legitimizes any personal touches to the notion of competence in the form of narratives of life (van Lier, 2004). Mixing of languages, code-switching, and idiosyncrasies receives a due place in the process of language learning and use as a sign of creativity and authenticity rather than deficiency.

Thus competence has been superseded with communicative efficiency in the multi- or plurilingual milieu with social appropriateness being questioned by critical approaches (Fariclough, 1992; van Lier, 2004). The concept of plurilingualism defines:

an individual's ability to use 'a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact'. According to the type of communication required in a variety of situations, the individual can "call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor" (CEFR, 2001: 4; after Piccardo et al., 2011: 26).

Whereas multilingualism:

refers more to the condition of a social group in which more than two languages coexist. From its outset, the CEFR promotes a plurilingual approach, that is, a seamless approach to the acquisition or learning of a number of languages throughout the course of a life, which involves constantly relating them to each other so as to build up a plurilingual repertoire, capacity or competence (26).

We may state without much exaggeration that plurilingualism with all ensuing interferences is perceived as an asset, breaking off from the restrictions imposed by linguistic formalists from the beginning of the twentieth century trying to account for imperfections in the linguistic systems of the user with the notion of semilingualism (Milroy and Muysken, 1995: 3). Such an attitude to communicative competence found adequate elaborations in the idea of language awareness; the concept basically

worked out in the field of foreign language education. Be it the learner or teacher, as a non-native speaker of an L2, they obtain a legitimate status as users of a foreign language with quite clear pedagogical advantages over the native speaker (Andrews, 2007).

Language awareness itself has broadened from its classic perception as KAL (knowledge about language). Nowadays, it includes issues which are in the focus of our considerations, such as relations between languages as well as "language choice and personal identity, individual and societal bilingualism and multilingualism, language variation, and the (mis)uses of language for social control [...]" (Andrews, 2007: 12). Interesting in this regard may be the concept of languaging. We can identify at least two possible applications of the notion (cf. Lankiewicz, in press).

The sociolinguistic concept of languaging, worked out by Jorgensen and Juffermans (2011), perceives language beyond delimited political boundaries, in the continuum of human semiotic and communicative ability. Hence they differentiate between using a language and using language. The latter pertains directly to the concept of languaging accentuating the fact that "people normally do not speak a language, but rather actively use their linguistic predisposition – languaging" (Lankiewicz, in press). This inherent ability can be socially observed in heteroglossia – the coexistence of language varieties in a language – as well as cross-linguistically at bilinguals or plurilinguals speaking not simply a fully developed additional language but a developing, so to say in-between, language conceptualized by others as interlanguage. Thus, languaging comprehended as "reaching beyond a language as a self-contained system, allows for making a closer bond between human cognitive capacity and the linguistic reality and perceiving language as a general human condition of making sense of the surrounding world and one's own existence" (ibid.).

The concept of languaging, worked out by Swain (2005, 2006), bears a more direct application to the field of language instruction. Evoking Vygotskian theory of the mediatory role of language in cognition and the Hallidayan concept of language as an agent in meaning making, she opts for substituting the notion of output with that of languaging. Putting her theory in most simple terms, she perceives language production as the process of (re)shaping thinking, mediating cognition, and consequently, producing particular knowledge of

the world, which, as maintained by more critical approaches, mentioned elsewhere in the article, necessitates articulation of identity. Thus "[l]anguaging is not just communicating; the construct of languaging adds to the meaning of communication the power of language to mediate attention, recall, and knowledge creation" (Swain and Lapkin, 2011: 105).

In our mind, both concepts have a direct reference to the idea of language awareness. Student's self-awareness and reflection upon the nature of language is built in the process of using their inherent ability of languaging as indicated by Jorgensen and Juffermans and additionally, according to Swain's (2006: 96) idea of languaging, about language with the result of cognitive and emotional artifact highlighting learner identity. The multilingual milieu, as stipulated in the analytical part of this article, constitutes an ideal environment to facilitate this process.

### 1.3 Identity and language learning in multilingual milieu

In language learning both psychological and social dimensions of learner identity are of relevance. The research on *ego* influence on language learning (Guiora et al., 1972, 1980) is an example of the psychological dimension while intercultural studies delve more into the social dimension. The ecological platform unites the two aspects looking for an overarching, multi-dimensional, but at the same time fractal and individual, approach to the problem. An etic approach offers a very general perspective, for example, a Polish learner of English may have experienced some identity conflicts propelled by the characteristics ascribed to his/her ethnicity and social and cultural distance embodied in the L2 culture<sup>5</sup>.

The general conclusions drawn from this perspective may be, however, very misleading, too much engrained in a stereotypical perception (cf. Jameson, 2007). An emic, individual diversity may offer more accurate insights into the problem. The perception of Polishness and Englishness depends as much on cultural generalizations (objective cognitive activities), as on individual variability shaped by personal cognitive experiences (subjective cognitive activities).

A good insight into the problem of identity may be derived from Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism. Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) make Bakhtin's theory comparable with that of chaos/complexity theory and post-

modern, interactional sociolinguistics. In the context that interests us, the feature that the mentioned theories share is the relativity of the self and other. Considering the problem with reference to the multilingual and multicultural context, they perceive relativity of the self and other as follows:

[B]oth the self and the other are intrinsically pluralistic, and possibly in conflict with themselves and with one another. Because the I is not unitary, but multiple, it contains in part the other and vice-versa; it can observe itself both subjectively from the inside and objectively through the eyes of the other (659).

In this line of thinking both the self and other are very relative in their nature of co-constructing themselves. Such an approach resonates with a phenomenological stance requiring the resignation from objectivity in favour of intersubjectivity (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1945: 415; after Kramersch, 2002: 11) encompassing the claim that "we can only know who we are and what we are worth through the eyes of the others". Elsewhere Kramersch (2008: 391) points out the fact that "I" is not unitary and it is corroborated by:

the frequency of stylization, parody, double-voicing in the discourse of everyday life observed by sociologists [...]. People very rarely speak only to transmit and exchange new information. More often than not, they say what they think others expect them to say, or what the situation requires, or they identify or empathize with others, or they present themselves as they would like to be seen by others.

The paranoid search for identity inscribed in postmodern sociology, accentuating ubiquitous plurality, is additionally amplified by discursive practices operating in different timescales (another feature lining Bakhtinian theory with that of postmodern sociolinguistics). Kramersch (2008: 392) illustrates the layered simultaneity of different timescales by citing Blommaert:

We have to conceive of discourse as subject to LAYERED SIMULTANEITY [stress in the original]. It occurs in a real-time, synchronic event, but it is simultaneously encapsulated in several layers of historicity, some of which are within the grasp of the participants while

others remain invisible but are nevertheless present (2005: 130).

Accentuating the synchronic and historic participation in discursive practices, Kramersch (2008: 391) notes after Blommaert's (2005: 128) that "the participants in verbal exchanges might speak from positions on different scales of historicity, thus creating 'multiple and contradictory temporalities' that may lead to different intertextual references and to communicate tensions.

Identity is surely interconnected with the affective domain pertaining to such factors as feelings, motivation, will, attitudes or anxiety. Multilingualism perceives affect related issues as "dynamic, ever-changing phenomena, rather than a static personal attributes" (Todeva and Cenoz, 2009: 10). If we assume after Wierzbicka (2004: 102) that a language is "a conceptual, experiential and emotional world", there remains a question whether learning L2 or L3 is simply acquiring emotional concepts in "culturally unique ways" as argued by Panayiotou (2004) or more probably L2 learning socialization reroutes "the trajectory of feeling" as maintained by Hoffman (1989: 269) and "engender[s] new forms of emotional experience" (Pavlenko 2006: 312; after Todeva and Cenoz, 2009: 10). Subsequently, Todeva and Cenoz bring forth Pavlenko's doubts that "to think of the first language as the language of emotions or the self and of the second or an additional language as the language of detachment is to oversimplify the relationship between languages, emotions and identities in bi- and multilingualism" (Pavlenko 2005: 236; after Todeva and Cenoz, *ibid.*).

Proponents of the ecological approach to language learning frequently point out its relation to multilingual and multicultural environment, as both components are inherent of the main concept. In the European context the notion of multilingualism and multiculturalism meets competitive terms of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism. As Kramersch (2008: 390) points out, they are not used interchangeably. While the former is mostly popular in the USA to account for both individual and societal phenomena, the latter is consistently used by European researchers to represent linguistic and cultural diversity within individuals. Since ecological linguistics is approached from both the social and individual perspective, we prefer to use the more encompassing term multilingualism. Nonetheless, their main assumptions are the same. Purilingualism, attacking the problem from an individual perspective, perceives

[L]inguistic and cultural pluralism in more than mere coexistence of various languages. It is primarily about the transcultural circulation of values across borders, the negotiation of identities, the inversions, even inventions of meanings, often concealed by a common illusion of effective communication (Kramersch, Levy and Zarate, 2008: 15; after Kramersch, 2008: 390).

Commenting on monolingual and monocultural bias in traditional language education, characteristic of a prototypical communicative exchange taking place between two or three interlocutors using the same standard target language, Kramersch (2008: 390) accentuates that such a situation is far from realistic and makes a general comment pertaining as much to communication at large as to the classroom encounters:

Today, language users have to navigate much less predictable exchanges in which the interlocutors use a variety of different languages and dialects for various identification purposes, and exercise symbolic power in various ways to get heard and respected. They are asked to mediate inordinately more complex encounters among interlocutors with multiple language capacities and cultural imaginations, and different social and political memories. Conversational power comes less from knowing which communication strategy to pull off at which point in the interaction than it does from choosing which language to speak with whom about and for what effect.

The ecological perspective, relying on the phenomenological methodology in language acquisition research, demonstrates the fact that "foreign language learners do not just learn the language, they are also constantly engaged in judging the relevance, validity, pertinence, or usefulness of this or that bit of knowledge, this or that assignment" (Kramersch, 2002: 11). Elsewhere, elaborating on the idea of subjectivity and subject positioning of symbolic competence, Kramersch (2008: 400-401) maintains that "subject positioning has to do less with the calculations of rational actors than with multilinguals' heightened awareness of the embodied nature of language and the sedimented emotions associated with the use of a given language".

The last claim posits language awareness is the result of experiential cognition (Danilewicz, 2011: 91), or the process of languaging, a central issue in positioning the learner in the multilingual milieu. This observation is vital for a discourse analysis of the interview extract carried out in the following part of the paper, which aims at defining students' positioning as learners and language users. In more simple terms, their talk discloses the way they perceive the nature of language and its learning and how much agency they perceive for themselves as foreign language users. Or, putting it more pedagogically, how much autonomy in language learning is discernible in their languaging about language.

#### 1.4 Discursive perception of identity

Our major assumption, both theoretical and empirical, pertains to social constructionism of the self, identity and attitudes perceived as products of social discursive practices, rather than the result of cognitive categorization. Social constructionism, in contrast to purely cognitive approaches, sees categorization – a human ability to make sense of the surrounding world – more as the product of social and historical processes (social identity) than as an inherent ability of an autonomous individual (personal, psychological identity). Jorgensen and Phillips (2002: 102), alluding to Woodward (1997), put forward this viewpoint is "based on anti-essentialism: that the social world is constructed socially implies that its character is not pre-determined or pre-given, and that people do not have inner 'essences' – a set of genuine, authentic and immutable characteristics". Language, in turn, "does not merely express experiences; rather, language also constitutes experiences and the subjective psychological reality" (ibid.). This claim seems to be vital for the perception of language in the ecological perspective, seeing it mainly as working on its semiotic potential in the process of meaning making (*semiosis*). Language is no longer seen as a cultural monument or a fixed code (Harris, 1996, after van Lier 2004: 109) but more as a potential affording itself to making new meanings.

Constructionists additionally assume "that our access to reality is always through language" (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 9), and whatever importance is ascribed to the physical objects, "they only gain meaning through discourse" (ibid.). Language is thus seen as a form of social action or "a 'machine' that enervates, and as a result constitutes, the social world. This also ex-

tends to the constitution of social identities and social relations" (ibid.).

Similarly to language, the self is also constructed during the dialogical process of social interaction with language and underpins any communicative attempts because language is not "ready-made for users before they start using it" (van Lier, 2004: 109). The dialectal relationship between language and the self renders language to be "intimately connected with the self, as an entity that is always under construction, always emergent" (ibid.). Consequently, in discourse analysis one has to be cautious when perceiving the subject (speakers) since they are also constructed. Additionally, and probably more importantly, mere equations of ideas with words may be misleading for "voices of other people resonate in our speech" (ibid.: 117) and "discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject" (Foucault, 1972: 55; after Jorgensen and Philips, 2002: 14) or as pointed out by Steiner Kvale (1992: 36) "the self no longer uses language to express itself; rather language speaks through the person. The individual self becomes a medium for the culture and its language" (after Jorgensen and Phillips, ibid.).

To conclude, a careful analysis of discursive practices may offer a revealing insight into the mutual relation between language and identity. We assume, after van Lier (2004: 19), that every school subject operates within a particular genre, so does the field of foreign language teaching. The genre, of e.g. language teaching, mingles with discursive practices fostered by contradicting linguistic theories, methodological practices and an array of other voices. Knowledge is an ongoing construction, resulting from competing discourses, after all. Assuming the ecological stance, we hold this truth that elaboration of a learner's own voice through connecting "the new language to the self, finding a voice, constructing and validating identities or roles" (Kramsch, 2000: 151; after van Lier, 2004: 120) is critical for a successful language user and is manifested by "awareness of language and learning, autonomy and self-determination in language use and learning processes, and authenticity in acts of speaking" (van Lier, 2004: 116-7).

## 2 THE STUDY INTO LANGUAGE LEARNING AND IDENTITY

The inspiration for the present research was a sojourn at Universidade da Coruña within the framework of LLP Erasmus. To narrow the gap between teaching and learning,

we decided to carry out a project verifying some theoretical issues delivered during lectures pertaining to intercultural studies, communication issues and the ecology of language acquisition theories respectively to the area of our scholarly interests. The problem of identity naturally evolved as a bridging notion for our undertaking since it is a notion pervading all three compartmentalized disciplines represented by our academic orientations.

Spain, in comparison to Poland, is culturally and linguistically more diversified despite the fact that the outside image of the country may seem quite monolithic. Spanish is well diversified by dialects and local languages. Its geographical attractiveness and economic boom of the post-Franconian era contributed to the intensified immigration. Presently, bigger cities in Spain may well be considered multilingual. Thus, the linguistic reality of A Coruña is marked by dialectal versions of both Spanish and Galician – a natural prerequisite of any language contained in the term of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1935/1981). Additionally, university life, due to European student exchange programs, has also been linguistically diversified by a repertoire of languages, concomitant cognitive representations of the world and identities of the speakers. It is postulated here that learning a lingua franca<sup>6</sup> in such a milieu is not merely a process of acquiring linguistic efficiency through incorporation of adequate communication strategies, but it is also a way of cognizing (linguaging) and, first of all, identifying. A sojourn of a Polish language learner, basically from linguistically and culturally homogenous communities (English is largely taught by Poles offering a mediated view upon language and the world) is expected to result in repositioning of identities. Our interest pertains here only to the identity of the student as a foreign language learner and user.

### 2.1 The subjects

The subjects of the research were four Polish students completing their semester stay at the above mentioned university. They were one boy and three girls representing different Polish educational institutions of higher education. To protect their identities (however ironic it may seem in the context of the following research), they are referred to as Adam, Magda, Beata and Patricia. A short exploratory interview with the teachers instructing their group indicated that these Polish students were perceived as good learners excelling in many subjects. They had a reputation for being punctual, open-minded, diligent, intelligent

with a good command of communication skills. Classroom and break time observation of their interaction with the rest of the students allowed us to claim that they were assimilated with the group (talking to other students, sitting in the company of different people during particular lectures, even if the girls were always together). Adam, having no Polish male mate, seemed to interact well with quite a number of students, both males and females. He was the most contributing person to our classroom activities.

## 2.2 Objectives and hypothesis

Starting with the basic assumption for constructionist discourse analysis that “ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world” (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 2), we decided to resign from survey research while looking for students’ identities pertaining to being a foreign language learner and user as influenced by multicultural and multilingual experience. Responses regarding identity statements elicited by meticulously compiled questionnaires present a danger that students’ declarations may fall short of their real life demeanor. The validity of such an approach requires a support of the triangulation methodology, possibly demanding a longitudinal approach as well. Since our research was restricted to a brief visit to Universidade da Coruña, we decided to delve into the creative power of discourse in tracking down the students’ identities and the potential of identity change lurking in their discursive practices. In a broad sense our intention was to engage the students in reflective activities regarding their language learning experiences in A Coruña, hoping that the interview would disclose discursive practices on the nature of foreign language learning and be indicative of the students’ positioning as language learners and users. Assuming Foucault’s claim (1977; after Jorgensen and Philips, 2002: 14) that there is not truth outside discourse – the basic premise behind constructionist discourse analysis – and keeping in mind the recommendation that discourse as an analytical exercise entails understanding of objects that the researcher constructs rather than as objects that exist in reality (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 144), it is important to begin with the demarcation of the discourses in the foregoing study (ibid. 147).

The domain that the order of discourse under scrutiny pertains to is foreign language learning. We chose to term this order of discourse “a foreign language learner”. A historical perspective in discourse analysis as accounted for by architecture studies of

Foucault and allowed for by Fairclough’s (1992) critical discourse analysis entitles us to frame any talking about a FL learner within the pedagogical domain, since traditionally the process of learning has been equated with the process of teaching due to the fact that “civilization” has ascribed, for the majority of its history, the primary function in language education to schooling. Even a more contemporary approach, such as autonomy in language learning, has been redefined to semi-autonomy (Wilczyńska, 2000) to fit the institutional framework. Consequently, language learning discourse has been dominated by school practices – pedagogical discourse or classroom language reflecting as well as constructing popular methodology. Discourse pertaining to sociolinguist aspects of learning a foreign language, accentuating a critical stance to normativity, has been largely excluded as impractical, dormant in the field of discursivity, and comprehended as a reservoir for the “surplus of meaning” (Leclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111). Thus, foreign language learning discourse has been mostly possessed by normative pedagogy and, as Fairclough (1992) demonstrates, sociocultural “appropriacy” helped maintain the power of the norm.

The main motivation for our study was to demonstrate that the analysis of students’ discursive practices might shed some light on the importance of direct experiences in the multilingual milieu and consequently on shaping identities of language learners and users. In particular, we were interested whether reflection upon the sojourn would result in heightened language awareness concerning the nature of language and its learning. The intriguing point was whether these particular students’ direct experiences result in alternative discourses upon the nature of language learning and allow them to reposition themselves as legitimate users of a foreign language, as stipulated by proponent of the ecological approach or supporters of autonomy in language learning.

In a sense we intended to analyze a *temporary closure* (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 29) of discourse as influenced by the stay in the multilingual learning milieu and its impact on their self-image (identity) pertaining to a language learner and user as a product of social interaction – social identities (Bloome et al., 2005). This entails social positioning, belonging to a particular social group/identity, e.g. a Pole, a non-native speaker, a good learner, a person from the post-communist country, a cosmopolitan, a language expert etc.

Needless to say, different identities may come into conflict with each other (Jame-son, 2007: 224) and be signaled by different discourses.

In most commonsensical terms the objective of the study is to delve into the influence of students' sojourn (measured by presence in discursive practices) in a multilingual community on their linguistic awareness pertaining to being a foreign language learner and user. Particularly, it is investigated how this awareness is exhibited in their discursive practice (an interview pertaining to their experiences). Language awareness, which we are particularly interested in, pertains to the nature of language and its learning. This can be called our ideological stance, or research slant categorizing our investigation far apart from a pure conversational analysis. We accept Billing's assumption (1999; after Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 106) that any analytical work on discursive practices "is based on a particular assumption and it is therefore impossible to fully understand people's talk purely in their own terms". Thus, our interpretative center resolves around normative, pedagogical discourse.

### 2.3 Methodology

We basically approve of multiperspectival approach to discourse analysis worked out by Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) but, for practical reasons, we mostly draw on Laclau and Mouffe discourse theory (1985) and partly on discursive psychology (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The former allows us to identify the structuring of dominant discourses and define whether they are in conflict or concordance (antagonism vs. hegemony), or if there are any signs of change in the dominant discourse. The latter helps us avoid generalization of Laclau and Mouffe theory to "investigate how people use the available discourses flexibly in creating and negotiating representations of the world and identities in talk-in-interaction and to analyse the social consequences of this" (Jorgenson and Phillips, 2002: 7).

This synthetic perspective of the discourse analysis allows us to foreshadow possible consequences for them as potential language learners and, ultimately, language users. Maintaining the stance that knowledge and social action are contingent (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 6), it is expected that discursively constructed knowledge about the nature of language will result in procedural language awareness (Andrews, 2001: 79) dictating more critical linguistic behavior and more hybrid discourses underlying the change.

### 2.4 Discourse analysis

The analysis of the collected corpus allowed us to identify competing discourses within the order of discourse termed as "a foreign language learner", normative, pedagogical discourse, commonsensical experiential discourse of language reality manifested by multicultural experience, and "cynical, skeptical discourse characteristic for late postmodernity, whereby scientific and other authorities are questioned" borrowed from Laclau and Mouffe's study (cf. Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 165-166). Discursive practices pertaining to the order of discourse of "a foreign language learner" exhibit "the struggle between different knowledge claims" and "different identities for speakers" (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 2). Thus of a paramount importance to us is to see how by the use of the aforementioned discourses the students identify themselves as foreign language learners and users.

Validation of any discourse analysis requires a delimitation of discourses (cf. Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 144). Positing, after Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 12), that discourse denotes a partial sedimentation of meaning around *nodal points* with a metaphoric image of a fishing-net, we thought it necessary to identify the nodes in the interview to exemplify their belonging to a particular discourse. Within the delineated order of discourse the students articulate words such as *competence, native speaker, accent, grammar, British English, American English, mother tongue*. The nodal point for the discourse is being correct, i.e. *using the right form, good accent, appropriate words*. The normative, pedagogical discourse ascribes particular attributes to them – the existence of a pattern to follow. All of the students seem to operate within the normative, pedagogical discourse by attributing a native speaker with a good accent, grammar with the underlying assumption that there exists one correct version. British English is given priority over impure American version and so on (cf. *I remember my teacher was making fun how American people speak...*). Magda's inclination for American version of English is always accompanied by laughter indicating that there must have been some confusion in this regard before. In such a form these notions function as *moments* (words possessing a fixed meaning within the normative, pedagogical discourse).

However, a closer look at the process of *articulation* (the process of modifying the meaning) indicates that some of them have

the property of *floating signifiers* (Laclau, 1990: 28). These are "signs that different discourses struggle to invest with meaning in their particular way (Jorgenson and Phillips, 2002: 28). Thus, Adam engages in, what we chose to call, a commonsensical, experiential discourse and accentuates the polysemic potential in nativeness, debunking it as the last recourse in the moment of doubts, by quoting an experiential argument: *but our Irish friend, she also was corrected, and stating further Yes, but I do not know what is correct in my language too, sometimes*. The borderline for delimitation of this discourse is recalling personal experiences from the plurilingual experience. In a similar vein, mother tongue, perceived by Beata as a distinctive thing in recognizing somebody's nationality, associated with pronunciation imperfection: *I can recognize where people are from by their accent* is rephrased in Adam's comment: *Is it so bad if I speak with a Polish accent if everybody speaks differently*. The context indicates that he refers to here and now experience. Magda partly supports the claim by articulating her opinion much earlier: *I'd like to speak like a native speaker, American, of course [laughter], to have a good accent. Will I ever be that good?*, and in doing so she tries to introduce the cynical, skeptical discourse. This does not pertain to any situated language use observation, it is rather a personal comment, and we construe this feature as a delineation of the border between the commonsensical, experiential and cynical, skeptical discourses.

Throughout the interview the hegemony of normative, pedagogical discourse seems to be evident, particularly at the beginning of the interview. Students in the first place articulate the issue of correctness and are preoccupied with it all the way through. Nativeness of their teachers, appreciated so much by interlocutors, is equated with *professional*, in the possession of *real English, original accent*, which boils down to an unquestioned paradigmatic version of language. Nonetheless, examples of direct experience allow students to stretch the fishing-net of normative, pedagogical discourse by making room for other discourses. Yet, the claims are tentative and hesitant. While nativeness of the teachers seems to be an unquestionable value, nativeness of some of the learners is not perceived as a categorizing asset. A noticeable thing is that the comments are accompanied by personal observations and direct experiences. It is mostly Magda who articulates her observations in the cynical, skeptical discourse, but even she apparently accentuates practicality of the nor-

native approach in the teaching profession: *at school you have to do this, because otherwise we have chaos*.

Using the dominant normative, pedagogical discourse, the students position themselves as incompetent language users, e.g. *I'd love to speak like a native ... I will I ever be that good?*, or by permanent preoccupation with correctness: *Is it correct to say 'than' here? or sorry at English, right*. The dream of nativeness is underscored by the dream of studying in England so that the language would not be used outside its culture. The general dream of perfection in English positions them as "absorbers" of a fixed code. Nonetheless, the competing discourses pervading postmodern, poststructural communities, marked with relativism allow occasional positioning as an agent (subject), a legitimate user. Comments such as *we had ... different nationalities and everybody used different accent, so is it possible to speak one accent, [...] English is an international way of communication, [...] We make mistakes but we are not afraid of saying anything* are reported as experience gained from the sojourn, which may be interpreted as a sign of repositioning articulated in the competing discourse. The position of a legitimate foreign language user is accentuated by poststructural linguistic discourse, to which pedagogical language seems to be still immune despite the theoretical call for autonomy in language learning.

The discursive change allegedly triggered by this Erasmus stay, as indicated by discourse features, might signal the reflective emergence of a new identity among the respondents. The one of a more autonomous language user and a legitimate foreign language user. The expected consequence is a more critical stance towards pedagogical discourse of language learning and ultimately an assumption of an identity of a foreign language user without negative positioning.

The students' positioning regarding their being foreign language learners and users is shaped mostly by dominant normative, pedagogical discourse, that of being a product, rather than a producer (more an object than a subject). School reality manifests itself with the traditional perception of language as something out there to be mastered (a fixed code), while experienced linguistic reality of foreign language user manifests itself with variability, change, creativity and polyphony. Multicultural and multilingual milieu allows questioning this basic presumption and even if the predominant pedagogical discourse oscillates

around normativity with native-like dream of language mastery and the perception of a native speaker in an idealized, normative sense, both skeptical and commonsensical experiential discourse, slowly encroach on the terrain dominated by normativity. The initial perception of the learners' strong accent as something derogatory (26-27) confronted with the interviewer's comment becomes mitigated by the perception of personal success (67-68) as compared with other foreign students. Every now and then, the personal narrative of success allows embarking on more general reflection about the nature of language and foreign language learning.

Since the conversation was held in English as a foreign language, due to practical reasons the meticulous study of linguistic features may not be very profitable. A quick glance at the excerpt communicates that this is the language of foreigners manifesting itself with complete sentences, quite formal register, typical of a school situation (being the case). Thus, the semantic analysis, intended to extrapolate hidden meanings, was judged as missing the point later abandoned.

## 2.5 Conclusions

All in all, the analysis highlights the hegemony of pedagogical discourse in establishing the students' identities as foreign language learners and users. Their sojourn in A Coruña results in a new discourse platform (commonsensical experiential discourse). Nonetheless, it is just burgeoning, signaling a potential of change in the superstructure. Here, we allude to the concept of hegemony by Gramsci (1991), which in the case of language awareness may be construed as linguistic ideology regarding the nature of language and its learning. The students' discourse is indicative of the cognitive Chomskyan perception of language as a fixed code, or a cultural monument as maintained by de Saussure, leaving little space for a personal semi-otic activity as it is expected by autonomous language learning (cf. Wilczyńska, 2002b).

Experience of learning English in the multilingual environment seemed to trigger a bottom up process in building a new type of language awareness reaching beyond the established linguistic and methodological tradition. Contemporary linguistic trends, building language and language learning theories in a postmodern perspective, seem not to have entered the pedagogical discourse on the classroom level and hence do not foster students'

language awareness which would allow them to position themselves as subjects, not the objects of the learning process. It is the poststructural, skeptical discourse and commonsensical experiential one that offer a potential for change in this regard. It can be speculated, however, that a more systematic and reflective approach towards language learning facilitated with proper theoretical underpinning would help these particular learners become more independent users and result in a more solid positioning themselves as legitimate users of the foreign language. Whether one identifies oneself as a foreign language or lingua franca user, this new type of awareness allows building an identity motivated by positive thinking about one's cultural identity (Jameson, 2007: 223) rather than by the feeling of being an imperfect non-native speaker. This might be the case if one understands the subjective dimension of linguistic reality overriding the concept of nativeness and normativity by the one of a personal, legitimate voice in a foreign language, as accentuated by the ecological approach to language learning.

The timid repositioning of foreign language students, as signaled by discursive practice, might obtain more impetus from a reflective approach to language learning, making an intervention in the ideological superstructure resulting from heightened language awareness on the part of both language teachers and learners. Direct experiences of learning a language in a multilingual milieu are surely a step ahead, but waiting for the revolution may take years to come. Using Marxist analogy, learners' consciousness is shaped by ideology imposed by a superstructure, schools and teachers are an element of which, and thus students suffer from "false consciousness" (cf. Jorgenson and Phillips, 2002: 31). In our case it is the normative, pedagogical discourse, pertaining partly to the concept of reproduction in education (Bourdieu, 1977; after van Lier, 2004: 177). Students' language awareness needs to be enhanced by a radical change in the pedagogical discourse itself.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview excerpts

#### Interviewer:

*How did your stay in A Coruña help you be a better language learner?*

#### Adam:

*It was a big chance for me. I experienced, hmm, something, something, I will never forget. Meeting new people, making new friends. I hope it will last a bit longer, I mean our friendship.*

- Interviewer:*  
And you girls, do you like it here?
- Magda:* Yeah, sure, it is nice to be here, it was a good decision to come here. I'd love to stay here a bit longer.
- Beata:* Well, for me it is OK, totally different than (.) Is it correct to say "than" here?
- Interviewer:* American "than" British "from", I guess.
- Beata:* OK, it because of you Magda [laughter]. Anyway, different from Poland. People are open minded, always ready to help, smiling and helpful.
- Interviewer:*  
How about studying here? Is it different from our Polish school reality?
- Adam:* To me, everything is perfect. University is well organized, teachers very professional, lot of them native speakers which is very important in language learning. At my university I am have lessons only with Polish teachers. It is no [hesitation]... well, in my case, we don't have teachers from England.
- Interviewer*  
[looking at the girls to encourage contribution]
- Patricia:* Well, for me everything is fine. Of course, it is funny sometimes, when some Spanish (.) and French students speak English, now I understand them but at first it was difficult. But our teachers are great, they are British, some of them, like Elizabeth or Alan, it is important for me to have contact with real English.
- Interviewer:* Real English?
- Patricia:* I mean real British accent, it is good when you can hear original accent.
- Adam:* Yes, well, everybody wants to be perfect (.) at least at university. We Polish people are quite good in English (.), sorry,
- at English, right?[waiting for approval] When I compare us with, for example, Spanish students, they are afraid of speaking in English, and they have very strong accent.
- Interviewer:*  
But most Polish learner have a strong Polish accent?
- Adam:* Yeah, but we speak without problems, we make grammar mistakes, but our Irish friend, she also was corrected, did not know sometimes the right form. Strange (.) Yes, but I do not know what is correct in my language too, sometimes.
- Magda:* I'd like to speak like a native speaker, American, of course [laughter], to have a good accent. Will I ever be that good? But, anyway, perfect grammar is only for school [laughter]. But since everybody here speaks British so now my accent is a mixture.
- Beata:* Me, I sometimes I pronounce words in a strange way, because I hear them so often, yes, and at times I use mixture of languages, "como always", Spanish and English.
- Interviewer:*  
Does it happen to other people?
- Magda:* Being here, I made friend with a girl from Italy, so sometime we spoke a mixture of English an Italian. I know it a bit, it was funny. At school my teacher insisted on one accent, of course, it was American [laughter].
- Patricia:* Here, it funny sometimes, a bit of all languages in English, we speak a new language, for me important are words, vocabulary, appropriate words, sometimes it is difficult to find right words for situations. It's funny I do not speak Spanish but I use English with some Spanish words in shops, or just

- single words. They always smile.
- Beata: But we know that here we have (.) OK, now we had, people already left, different nationalities and everybody used different accents so it is impossible to speak one accent if you are not a native, I can recognize where people are from easily by their accent, in general, of course. Sometimes, it is difficult, Our teacher Carlos is Spanish but I thought, he was English.
- Adam: But is it so bad if I speak with a Polish accent if everybody speaks differently? The truth is everybody speaks with an accent if he is not native, sorry not a native.
- (....)
- Interviewer: Yeah, Lets come back to my original question. How did the stay here help you be a language learner?
- Adam: Well, before coming here, I did not realize that I was so good at English, our teachers are more demanding, I did not have good grades, sometimes yes, but not always, but here I think I was good. Maybe, sometimes I don't know how to talk to teachers here but (.) yeah, I communicate with no big problems.
- Magda: I realized how important it is to be open minded. Polish people are very conservative, we hear some strange stories about our country that we, for example, eat fruit soup with chicken [laughter]. German students mention Polish-thief stereotype, not in the classroom, when we speak open at parties, but they know we are different [laughter].
- Adam: People are the same everywhere, yeah and being here maybe I did not study the book that much, as in Poland maybe my grammar competence has lowered [laughter] but I know that it is more important to communicate ideas. Who cares for perfect grammar, correct pronunciation, of course, I do [laughter]. And teachers, not normal people [laughter].
- Beata: My stay in A Coruña motivated me to learn other languages, not at school by staying about, I want to learn Spanish and German. Of course, staying there. I know the languages quite a bit so I will study them on my own and then go abroad. My dream is to study in England, natural place for English.
- Adam: It is a good idea, I may do the same, yeah, but it is important to learn a lot on your own.
- Interviewer: And you Magda? Going to America is expensive, it's my dream, but I know my American is not American any more. Anyway, I have internet and movies to learn from. But, who cares for perfect language. Fluency and communication, it is more important. Everybody speaks different language, English is an international way of communication.
- Beata: I agree with you but if you want to be a teacher you have be good, maybe not perfect, nobody is perfect if you were not born in, for example, in England, but you should try to be, to very good. I want to be a teacher, yes. I remember my teacher was making fun how American people speak, of course it not good, but I understand now that for teacher you have do your best.
- Magda: Well, you speak like a teacher. But, you know, normal people [laughter] speak as they like. I don't want to be a teacher I understand that at school you have to do this, because otherwise we have chaos. I have no big plans for the future, English is necessary, a must nowa-

*days so I study it, but what can you do with just a language. I want to learn something practical to do in the future.*

*Interviewer:*  
*And being a better learner?*

*Adam:*           *We are all good, Aren't we? [laughter] We make mistakes but we are not afraid of saying anything. And some students have a problem with it.*

(...)

## NOTES

1. Our comprehension of a FL pertains to learning English as a language for professional purposes by those majoring in English language studies, should it be language teaching, interpreting or using it for communicative purposes as competent users. This entails that such learners are capable of some sort of language reflection or language awareness.

2. These terms are used interchangeably.

3. For a critical evaluation of CEFR see Klein and Szczepaniak-Kozak (in press).

4. translation from Polish.

5. Similar problems were indicated in research conducted by Szczepaniak-Kozak (2012) with Dutch students learning Italian as a second language.

6. The concept ELF (English as lingua franca) has recently found its implications for language teaching. There are still doubts about its fully legitimate status as a linguistic system since it is marked by great variability. Nonetheless, linguistic reality – supported by theoretical considerations, within e.g. sociolinguistic research on linguistic normativity, interlanguage, autonomy in language learning, ecology and semiotic in language learning, as well as linguistics identity – is manifested by features of ELF, non-conforming to native-speaker norms. Normativity, however, still remains a very important in EFL (English as a foreign language) studies.

Título: El aprendizaje de idiomas e identidad: la posición del usuario como aprendiz de una lengua en un entorno multilingüe.

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