



Positional Identities and Learning an Additional Language in Bi/multilingual Contexts: Dialogic Ways to Understanding

Tetyana Reichert

Dept. of Germanic and Slavic Studies University of Waterloo

tetyana.reichert@uwaterloo.ca

Abstract

A growing body of literature of second language acquisition suggests including consideration of learner identities as expressed through linguistic recourses and studied in its context of use. But the question remains as to how learners actually develop understanding of themselves and a new language through social interactions.

Drawing on Bakhtin's dialogism and the socio-interactionist approach to L2 learning, I explore constructions of both knowledge and identity, and their interconnections in peer interactions of foreign language learners of German in non-classroom multilingual and bilingual contexts.

I analyse selected excerpts from 23 videotaped peer interactions which were recorded in 2007 at a major North American university. These interactions resulted from a course requirement, for which groups of two or three students had to compose a role play in the target language and perform it in front of the class. The interactions comprise the preparatory meetings of groups when the teacher is not present.

The reference is made to the concept of positional identity [1]. From this point of view, in every act of communication, speakers draw on activity histories and sociocultural knowledge to construct meanings through interactions, and to position themselves as particular persons (e.g. competent, non-knower, or expert).

By describing the ways in which learners negotiate their interactional positions, I examine both learning as the process of appropriating utterances and voices [2] from other people and learning opportunities that these practices entail.

The findings suggest that appropriating a new language and using it in social interactions necessarily involves the struggle for a new voice and therefore a negotiation of identities in L2 which lead to learning. The results of the analysis will have pedagogical implications for task-design, instruction-giving and teaching and learning in general.

References

[1] Holland, D., Lachicotte, W., Jr., Skinner, D., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

[2] Bakhtin, M. (1972). Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo [*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*]. Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura.