

# Thinking Allowed

## Research tasks on identity in language learning and teaching

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*The growing interest in identity and language education over the past two decades, coupled with increased interest in digital technology and transnationalism, has resulted in a rich body of work that has informed language learning, teaching, and research. To keep abreast of these developments in identity research, the authors propose a series of research tasks arising from this changing landscape. To frame the discussion, they first examine how theories of identity have developed, and present a theoretical toolkit that might help scholars negotiate the fast evolving research area. In the second section, they present three broad and interrelated research questions relevant to identity in language learning and teaching, and describe nine research tasks that arise from the questions outlined. In the final section, they provide readers with a methodology toolkit to help carry out the research tasks discussed in the second section. By framing the nine proposed research tasks in relation to current theoretical and methodological developments, they provide a contemporary guide to research on identity in language learning and teaching. In doing so, the authors hope to contribute to a trajectory of vibrant and productive research in language education and applied linguistics.*

### Introduction

Over the last two decades, the growing interest in identity and language education has spawned a rich body of work that has informed language learning, teaching, and research, and there is now a superb 37-chapter handbook of language and identity (Preece 2016). During this time, innovations in digital technology and increasing transnational connection have shifted our understanding of time, space, and our place in the world (Darvin & Norton 2015). Using social media, transnational learners can now connect the past, present, and future in unprecedented ways, and access to conversations is negotiable both on- and off-line. Further, language teachers can explore transnational identities that were not socially imaginable two decades ago (De Costa & Norton 2017; Varghese et al. 2016).

This exciting new world, however, remains unequal, and research problems are possibly even more complex than they were in the mid-1990s (Norton 2013). In order to navigate this new terrain, we divide this article into three sections. In the first section, we consider how

theories of identity have shifted and evolved, and present a theoretical toolkit that might help scholars, both emerging and established, address the diverse research agendas and tasks that arise from this changing linguistic landscape. In the second section of the article, we discuss three broad and interrelated research questions relevant to identity in language learning and teaching, and present nine research tasks that arise from the questions outlined. These tasks are representative of the kinds of tasks associated with a given set of research problems, and make no claim to be exhaustive. After each of the nine tasks, we provide an exemplar of a research study that might help scholars in the design of their own studies relevant to the task in question. In the third section, we bookend the article with a methodology toolkit that might help scholars address, at least in part, the research tasks discussed in the second section. Two articles previously published in this journal (Norton & Toohey 2011; Higgins 2015), as well as De Costa & Norton (2016) provide a useful background to the framing of this article.

## 1. Theoretical toolkit

In this section, we consider what advances in social theory might enhance the development of research tasks on identity in language education. The four areas we have identified, respectively, are those that pertain to globalization and neoliberalism; investment and identity; scales and translanguaging; and poststructuralism and human agency.

### 1.1 Globalization and neoliberalism

As recent identity research suggests (e.g., Blackledge & Creese 2010; Heller 2011; Higgins 2011; S. Shin 2012), identity needs to be interrogated in the face of globalization, in which hybridizing and intersecting movements of people have led to increasing multilingualism in schools and society, and the production of new identities – what Higgins (2015) has called ‘millennium identities’. At the same time, the forces of neoliberalism, which entail deregulated markets, heightened individualism, and the marketization of activities and institutions (Block, Gray & Holborow 2012; Duchêne & Heller 2012; Duchêne, Moyer & Roberts 2013), have had concomitant effects on the identities of language learners and teachers (Piller & Cho 2013; Block 2014; Chun 2016; Darvin 2016). Illustrative studies include Morgan & Clarke (2011), who examine how business ideologies have infiltrated language education, in which social actors are often described as ‘stakeholders’; while Park & Lo (2012), in their examination of the relationship between multiple markets and neoliberalism, illustrate how multiple centering forces impact an interaction involving Korean students discursively positioned as cosmopolitans. An enhanced understanding of globalization and neoliberalism will help in the development of research tasks on identity and language education.

### 1.2 Investment and identity: An expanded model

The sociological construct of investment, conceptualized by Norton in the mid-1990s (Norton Peirce 1995; Norton 2013) as a complement to the psychological construct of motivation

(Dörnyei & Ushioda 2009; Murray, Gao & Lamb 2011), continues to engage scholars in the field of language education and applied linguistics (Clark 2009; Reeves 2009; Anya 2011; Chang 2011; Mastrella & Norton 2011; Ollerhead 2012; Motha & Lin 2014; Anya 2017) and has now been included in the Douglas Fir Group framework of second language acquisition (SLA) (Douglas Fir Group 2016). In addition to asking ‘Are students motivated to learn a language?’ Norton posits the complementary question: ‘Are students and teachers INVESTED in the language and literacy practices of a given classroom or community?’ The central argument is that a learner may be highly motivated to learn a particular language, but may not be invested in the language practices of a given classroom if it is, for example, racist, sexist, or homophobic. Norton and her students have been exploring the relevance of the construct in diverse international contexts, finding it helpful in explaining the relationship of Ugandan multilingual students and teachers to the affordances of digital technology (Norton, Jones & Ahimbisibwe 2011; Norton & Williams 2012; Stranger-Johannessen & Norton 2017), while Darwin & Norton (2015) have developed an expanded model of investment that might help to inform research tasks in the future.

To capture the changing global context, Darwin & Norton’s model of investment occurs at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology, thus placing greater emphasis on capital and ideology than in Norton’s previous work on investment and identity. By providing a multi-layered and multidirectional approach, the model demonstrates how power circulates in society, at both micro and macro levels, constructing modes of inclusion and exclusion through and beyond language. Through this critical lens, researchers can examine more systematically how microstructures of power in communicative events are indexical of larger ideological practices and diverse forms of capital that impact learner and teacher identity. This new work on investment is the subject of a special issue of the European journal *Langage et Société* (Bemporad 2016), which arose out of a special symposium on investment, identity, and language learning, held at the University of Lausanne in May 2014.

### 1.3 Scales and translanguaging

Also of interest to identity theory is the construct of scales, which is an heuristic that takes into consideration the identities and practices of learners that evolve over time and space (De Costa & Canagarajah 2016; Maloney & De Costa 2017). We have both long understood the value of tracing how the personal histories of language learners impact investment in language learning. Such longitudinal identity research is enhanced by a scalar approach, which includes both timescales and sociolinguistic scales. Canagarajah & De Costa (2016) treat scales as a shifting category of practice in order to interpret how identities emerge from the translanguaging (García & Li 2014) and metrolingual (Pennycook & Otsuji 2015) practices of people and institutions.

A scalar approach to examining identity has been used by sociolinguists (e.g., Norton & Williams 2012; Park & Lo 2012; Canagarajah 2013), linguistic anthropologists (e.g., Wortham & Rhodes 2012), and SLA researchers (e.g., De Costa 2016a). Using timescales, Park & Lo (2012) show how the lives of migrant learners are invariably interlinked with material and historical conditions at geographically distant places, while Blommaert (2010) demonstrates

through his use of sociolinguistic scales that different languages and language varieties are not only valued differently but also index different identities.

In addition to a growing interest in the application of scales to identity work, recent research on identity (e.g., De Costa 2010b; Pennycook 2010; Stroud & Wee 2012; Xu 2012; Canagarajah 2013) has also argued that it is through engaging in linguistic practices with various people that a range of identities are subsequently enacted by the learner. For example, in his work on teacher identities, Xu (2012) invoked the notion of practiced identities and contrasted it with the imagined identities of four novice ESOL K-12 teachers in China. Increasingly, more identity researchers have combined the constructs of scales and practice in their investigation of identity development. For example, in their call for a greater attention to the level of practice, Wortham & Rhodes (2012) recommend investigating identity formation through examining critical points in activities engaged in by learners across space and timescales. Given that scales enable us to better understand how learners and teachers handle complex social realities, they have important implications for the development of associated research tasks.

#### 1.4 Poststructuralism and human agency

The field of language education and applied linguistics was a latecomer to groundbreaking debates in the humanities and social sciences, beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, and arising from Saussurean and post-Saussurean theories of language. In poststructuralist theory, language is seen as central to the circulation of discourses, which are systems of power/knowledge that define and regulate our social institutions, disciplines, and practices (Norton & Morgan 2013). The poststructural ‘multilingual subject’ (Kramsch 2009) is of much interest in the field, and as Block (2007: 864) notes, a poststructuralist approach to identity ‘has become the approach of choice among those who seek to explore links between identity and L2 learning’. A recent special issue on poststructuralism in the journal *Applied Linguistics* (McNamara 2012) highlights the enduring importance of this area to the field.

Future research, however, will be enriched by increased interest in theories of human agency, which is the subject of an exciting book by Miller (2014). The central argument Miller makes is that while many scholars draw on poststructuralism to theorize learner identity in non-essentialist terms, agency is often treated as an essential feature of the learner. Working with a comprehensive corpus of interview data from adult immigrant business owners in the USA, Miller theorizes agency as performatively constituted in discursive practice. This book has been followed by a comprehensive edited collection on interdisciplinary approaches to human agency (Deters et al. 2015), which will also enrich future research tasks on identity in language education.

## 2. Research agendas and research tasks

Theories of identity over the past two decades have helped us better understand the relationship between the language learner and the larger, frequently unequal social world. Identity has been theorized as a site of struggle, changing across time and space, and reproduced in social

interaction (Norton 2013). Much of this research focused on the language learner, particularly in immigrant contexts. In this section of our article, we expand the scope of this research to ask three interrelated sets of questions: (a) Which social categories, including race, gender, class, and sexual orientation have been under-researched? What research tasks require greater attention? (b) How is identity implicated at global, national, institutional, or interpersonal levels? What research tasks will enhance our understanding of the relationship between learners and teachers, on the one hand, and social contexts, on the other? (c) Which research populations require deeper analysis? Which research tasks would provide greater insight into particular social groups? Through an exploration of these three sets of interrelated research questions, addressing, respectively, social categories (2.1), social contexts (2.2), and research populations (2.3), we have generated a total of nine research tasks. We hope that Research Tasks #1 to #9, with accompanying exemplars, will help to promote vibrant and productive research that impacts theories of identity as well as enhanced application in classrooms.

## 2.1 Social categories and identity research

### 2.1.1 Intersectionality

In the context of globalization, social categories such as ethnicity, gender, and class require more nuanced research, particularly with regard to the intersections of these categories – which has also been called ‘intersectionality’ (Block & Corona 2014). A focus on intersectionality is important because social categories are often overlapping and interdependent. For example, the plight of struggling immigrant students cannot be attributed solely to the identity inscription of nationality or ethnicity, but must be examined with respect to other categories such as class, gender, and religion. In a study which crosses ethnic, gender, and sexuality divides, Appleby (2012) found, for example, that White Australian men teaching in Japanese language schools struggled to negotiate a particularly complex contact zone, which may have limited their professional and pedagogical aspirations. Also in Japan, Kamada’s (2010) study of the hybrid identities of adolescent girls who were ‘half’ Japanese was focused on issues of both ethnicity and gender, and illustrates how these young women struggled to negotiate desirable identities when confronted by marginalizing discourses.

#### **Research task 1**

**With reference to a designated group of diverse language learners or teachers, study to what extent Darwin & Norton’s model of investment (Darvin & Norton 2015) might serve as a useful tool for the analysis of intersectionality.**

*Exemplar:* As noted in 1.3, the construct of investment has gained much traction in identity research over the last two decades. Following their review of the rich body of investment-oriented identity work, Darvin & Norton applied their model of investment, incorporating identity, capital, and ideology, to the case of a female language learner,

Henrietta, in a poorly resourced Ugandan village, and the case of a male language learner, Ayrton, in a wealthy neighbourhood in urban Canada. Their findings revealed that the imagined identity of each learner was inextricably linked to the levels of capital (social, economic, and cultural) available to them and the ideologies with which their participants' learning experiences were associated. While Ayrton's learning was buoyed by access to high levels of capital in the context of neoliberal ideological practices that sustained his imagined cosmopolitan identity, Henrietta's dreams of assuming an imagined identity of a knowledgeable global citizen were challenged by limited access to capital and a hegemonic ideology that reproduces the global North/South divide. Building on this example, future studies might wish to explore how this model of investment can be applied to other learning contexts. For example, extending the work of Stranger-Johannessen & Norton (2017), scholars might wish to compare and contrast the identity realizations of a female elementary school teacher in a poorly resourced Ugandan community with that of another female elementary school teacher in a well-resourced UK community to determine how issues of ideology, capital, and identity might impact their language teaching.

### 2.1.2 Race and ethnicity

While we anticipate that more intersectional research will be conducted in the future, we also recognize that interest in particular social categories, such as race, remains resilient (Motha 2014). Anya (2011, 2017) has found that African American college students who wish to learn a second language (L2) are drawn by the desire to connect with and learn more about Afro-descendant speakers of their target languages, while Feinauer & Whiting (2012), who studied Latino communities, endorse ethnic-identity-development processes for pre-adolescent language minority youth. Also with respect to ethnicity, the long-standing native- and non-native speaker distinction continues to attract L2 identity research (e.g., Moussu & Llurda 2008; Gathbonton, Trofimovich & Segalowitz 2011). However, we suggest that this enduring interest in race and ethnicity needs to be seen in relation to the neoliberal turn, which, as Pujolar & Jones (2012) show, has resulted in the marketization of ethnolinguistic 'authenticity' to generate income. Increasingly, such a distinction has both heritage-related and economic consequences because belonging to certain privileged ethnicities, in particular, brings with it opportunities associated with being a native speaker. Blommaert's (2009) study of call centers in India, which examines learners' strong desire to sound like a native-English speaker because it helps secure lucrative jobs, is a stark reminder of this reality, as is Pujolar & Jones's (2012) investigation of the marketization of Catalan ethnolinguistic 'authenticity' to generate tourist income. Overall, research on race and ethnicity will feature heavily in the identity research agenda because these two social categories continue to be highly relevant issues in education.

#### **Research task 2**

**With reference to a multiracial group of native and/or non-native teachers of English, study to what extent race is implicated in teacher experiences of legitimacy as English language teachers.**

**Exemplar:** As earlier research has shown, claiming ‘authentic’ ethnolinguistic identity and native-speaker status brings with it financial rewards. However, equally interesting would be an investigation of the experiences of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) who constitute a significant and growing segment of students enrolled in teaching English to speakers of other languages) (TESOL) programs in English dominant countries. In 2012 G. Park published a study that investigated a teacher’s journey in claiming and embracing her non-native-speaker identity. Drawing on narratives (see 3.1) and interviews conducted with her focal teacher, Park traced how the teacher ultimately overcame her linguistic powerlessness over the course of working with an inspiring non-native English-speaking teacher educator. Scholars are directed to the appendices to Park’s article that contain helpful directions on how to design email autobiographical (e-auto) narratives and prompts for e-journals. Following Park’s research design, we recommend that classroom observations of focal NNEST teachers be conducted to further triangulate data sources. Such research would help shed light on how NNEST identities are enacted in classroom practice. While Park worked with East Asian teacher participants, we recommend that future research also include teachers from other regions of the world. Further, we suggest that spatiotemporal scales (see 1.3) be applied to the analyses of the data to produce a more nuanced understanding of how teacher identities change over time and space.

### 2.1.3 Social class

Neoliberalism and globalization also serve as analytical tools in new conceptions of social class, (Rampton 2011; Snell 2013; Block 2014). Much of the identity work on class thus far (e.g., De Costa 2010a; Norton 2013; de Costa 2016b) has drawn on Bourdieu’s (1991) constructs of capital and habitus, which conceive of class as relational and emergent. A welcome addition to these debates is a special issue on social class, edited by Kanno & Vandrick (2014), in the *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*. The contributions provide a lens through which scholars can examine how language learning and teaching can either reproduce or disrupt economic and social inequities. While recognizing that the emergence of the neoliberal post-industrial work order may render traditional labels of ‘middle class’ and ‘working class’ defunct (Savage et al. 2013), important investigative tasks remain on the research agenda, including an examination of what Vandrick (2011) has called ‘the global elite’. Work on this group of learners and their teachers promises to be significant because it highlights the material conditions of globalization and its structures of inequality, a component of neoliberal ideology.

#### **Research task 3**

**With reference to two families with contrasting socioeconomic histories, study the extent to which digital literacy practices are constructed by and reinforce class identities.**

**Exemplar:** While we appreciate the need for more research on the global elite, we are also committed to seeing more identity work done with learners from lower socioeconomic

classes. Lemphane & Prinsloo (2014), in particular, make a strong argument for researchers to examine how digital literacy practices are shaped by class identities. Set in two black Sotho-speaking homes in Cape Town, South Africa, they illustrate how unequal access to digital resources has a divergent impact on the literacy development of children from a suburban middle-class family, and an urban township family, respectively. While the former enjoyed broadband connectivity and access to a ‘2nd life’ teenage site (which ironically only contained white teenage avatars, further illustrating the intersectional nature of identity research), the latter had no computer access at all and were allowed only limited access to their parents’ mobile phones. As noted by Lemphane & Prinsloo, access to semiotic resources ultimately determined the level of interactive language learning opportunities available to both sets of children. Given the increasing role that technology plays in maintaining social inequalities (see 2.2.1), it would be useful to continue this line of research by including, for example, an investigation of the digital literacy practices of adult learners associated with different social classes. A broader and deeper understanding of how class impacts language learning might help us bridge the academic gap that exists between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ in school and society.

## 2.2 Social contexts and identity research

### 2.2.1 Digital literacy and virtual spaces

The ability to construct functional selves through digital interaction is not uncommon in digital environments (Warriner 2007; Thorne & Black 2011; Lam & Warriner 2012; Darwin 2016). In their examination of the characteristics of vernacular literacies on Web 2.0, Barton & Lee (2012), for example, focused on the writing activities performed on the photo-sharing site Flickr.com by multilingual Spanish-speaking and Chinese-speaking users who drew on a wide range of semiotic resources to project new global identities. Darwin & Norton (2014), in another example, describe the ways in which digital storytelling can expand the range of identities available to migrant language learners, creating a ThirdSpace that acknowledges and affirms multidimensional identities.

While research on digital literacy and digital identities has been informative, it is not without shortcomings (Warschauer & Matuchniak 2010). As Snyder & Prinsloo noted (2007), much of the digital research on language education has focused on research in wealthier regions of the world, and there is a great need for research in poorly resourced communities to impact global debates on new technologies, identity, and language learning. In this spirit, the work of Toohey, Dagenais & Schultze (2012), discussed next, is important and innovative. What is needed in this changing landscape are new tools to expedite future research on identity and digital literacy, which we anticipate will grow because of the increasingly central role that technology plays in language and literacy development. To ensure analytical rigor, identity researchers could adopt more sophisticated analytical tools (see Martinec & van Leeuwen 2009; Thorne 2013) to investigate how identities are mediated along multimodal and Internet-mediated lines, a theme to be discussed more fully in Section 3.



**Research task 4**

**Conduct a transnational study with youth to determine the extent to which digital innovations can build global networks across different language learner communities.**

**Exemplar:** As noted in 2.1.3, attempts need to be made to bridge the gap between students with unequal access to technology and digital literacy. Given this concern, and the emerging interest in transnational identities (e.g., De Fina & Perrino 2013), one exemplary study is Toohey, Dagenais & Schultze (2012). In a multi-country videomaking project with school children in India, Mexico, and Canada, Toohey et al. (2012) found that the making of videos offered language learners opportunities for meaning making that extended beyond their particular L2 capabilities. The authors argue that videomaking can enhance the participants' awareness of audience, sequencing, and rhetoric, leading to 'activities of critical reflection and agentive self and collective expression' (Toohey et al. 2012: 90). Similar studies involving students in different contexts ought to be conducted in order to examine ways to legitimize multilingual practices and to validate the identities of multilingual students. Crucially, such studies would constitute part of the wider plurilingual turn currently taking place in language education (Taylor & Snodden 2013) as well as the increasing interest in materialism and posthumanism (Pennycook 2017; Smythe et al. 2017).

## 2.2.2 Indigenous, postcolonial, and diaspora sites

In keeping with the enduring interest by linguistic anthropologists such as Hornberger in indigenous identity (Hornberger 2014), identity researchers are examining how indigenous youth who remain in local communities (e.g., Norton et al. 2011; Wyman, McCarty & Nicholas 2014) negotiate dynamic cultural worlds that are shifting as a consequence of globalization. One area of interest is the investigation of identity negotiation by children left behind by parents who leave their communities in search of work abroad. A study that stands out is King & Haboud's (2011) poignant analysis of the impact of international migration on Quechuan-speaking youth in the Ecuadorian Andes whose lives were transformed by new technology such as cellphones as a result of money remitted home by their overseas parents. A 2014 special issue of the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* (May 2014) with the title, 'Deconstructing the urban-rural dichotomy in sociolinguistics: Indigenous perspectives' seeks to complement the focus on urban multilingualism, characteristic of much current identity research, by highlighting the diverse ways in which indigenous peoples are affected by the conditions of late modernity. The article by Hornberger (2014), for example, examines the life history of one Quechua-speaking bilingual educator as a teacher, teacher educator, researcher, and advocate, illustrating the complex ways in which Indigenous identity is co-constructed across rural-urban divides. We believe that more identity research on indigenous peoples is needed in light of the widening gap between rural and urban populations.

There is also increasing research in diaspora and postcolonial sites where multilingualism is the norm (e.g., Barton & Lee 2012; Harissi, Otsuji & Pennycook 2012; Erling &

Seargeant 2013; Kerfoot & Bello-Nonjengele 2014). Such research responds to calls to restore agency and professionalism in periphery communities (e.g., Bamgbose 2014) and gives due recognition to local vernacular modes of learning and teaching. A special issue of the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (Norton 2014), titled ‘Multilingual literacy and social change in African communities’, grapples with the ways in which language learners and teachers in African communities are navigating complex identities in changing times. Two particularly active sites of research are South Africa and Uganda, where researchers are undertaking exciting research in both homes (Lemphane & Prinsloo 2014; Namazzi & Kendrick 2014) and schools (Early & Norton 2014; Makoe & McKinney 2014). Future research on identity in language learning and teaching will continue this important trajectory.

### **Research task 5**

**Examine how the linguistic practices and identities of members situated in indigenous, postcolonial, and diaspora sites change over extended periods of time.**

*Exemplar:* Canagarajah’s (2008) study of language shift within Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora families located in Toronto (Canada), London (UK), and Lancaster (USA) provides fascinating insights into the ways such families negotiate the tensions between valuing cultural identity and heritage language proficiency (see 2.3.3). Researchers can adopt and modify Canagarajah’s practice of (a) administering a questionnaire on language attitudes and choice, (b) conducting individual, family, and focus group interviews, and (c) taking field notes of observations in order to learn about the issues and challenges involved in the intergenerational language acquisition of a heritage language. Also of interest in this study, given recent calls to engage in reflexivity (Kramsch & Whiteside 2007; De Costa 2014), is Canagarajah’s discussion and account of his own research positionality as he moved between being an insider and outsider of the Tamil communities he studied. As Norton & Early (2011) have argued, identity researchers are encouraged to examine their own identities in relation to their participants and their research sites.

## 2.3 Research populations and identity research

Earlier research on identity focused primarily on language learners, particularly in immigrant contexts. There is now increasing interest in a wider range of research populations, including teachers, lingua franca speakers, heritage language learners, and study abroad learners. A variety of research tasks that address identity arise from a study of these diverse research populations.

### 2.3.1 Teacher identities

An area of identity research that is gaining momentum is that of language teacher identity (e.g., Clarke 2008; Kanno & Stuart 2011; Varghese 2011; Sayer 2012; Dagenais 2012;

Menard-Warwick 2013; Cheung, Said & Park 2015). Recently, Kumaravadivelu (2012) called for a rethinking of teacher identities in this globalized world. Specifically, he invoked an epistemic break in the dependency on western knowledge of production and center-based methods. Such challenges are being taken up by emerging scholars such as Andema (2014) from Uganda and Carazzai (2013) and Sanches Silva (2013) from Brazil, who are exploring ways in which globalization is impacting language teacher identity in tertiary language education programs. The call to decenter and decolonize teaching is relevant in a neoliberal era that emphasizes accountability and adherence to common standards. Barkhuizen (2017) as well as two journal special issues on teacher identity, one in the *TESOL Quarterly* (Varghese et al. 2016) and another in *Modern Language Journal* (De Costa & Norton 2016) will contribute much to contemporary debates on identity research, and the ways in which teacher identities have evolved in the wake of globalization and neoliberal impulses.

While the call to decenter and decolonize teaching is relevant in a neoliberal era, it is equally important that we do not ignore policies that directly impact teachers' daily practice. In this spirit, researchers need to examine how teachers negotiate language policies in schools (e.g., Menken & García 2010) and how teacher identities are subsequently transformed. One way researchers have approached this topic is to conduct an ethnography of language policy (e.g., Johnson 2013). Further, in line with the universal implementation of standards in most countries, researchers are beginning to explore how policy documents and curriculum guidelines such as the Common Core State Standards in the USA (e.g., Kibler, Valdes & Walqui 2014) impact teacher identities. The investigation of teacher identities is part of an upward trend to bridge SLA and language policy research, as evidenced by a recent conference at Lund University in Sweden (<http://konferens.ht.lu.se/lpp-symposium>).

### **Research task 6**

**Conduct an ethnographic study on the ways in which educational policy impacts teacher practices and teacher identity in a given community.**

**Exemplar:** Given that the development of teacher identities and pedagogical practices do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped in response to policies, we direct researchers to a study by Abiria, Early & Kendrick (2013). Based in northern Uganda, their study investigated how five Primary 4 teachers adopted a dynamic plurilingual approach in the face of pressures to prepare students for the national examination in English, and limited resources and large class sizes in their school. Following Abiria et al., we recommend that an array of qualitative research methods – observations and reflections, photographs, post-lesson reflections/interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, questionnaires and artifacts – be used to gain a holistic understanding of how teachers create a conducive learning environment through their creative mobilization of linguistic, multimodal, and cultural resources.

### 2.3.2 Lingua franca speakers

Lingua franca speakers are another population of interest to future identity researchers. Many aspiring lingua franca languages compete for legitimacy in the global arena, and there is growing interest in lingua franca languages (Jenkins 2006; McGroarty 2006). In line with this interest is a greater exploration of non-native-speaker identities (see also 2.1.2 above). For example, Cogo & Dewey (2012), De Costa (2012), Liang (2012), and H. Park (2012) have started to examine how non-native language learners develop and enact identities from an English as a lingua franca (ELF) perspective. As observed by Clark (2013), in contrast to the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL), which positions English language learners as different from and/or deficient compared to speakers of 'standard' English, ELF does not differentiate between native and non-native speakers of English, and views code-switching as a bilingual pragmatic resource. Further, given the explosive growth of contexts where English and other major languages such as Spanish, Arabic, and Chinese are used as a lingua franca, identity researchers are beginning to explore how enacting lingua franca identities enables learners and teachers in periphery communities to assert their agency (Duff 2012). Overall, an investigation of lingua franca identities is timely and is set to grow, in view of the emergence of several major lingua franca languages whose growth has been bolstered by globalization and technology.

#### **Research task 7**

**Drawing on an online chat room site or other social media forum, study the ways in which it constructs – and is constructed by – the identities of lingua franca speakers.**

***Exemplar:*** Increasingly, English is used as a lingua franca for online communication. Taking this reality into consideration, Jenks (2012) analyzed the interactional features of participants in a Skypecast chat room and illustrated how, contrary to general expectation that ELF interactants are mutually supportive, reprehensible talk existed among chat room users. In line with Jenks, we suggest that identity researchers analyze online interaction involving ELF users because chat rooms offer accessible but naturalistic data to examine the construction of ELF identities. Jenks's use of conversation analysis (see 3.2) is also recommended because it allows researchers to examine how such identities can change on a turn-by-turn basis. While online data are readily available for analysis, we urge researchers to take steps to preserve the anonymity of the chat users in light of the ethical turn in applied linguistics (De Costa 2014). While Skype no longer supports its chat room function, one site that can contribute to our understanding of ELF identity construction is the World of War Craft live chat room which brings together over 10 million global subscribers. Findings from such an ELF-based study might also add useful insights to a growing interest in gaming and digital literacy development (e.g., Gee 2011, 2013) [see 2.2.1].

### 2.3.3 Heritage language learners

Another population of increasing interest to identity researchers is heritage language learners (see Creese & Blackledge 2010; Leeman, Rabin & Román-Mendoza 2011; Duff 2012; Kagan & Dillon 2012; He 2014; Manosuthikit & De Costa 2016; Maloney & De Costa 2017). Common in such research is a commitment to reclaim the local by venerating the languages spoken in students' home communities. For example, Creese & Blackledge (2010) describe a program in complementary schools in the UK that sought to build young heritage language speakers' language awareness of Gujarati and Mandarin. In their comprehensive review of L2 identity, Miller & Kubota (2013) note, however, that the term 'heritage' remains slippery and contested, and needs greater clarification, especially given the growing enrolment of heritage language learners in schools and universities. Further, Miller & Kubota (2013) make the case that researchers and teachers cannot underestimate a learner's agency with respect to whether and how learners identify as heritage language learners.

#### **Research task 8**

**Investigate heritage language learner identity and agency across a range of age groups from a service learning perspective.**

*Exemplar:* In line with Miller & Kubota's (2013) call to investigate agency as exercised by heritage learners, we recommend research that investigates how heritage learners reclaim while also reconstruct heritage identities. One good example is Leeman, Rabin & Román-Mendoza (2011) who describe a critical service-learning university program that sought to build heritage language speakers' language awareness through community-based opportunities to enact and strengthen their identities as language experts. In this vein, future heritage identity research should take into consideration curricular efforts that involve various stakeholders such as families and community organizations. While much of the heritage learner research has focused on younger learners, few studies have explored how older (i.e. beyond university-age) learners attempt to revitalize the learning of their heritage language later in life. We recommend that researchers investigate how mature learners negotiate their own identities as they elect to (re)learn heritage languages. One way to do this is to couple this approach with tracing learner trajectories and examining sedimented experiences, as has been emphasized throughout this article. Such learners may decide later in life to learn their heritage languages following a visit to the country of their ancestors upon retirement. Importantly, a focus on mature learners is part of a recent shift toward studying the language learning experiences of older language learners (e.g., Swain 2013).

### 2.3.4 Study abroad learners

In addition to investigating the identities of heritage language learners, another promising research context is study abroad, especially given the growing number of such programs offered by universities (see Kinginger 2011; Magnan & Lafford 2012; Benson et al. 2013;

Wernicke 2014; De Costa, Rawal & Zaykovskaya 2017). According to Magnan & Lafford (2012), to facilitate student linguistic success abroad, candidates ought to engage in social computing networks with their future host families before arrival on site, receive extensive departure training about the target culture, live in interactive home stay situations, and participate in service learning and internships to practice the target language. Following these observations, one way in which study abroad identity research can be developed is through tracing a learner's identity transformation across the different contexts identified by Magnan & Lafford. As discussed, such a longitudinal approach would also enhance our understanding of how identities change over time and space.

### **Research task 9**

**Study to what extent language learners in study abroad sites are able to engage in identity negotiation.**

*Exemplar:* Kinginger (2008) investigated the L2 experiences of 24 undergraduate study abroad students from a US university during their one-semester sojourn in France. What is noteworthy about this mixed methods study is that while she collected quantitative data (a standardized French proficiency test, speech samples from role plays, language awareness interviews) from all 24 participants, qualitative data (in-country logs, journals, oral interviews before and after their sojourn, and on-site observations) were also collected from 6 focal participants to study their identities as L2 learners and users. Following Kinginger's research design, we recommend that additional social media data (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr posts) also be conducted for a better understanding of students' own investments in their SLA experiences and identities as L2 users. Another suggestion is that the study be conducted over a longer period of time (i.e. more than one semester) to gain a better understanding of the students' identity development.

## **3. Methodology toolkit**

In order for new research tasks to be carried out, current methodologies will need to be revised and new ones added to the methodology tool kit. To ensure analytical rigor, identity researchers could adopt more sophisticated analytical tools (see Martinec & van Leeuwen 2009; Thorne 2013) to investigate how identities are mediated along multimodal and Internet-mediated lines (see Kendrick 2016). Further, while identity-inflected social media research has usually focused on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, or Instagram), a more holistic understanding of identity development would be attained if an examination across a range of social media platforms were conducted. Many learners today use more than one type of social media and more often than not, these media are synced to one another. More importantly, digital research should strive toward a connective ethnography of online/offline literacy networks (Leander 2008; Wargo 2017) and not view technology as being separate from in-class language and literacy development. Apart from classic qualitative research

(e.g., Duff 2008), promising methodologies that have in recent years attracted greater attention include narrative inquiry, conversation analysis, and corpus linguistics.

### 3.1 Narrative inquiry

While the scope of narrative inquiry is broad and sometimes difficult to define (Barkhuizen 2013), Early & Norton (2013) illustrate how narrative inquiry can illuminate identity negotiation, given that narratives are co-constructed and shaped by social, cultural, and historical conventions. Focusing on oral narratives, De Fina & Baynham (2012) add that narratives create a space for immigrant voices, further exemplified in the case involving Spanish-speaking Latina immigrants interviewed in King & De Fina (2010). During interviews, the immigrant participants positioned themselves relative to US language policies, thereby exemplifying the personal negotiation of identities that immigrants often experience within a broader anti-immigrant socio-political context. Working with narratives, Block (2010) has suggested three distinct ways of dealing with narratives: thematic analysis (focus on the content of what is said); structural analysis (focus on how narratives are produced); and dialogic/performative analysis (focus on WHO the utterance is directed to and the purpose of the utterance). This third analytic approach highlights the need to consider the positionings adopted by the interlocutor and the importance of engaging in rigorous analysis of narratives. The significance of positionings is also emphasized by Talmy (2011), whose social-practice orientation to interviews focuses on how identity is performed in this particular speech event. We foresee future narrative-based identity work as continuing this recent line of methodological practice. In the execution of the research tasks in Section 2, we anticipate a wider range of narratives being adopted, ranging from plays and poems (Nelson 2011; Darwin 2015) to autoethnographies (e.g., Canagarajah 2012).

### 3.2 Conversation analysis

As an analytical tool, ethnomethodological conversation analysis (CA) allows researchers to explore discourse identities and social identities, thereby enhancing our understanding of how identities are ascribed through an analysis of the sequential development of talk. More recent 'applied' CA research has begun to open up new understandings of how spoken interactional practices can help sustain social identities in this way (e.g., Mori 2012). Congruent with recent studies that explore how researchers' own identities and agendas are implicated in the construction of interviewees' responses, Mori's (2012) conversation analysis of a multilingual speaker of Korean, English, and Japanese revealed that the speaker co-constructed her ever-shifting identities vis-à-vis membership categories such as American, Korean, or Korean-American. Such an interpretation of identities as being fluid is consistent with Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) 'interactionist approach to identity', which calls for an examination of how subjectivities emerge as individuals engage in activity of all types. Also crucial to note is the growing number of identity studies that analyze other forms of talk apart from classroom discourse. Increasingly, for example, there is recognition that identities can also be displayed

in family interactions (e.g., De Fina 2012). We anticipate that CA will be regularly applied in the research tasks described in Section 2.

### 3.3 Linguistic ethnography

As an interpretive theoretical and methodological approach, Linguistic Ethnography (LE) investigates the local and immediate actions of social actors from their point of view and considers how these interactions are embedded in wider social contexts and structures (Copland & Creese 2015; see also Maybin & Tusting 2011; Snell, Shaw & Copland 2015 for overviews of LE). Essentially a European phenomenon influenced by North American scholarship in linguistic anthropology, LE draws on different approaches to the analysis of discourse such as CA and combines them with ethnography in order to explore how local actions and interactions are embedded in a wider social world. In that respect, LE can be partnered with the notion of scales (see 1.3) to examine how identities are constructed over time and space. Further, Rampton et al. (2004) describe LE as being shaped by five ongoing and recent fields of socio and applied linguistic research – fields that overlap with key research areas described earlier: local literacies; ethnicity, language and inequality in education; ideology and the cultural dynamics of globalization; the classroom as a site of interaction; and language teaching. On a broader level, LE provides a helpful lens in understanding researcher identity and reflexivity (2.2.2) by taking into account the need to conduct ethical research. In their discussion of the ethical issues surrounding their LE research, Copland & Creese (2015) argue for a democratic approach to carrying out research that flattens the hierarchies between the researcher and the researched. Thus, one way that LE can contribute to future identity work is through an investigation of researcher identity (Norton & Early 2011), which can further inform the ethical turn in language education research.

### 3.4 Corpus linguistics

While some researchers have focused on interaction data, others have adopted a corpus approach to investigate how identities are represented in written discourse (e.g., De Costa 2007; Hyland 2012). For example, Hyland (2012) explored the regularity and repetition of what is socially ratified by analyzing consistent rhetorical choices associated with the constructs of proximity and positioning. Within ELF research, Cogo & Dewey (2012) have applied corpus procedures to describe linguistic features characteristic of identities associated with ELF speakers. Given the growing sophistication of concordance tools and the availability of corpora, applied linguists now have greater access to data from all around the world through websites, blogs, and social networking sites (Friginal & Hardy 2014), which allow identities in the digital era to be examined in increasingly creative and rigorous ways. Importantly, such a systematic examination of how academic identities are mobilized in writing can help students become experts in the genres of their discipline (Nesi & Gardner 2012) and thus inform pedagogy and curriculum design. Given these developments, it is predicted that the



application of corpora and corpus-based methods will further illuminate identity research agendas and research tasks.

#### 4. Conclusion

As identity researchers in language education navigate an increasingly mobile and digital world, the need for an expanded range of research tasks is timely. We have identified nine research tasks that may help scholars address three broad research questions that focus on the relationship between language learners and teachers within particular institutional and transnational contexts. These research tasks, which are illustrative rather than exhaustive, range from the application of Darvin & Norton's (2015) model of investment to study intersectionality, to the examination of social media platforms to better understand lingua franca speakers. We have introduced each research task with a key study in the field, and bookended the article with a discussion of contemporary social theory relevant to identity in the first section of the article, and methodology innovations in applied linguistics in the final section. Through identifying a range of research tasks that arise from key research questions, this article seeks to help frame the exciting trajectory of research on identity and language education in future years.

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