Discourse and Learner Identity: Representations, Negotiation and Shift in a Saudi EFL Context

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Abstract

Identity research, L2 learner identity included, has of late, witnessed an unprecedented surge. Changes in the concepts of 'language" "community", and the "individual" "competence", have all influenced researching identities, leading ultimately to them perceived as "complex", "multi-faceted", "dynamic", "varied", "changing", "fluid", "re/constructed" and "negotiated" phenomena. This study attempts to explore identities in the context of a Saudi Arabian college. In particular, the complexities, idiosyncrasies and potentialities of a group of 8 high-achieving EFL learners were thoroughly probed cross a period of four to six years. Instances of manifestations, construction, negotiation, and shift were probed. The mixed data collected and analysed subsumed a variety of observation sheets, semi-structured interviews, and informal talk and some verbal introspections included largely within the body of interviews. Some four nonnative multilingual instructors were likewise interviewed to help enrich the journey into these participants' L2 selves. Findings suggest the existence of subtle ways of construction, manifestation, negotiation and shift among the participants. The discussion reveals interesting instances of L2/self facets, third spaces, idiosyncrasies (self-definition and reflection problems, self-talk, etc.), complex L1-L2 relationship (languaging and reversed transfer supporting Cook's Multicompetence), etc. Empowerment of nonnative multilingual is further suggested in the discussion building on the conversation and interviews with several of them working in the context investigated alongside the data from students.

Keywords: Identity; Learner-identity; L2 Self; Identity Construction; Identity Negotiation; Identity Shift; Multi-competence; Arabic-speaking EFL Learners; Learner-self

1. Introduction

This paper explores and reflects on the issue of L2 identities and their implications for Arabic-speaking Saudi EFL learners. It particularly draws on the much more recent research on identities that foregrounds the notions of construction, shift and negotiation, and then attempts to probe the implications of these to Arabic-speaking EFL learners, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Categorically, identities are highlighted on the basis of a range of presumably the newest and most effective concepts and theories in the field: postmodernism and poststructuralism, languaging, critical pedagogy, a community of practice, meaning-negotiation, the recent revival of Vygotskianism and social-

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constructionism. Additionally and pointedly, identities are discussed in terms of the processes of their construction and negotiation, the way they manifest in the context of second/foreign learning, the complexity of L1-L2 interrelationships and the controversy over the native-nonnative speaker in language education that recently emerged to the forefront of applied linguistics and EFL/ESL education. The overall resultant framework out of this myriad of views is one in which identities-language identities included - are seen as hugely multi-faceted/multi-directional, individually and socially re/constructed, constantly changing, dynamic, conflictual and infinitely negotiated.

In the light of these emerging new concepts, facts and theories of identity research over the last two decades or so, the Saudi EFL situation is probed, discussed, reviewed and reflected on. This is further buttressed by some qualitative data (observations, focus discussions, teachers' and students' casual remarks along with a few interviews with high-achieving learners) in the context of a Saudi tertiary level EFL institution. The reflection, analysis, discussion and interpretation of the implications of both the surge of global theories of identity, in broad terms, and L2 identities, in more particular terms, coupled with the qualitative data collected and analysed, suggest that high-achieving learners do construct L2 identities and that they appear to showcase some complexities of identity negotiation and shift. These complexities can be further illuminated by the literature of self-definition problems, intersubjectivities, the concept of languaging, the subtleties of the L1-L2 relationship, idiosyncracies and performity, meaning-making multilayeredness and dynamism.

Thus, the study combines the quasi-experimental qualitative approach with a discourse-based critical approach to explore the issue of learner identity construction, negotiation and shift in the Saudi EFL context.

2. Literature Review

2.1. What is Identity?

The notion of identity has been one of the most contentious topics across the history of human thought. Philosophers, psychologists, scientists, theologians/religious thinkers, and scholars from every walk of modern academia have continued to debate the issue from time immemorial. The debate rests on tackling questions such as: What is meant by identity (an umbrella term in itself) (whether it be individual, social, cultural, or collective identity)? What constitutes an identity (what are its components)? Is identity stable, static, unidirectional/one-sided or is it dynamic, process-based, multi-faceted, negotiated and cross-categorical?

Various theories, classifications and methods prevail the literature of identity research (Cognitive – including the most classical Jung's Type Theory, Trait Theory, Token Theory, Social Constructionism, Sociocultural Reflexivity, Praxis-oriented Auto-ethnography -the latter which is probably the most recent, is both a theory and a method of identity study, etc). Social identity theories that predominantly draw on the work of Tajfel and Turner across the 1970s and 1980s have recently undergone many modifications as a result of the challenges posed by post-structuralists (see Turner's theory of 'self-categorization). Exploring controversies over all these theories and approaches to identity, would, of course, go beyond the scope of this paper. Notwithstanding this, the longstanding disputes among scholars can generally be grouped into three major categories: Classical, Modernist and Postmodernist. The classical approach views identity in terms of one 'core' category (material or symbolic) such as ethnicity, religion, social class/position, locality, gender/sexuality, political leaning, etc. While the modernist approach shares some concepts of identity with the post-modernist approach, it tends to differ in that, its beliefs and ideas about the "individual" and the "community and the "society" are either still in many ways static, or not adequately flexible and varied enough to cope with the new reality on the part of both the individual and the society. Conversely, the postmodernist approach

appears to envisage the notion of identity as much more complex, hugely dynamic, conflictive/conflictual, negotiated and endlessly multi-faceted. Both the individual and the community/society are approached in postmodernism as extremely complex, fluid and multilayered (Rampton, 2005, De Fina, et al., 2006; Toohey & Norton, 2010; Moin Syed, 2020). The issue of identity has particularly intrigued educators, linguists and language policy/language planners, for reasons to do with the very aims and objectives of these scholars.

2.2. Identity and the Changing Scene: Postmodernism and Post-structuralism

It would go beyond the scope of the present study to claim any comprehensive treatment of these two colossal framework terms. It would, nevertheless, appear necessary to situate 'identity' research within a larger explanatory framework. The almost twin terms postmodernism and poststructuralism are both umbrella terms that subsume a wide range of features, characteristics and phenomena. The following is an attempt to give a synopsis of these features, and it would be interesting to see the extent to which they are linked to shaping identity research:

1. The significance of envisaging phenomena is much more complex (than would be viewed by modernism and structuralism). Phenomena (material or immaterial) are rather looked at as multi-faceted and multi-layered entities consisting of various forms and parts and having the potentiality of taking a variety of shapes.

2. Social, political, linguistic, behavioral and cognitive phenomena, are never stable or static. While both modernism and structuralism are inclined to treat phenomena (and esp. socio-cultural phenomena) as somehow stable (assuming the inherently little role, if any, for the particulars and idiosyncrasies of these lumped together phenomena), postmodernism/poststructuralism would even resist any attempts of grouping things together or categorizing them, favoring instead, their "individuality, "uniqueness" and "performity".

3. In connection with the previous point, neither the "individual" nor the "community", could be seen as a 'unitary', 'one-directional', or a 'stable' entity. Rather, these, in postmodernist and poststructuralist terms, are seen as varied, dynamic, and multi-directional.

4. A shift of a perspective of meaning, from a stable and given or pre-determined to a view of meaning as something more complex, dynamic, shared, continuously shaped and negotiated.

5. Taking a critical stance towards the large-scale theories (pejoratively called "grand narratives" by postmodernists) that generally claim to provide a comprehensive explanatory framework for a wide range of things in the real world. Grand narratives are attacked as being inherently contradictory and inept to incorporate the complexity, fluidity and changing nature of real-life worlds.

6. Taking a critical approach towards the notion of "method", per se. postmodernists and poststructuralists are, in general, critical to the concept of a unified and stable framework of practices that can be labeled a "method". In applied linguistics for language education, this critical approach has yielded what is known as the "post method" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). The approach calls for "transformative" classrooms in which both teachers and students reflect critically on whatever method they are using, and draw on their own contexts and idiosyncrasies; they can create their own innovative methods/techniques.

7. Both postmodernism and poststructuralism tend to take a critical approach towards dominant mainstream discourses and cultures with a view to empowering the rather disadvantaged and marginalized.

2.3. Language and Identity

Language is anchored in all aspects of our life. Indeed, it is, in many ways, part and parcel of what we feel, what we do, what we perceive about ourselves and others. Since "there is nothing that so well characterizes human social action as language", where " cognition, consciousness, experience, embodiment, brain, self, and human interaction, society, culture, and history are all intertwined in rich, complex, and dynamic ways", as summed up by Ellis (2011:655), then both 'selfness' and 'otherness' could be seen to constantly surface up in language and language use.

Language, is also "an intimate part of social identity", as McGroatry (2010:3), has put it. The relationship between language and identity has particularly attracted linguists following the recent surge in critical discourse studies, socio-cultural approach, critical pedagogy and cognitive linguistics, that have cloaked language research since the early 1990s, or a bit earlier (Kramsch, 1993, 1998, 2009; Edward, 2004; Canagarajah, 2004). Edward (2013:57) has identified three ways in which language can signal identities, " Identities are manifested in language as, first, the categories and labels that people attach to themselves and others to signal their belonging; second, as the indexed ways of speaking and behaving through which they perform their belonging; and third, as the interpretations that others make of those indices".

 Back in the early 1980s, some scholars interested in discourse strategies such as Gumperz (1982) stressed the importance of language in giving shape to 'social identity'. Being interdisciplinary in themselves, these fields have broadened the way scholars look at the complex issue of identity. Canagarajah (2004:117) has summed this up by pointing out that "These schools have helped us understand identities as multiple, conflictual, negotiated, and evolving." He went on further to capture the key features of identity as follows:

1.   The Self is shaped considerably by language and discourses.
2.   The Self is composed of multiple subjectivities deriving from heterogeneous codes, registers, and discourses that are found in society.
3.   These subjectivities enjoy unequal status and power, deriving differential positioning in socioeconomic terms.
4.   Because of these inequalities, there is conflict within and between subjects.
5.   In order to find coherence and empowerment, the subject has to negotiate these competing identities and subject positions.
6.   Selves are not immutable or innate; they are reconstructed and reconstituted in relation to the changing discursive and material contexts (Canagarajah, 2004: 117).
 The conflictual approach to identity, stressed, in point 4 and several others, in the above quote, emanates from the fact that language is constantly a site of struggle for 'meanings', and as such is, consequently, a site of struggle for 'identities'.

The notion of the Self entails that of the Other; in fact, it is even impossible to define, the one without also necessarily evoking the other. Nevertheless, both the Self and the Other are immensely complex, involving a set of dynamic and multi-layered aspects. It is this complexity and multi-layeredness of both Selfness and Otherness, that has made philosophers, psychologists, linguists, sociologists and cognitive scientists (each with their own interests and objectives) invariably preoccupied with describing and defining them. Canagarajah's point (1) above, has kept reiterated in philosophy and psychology in what is known as "inter-subjectivity" (cf. the literature of Existentialism). The Self cannot, in any real depth, be seen as homogeneous, discrete, or unilateral. It would even appear that there is no one Self, but rather, a group of continuously "reconstructed and reconstituted" Selves. Discourse analysts and critical pedagogists have been concerned about how the

Selfness and Otherness could be shaped and reshaped by discourses (cf. above) (Paltridge, 2012); along with the concept of "self-construction" that would be detailed later. In fact, competing discourses, can themselves get (re)constructed by a particular condition and perception of the Self (Fairclough, 1989, 1992).

2.4. Learner Identity and Second Language Learning

The notion of the existence of a particular identity for the language learner and the active role of that identity in second language learning has been sparked in modern SLA research, by Norton's 1995 seminal article and her subsequent research (2000-present), (see Block, 2007; Miller and Kubota, 2013). Since then research has flourished unprecedentedly on the questions of identity and its role in influencing (positively or negatively) the trajectory of L2 development (Gao, Jia, and Zhou, 2015). However, some scholars have traced the issue of L2 identity back to the 1970s' influential work on 'motivation' by Gardener and Lambert (their classification of motivation into "instrumental and "integrative"). In fact, interest in L2 identity could even go further back than that, but the central difference between these earlier attempts and the new trend of identity research triggered primarily by Norton is that while those were largely grounded on the psychological approach, the new paradigm shift draws substantially on the socio-cultural approach (also known as the 'social turn'). As Norton (2011:318) herself notes, there has been " a shift from a predominantly psycholinguistic approach to second language acquisition to include a greater focus on sociological and anthropological dimensions of language learning, particularly concerning socio-cultural, post-structural, and critical theory".

The shift, referred to by Norton, has, in reality, resulted from a larger framework of a growing interest in the humanities, in the impact brought about by post-modernity, post-structuralism, and socio-culturalism. In particular, in linguistics and second language education, the return to the socio-cultural approach pioneered by the Russian scholar Vygotsky (Vygotskian Approach) over the last two decades or so, paralleled with an increasing surge of interest in a set of other lines of research and developments such as the complex relationship between L1 and L2 (and also the impact of L3), the recent controversy over Native and Nonnative Speakership, critical education/pedagogy, critical discourse studies (in particular the concepts of construction, meaning negotiation, the influence of power and power relations, code-switching and code-crossing, etc.). Thorough coverage of the impact of all these factors and research paradigms would apparently exceed the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, selective treatment of some of the major influences that contributed (and are still contributing, for that matter) to identity research seems necessary.

2.5. Identity and the Complexity of L1-L2 Relationship

The relationship between L1 and L2 has long occupied an important position in applied linguistics. The view towards the nature of this relationship has undergone various shifts and has taken on a variety of forms. Theoretical movements include Contrastive Analysis in the 1940-the 1950s, Generativist and cognitive theories in the 1960s, the Communicative Approach in the 1970s and Selinker's Interlanguage model in 1972. These adopted various approaches to the question of the L1-L2 relationship.

Since the early 1990s, however, a set of new paradigms has evolved. Research in L2 acquisition, cognitive linguistics, and a host of other related fields, has unveiled the complexity of the L1-L2 relationship and the extent to which all the previous models had largely simplified a complex picture, if not totally distorted it. Among these two theoretical developments figure prominently: Cook's Multi-competence and the Complex Systems Theory. Multi-competence is the framework developed by Cook first in 1991 and then developed further over the later 1990s and 2000s, is an attempt to fill the

gaps of Selinker's Interlanguage theory, by proposing a more liberating paradigm that involves the whole learner's mind (defined by Cook as "the compound state of a mind with two grammars"); grammar being used in the wider sense of the word to encompass all cognitive and socio-cultural aspects of the language system(later, the definition was refined in as just" knowledge of two or more languages in the same mind " or "the overall system of a mind or a community that uses more than one language"). In this framework, the learner (or also user) is viewed as a competent multilingual speaker, utilizing the two or more languages interacting in his/her mind as an integral part of the language learning/using resources; language transfer/interference is conceived of as a more complex, two-way and dynamic process in which the two or more languages can influence each other in equally valid ways. Consequently, an important implication of multi-competence would be the call for a reinstatement of the role of L1 in the L2 teaching and learning practices. The other theoretical development that has also influenced the re-thinking of the L1-L2 relationship, is the Complexity or Complex Systems Theory. This theory, which first caught the interests of scholars in science, physics and mathematics, is presently being used by scholars from diverse disciplines, including linguistics and language acquisition. The tenet of the complexity theory is that phenomena, be they natural or human, are extremely complex systems and very often composed of many infinitely interrelated parts. The interaction takes place both between the components of the system, on the one hand, and between the system and its surrounding milieu, on the other. The implication of this theory to language acquisition is the awareness of the need for a more illuminating view of the relationship between the first and second (or additional languages) than previously thought.

2.6. Identity and Native-Nonnative Speaker Controversy

Closely connected with the controversy over the complex relationship between L1 and L2, is the debate that has, of late, prevailed applied linguistics circles over the validity of the concept of the "Native –Speaker". The questions posed: What is the "Native Speaker"? Who is the "Native Speaker"? Does the "Native Speaker" really exist? Is not the Native-speaker a completely "idealized" model (note that Chomsky has described him/her as "the ideal speaker-hearer"?). In today's language education, can the "native speaker" still be held as the "role model" of the nonnative L2 learner/user? Who "owns" the language? Who really "owns" English?

What are the merits and privileges, if any, of the "Nonnative Speaker" over the "Native Speaker"? What are the implications of these questions for the EFL classroom? Should the concept of the "Native Speaker" be viewed as fixed and unilateral, or somewhat more dynamic and multi-sided involving the possibility of being socially and culturally "constructed"? Is there any power element (political or cultural) inherent in the designation of the concept of the "Native Speaker", particularly in the context of English language teaching?. These are generally the questions that the controversy has kept revolving around over the past three decades or so.

Things are changing swiftly and radically in the world of linguistics, applied linguistics, and language education. One of the concepts that have repeatedly undergone a radical re-thinking and reconsideration is the notion of the "Native Speaker". In his mind-blowing article of 1985, Paikeday declared the death of the "Native Speaker" (The Native Speaker is Dead!!). Towards the end of the eighties, Jennifer (1989) introduces her milestone ideas about the study of phonology as an international language, arguing for a global phonological touchstone that favors "intelligibility" rather than the received pronunciation "RP". During the 1990s, the notion continued to be revisited over and over again, Rampton, 1990; Davies, 1991; Widdowson, 1994; Kramsch, 1997). Kramsch has particularly highlighted the advantages and privileges of the nonnative speaker over the monolingual native speaker. Over the last decade or so, the winds have been blowing all the harder with the increase of "Globalisation", "Digitalisation" and the "Socio-cultural Approach" of Vygotsky regaining

much of its lost territories. In the mid-2000s criticism against "native-speakerism", continued to grow and heighten (Holliday, 2006). The ongoing tendency to criticize the concept, or for some "ideology" of "native-speakerism", and acknowledge the role and privileges of "nonnative", or for some, "multilingual speaker", has not been shattered by Davies' attempts to give a more balanced account by pointing out to both upsides and downsides, or what he calls "myth' and "reality" of the native speaker (Davies, 2003). In the same way, Shakouri and Shakouri (2014:220) warn that despite all the criticism, "the notion of the native speaker should not be nonchalantly passed by".

The shift towards a reconsideration, reconceptualization, and rethinking of the concept of the native-speaker, along with a need to recognize and empower the nonnative-speaker, in general, and the nonnative-speaker teacher in particular, has taken different forms and has benefited predominantly from the surge in critical discourse studies over the last decades. The concept of the native speaker has been attacked by many critical discourse analysts based on the "power" factor inherent in the hypothesis itself; being attributable, in part, to the concept of "colonization" and "colonial knowledge" together with the notion of "imperialism" (Philipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1998 and Canagarajah, 1999, 2011). Another form that the criticism of the concept of the native-speaker has taken, appears manifest in the emergence of a set of new tendencies in L2 education such as the study of global/world Englishes, the study of English as an International Language (EIL) and English as a Lingua franca (ELF). In all these forms, English is looked at as a global property that can be claimed by whoever uses it meaningfully and purposefully (Widdowson, 1994). It is also important to note here that some scholars such as Shakouri and Shakouri (2014) view a native speaker of a language as "not a matter of genetics, but training and practice" (p. 224). Consequently, almost all recent trends and developments have directly or indirectly encouraged a shift away from the long-established "nativeness ideology" or native-speaker "logo-centrism", and towards a more inclusive designation for English learners and users around the globe.

2.7. Identity and Community of Practice

The concept of the "community of practice" is a new enterprise in applied linguistics, socio-pragmatics, and critical discourse studies. The notion of a community of practice has come about as a continuation of two concepts of "speech community" and "discourse community", and, simultaneously a criticism for both of them.

The difference between a speech community and a discourse community is that, whilst the former refers to a group of people who share the same language system or a variety (dialect, accent, etc) or who, in other words, share linguistic 'rules', 'norms', the latter suggest that the group shares more than that; not just the sign or language system; it shares social, cultural and affective conventions, patterns and rules underlying the use of that system. One of the best and most detailed attempts to distinguish between 'speech community' and 'discourse community', is provided by Swales (1990, 2008). Recognizing the slippery nature of the two terms, Swales gives three reasons for the significance of the distinction between two types of community: 1. The term 'speech' implies the exclusion of writing, 2. While speech community is a 'sociolinguistic' term (where language is viewed mainly as a social behavior; featuring mainly socialization aspects), discourse community is 'socio-rhetoric' (where language is conceived of as being primarily functional and goal-oriented), 3. Whereas a 'speech community' is "centripetal", a discourse community is "centrifugal". The former is convergent (moving inward), while the latter is divergent (moving outward). In fact, it is in the latter point, which reveals most Swales' feeling of the importance of a more adequate term, despite his painstaking effort to side with 'discourse community by citing six features which he maintains to be characteristic of discourse communities (inside which lurks what would later be called by others "community of practice") summing them up as " common goals, participatory mechanisms, information exchange, community-

specific genres, a highly specialized terminology, and a high general level of expertise" (Swales, 2008: 29).

Despite Swales' strenuous effort to describe and advocate the alternative term "discourse community", many linguists working under a post-structuralist framework have noted that both concepts of 'speech community' and 'discourse community' started to be attacked for their many limitations and inadequacies to account for the complexity of today's diverse socio-cultural and sociolinguistic phenomena and practices (Cummins, 1996; Norton, 200,2011; Norton and Toohey, 2004; Rampton, 2005; Davies, 2005; Auer and Wei, 2007). These inadequacies and pitfalls can be summed up in their inherent claims of 'homogeneity', 'stableness', and 'unidirectionality. The following quote from Norton (2011:319) summarises this position:

While structuralists conceive of signs as having idealized meanings, and linguistic communities as being relatively homogeneous and consensual, post-structuralists take the position that the signifying practices of a society are sites of struggle, and that linguistic communities are heterogeneous arenas characterized by claims of power. Thus language is not conceived of as a neutral medium of communication, but is understood concerning its social meaning in a frequently inequitable world… Three defining characteristics of subjectivity that are of particular interest to language educators are the multiple, non-unitary nature of the subject; subjectivity as a site of struggle; and subjectivity as changing over time. In post-structuralist theory, subjectivity and language are theorized as mutually constitutive.

Of particular importance, in Norton's statement, is the new concept of 'subjectivity' as 'multiple', 'changing', 'non-unitary and a 'site of continuing struggle' (Rampton, 1995). In response to the shortcomings of the terms 'speech community' and 'discourse community', and the new ideas in this respect, coupled with many real-world facts, the alternative term 'community of practice' (often abbreviated as CofP), was coined by Lave and Wenger in 1991, to account for the learning strategies and experiences shared by a group of people who share specific professional or occupational interests and who engage in common and continuous interactive learning. The concept is not brand new in itself, and some scholars trace it back to philosophers of American pragmatism such as Peirce and Dewey. In its new use and particularly since being expanded by Wenger (1998), the term has, nevertheless, attracted a new surge of studies in a variety of fields such as second language learning, sociolinguistics, pragmatics and discourse studies. Of particular interest to many researchers, has been the concept of "legitimate peripheral participation", an aspect of (CofP) in which new members are guided gradually into the culture of the group by being allowed only a sort of 'peripheral participation' until they can "develop desirable insider identities in these communities of practice" (Miller and Kubota, 2013:235-236).

Introduced into L2 literature largely by Toohey (2000, 2010) in her famous longitudinal Canada study, identity research has considerably benefited from the new facts emerging out from the notion of 'communities of practice'. More specifically, the idea of a multiple, dynamic and socially sensitive self-proved of invaluable significance for studying, interpreting and understanding L2 learner identity and the complex process of identification. Schools, universities and L2 classes started to be seen as communities of practice in which various opportunities (or identity options) to optimize learning experiences exist (Anwaruddin, 2012). (CofP) could also prove useful in understanding and analyzing many multi-modal communication contexts, such as the one involving modern 'social media' discourse.

2.8. Identity Construction, Negotiation and Shift

Research has, furthermore, importantly delineated interesting facts about identity. Among these, is that identity can be individually or socially constructed, negotiated, and may also shift across time, depending on its sensitivity to the changing and complex situation (Widdowson, 2004; Canagarajah, 2004; Davies, 2005; Dunne, 2009; Miller and Kubota, 2013). A focal factor in point is the influence of power and power structures/relations on identities. An individual identity or learner identity is subject to the dynamics brought about by the structure of power and power relations which may take the form of major-minority, L1-L2/L3, immigrant-host country, dominant/centered-marginalized, empowered-disempowered culture, or any other level of Self-Other relationships. Consequently, research on identity categories is increasingly moving away from the rather isolated psychological aspects such as self-esteem, self-belief, self-efficacy, self-imaging(important as these really are), to much more socially involved and socio-culturally-aware aspects, including among others, power structure and relations. It has even been shown that these seemingly self-aspects themselves, along with categories like gender and race and the simplistic dichotomy of 'native-nonnative speaker' can, and, in quite many ways, be "socially-constructed"; hence the terms "gendered and racialized discourses/identities" are ubiquitous in the literature (for the race, see the literature on 'Critical Race Theory(CRT) which has proved very enlightening about the complexity of the concept of 'race' and 'racialization'). Under (CRT), issues of race and racial inequality have been deepened and broadened to include dominant existing standards, values, laws, and power structures as inherent causes of inequalities (hence, the concept of "institutional or systemic racism"). The traditional simple learner categories have been shown to "obscure the enormous complexity in identity and learning, and the power relations that contribute to reifying and neutralizing such identity labels", while the studies of the new categories "typically attend to the interactions, ideological and cultural norms active in classrooms as sites for identity construction" (Miller and Kubota, 2013: 263).

Construction naturally evokes power and ideology (or alternatively, also reconstruction and deconstruction as is prevalent in the literature of Derrida's deconstructionism, Derrida, 1978). These two are presumably its most important pillars. Since the early works on power and ideology by leading discourse analysts such as Fairclough (1989), Lee (1992), Widdowson (2004), etc., the question of the way power relations and ideology can shape discourses and identities, has featured significantly in the literature of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics and related fields. In fact, even a bit earlier, the birth of interactional sociolinguistics, largely by the touchstone works of Goffman (1959, 1974), had already laid bare the role of ongoing social encounters in face-to-face interactions, in constructing meaning and identities, esp. his work on 'face' and (the existence of two types of constraints on interactional meaning: system constraints and ritual constraints). Accordingly, it has been shown that ' our everyday behaviors and interactions with each other … play a role in creating and maintaining the roles we fill, the statuses we occupy (our social identities), and the personalities we feel ourselves and others to have (our personal identities). The identities that we adopt also help produce social order and stability and, hence, actually help to give social institutions their meanings and foundation structures" (Schiffrin, 2010: 309).

It is perhaps worth mentioning that, although the term 'identity negotiation' was first coined by Swan (1987), it is largely the works of Goffman reviewed above that first set the tone for the theory of 'identity negotiation'. In a very recent study, it has been shown that "The students oriented to several discourse identities to accomplish task-related actions. They engaged in learning processes as they negotiated meanings to achieve intersubjectivity" (Omar, et al., 2020:146). Their study also indicates the "fluid" nature of identity and the role of identity construction in developing the learner's interactional competence. This fluidity of identities has also be indicated by Juliaty (2019) in a recent

study that examined identities in the context of novice EFL academic writers. The study has been based on a framework of Self-identity, Discoursal Identity and Authorial Identity. Its "findings revealed that these students reflected multifaceted academic identities, i.e. average university student, experienced and knowledgeable person, novice member of the academic community, reporter and biased judge," (p.332).

This has resulted in a much deeper knowledge about issues of bilingualism, multilingualism, language policy and planning, second and third language acquisition, etc. In almost all of these domains, the resulting knowledge about the complexity of identity and identification issues has been wonderful. As an example, the application of the negotiation of identity (process-based approach) by Ting-Toomey (1993) in 'intercultural communication', has revealed that negotiation is almost a prerequisite for successful intercultural communication and the development of 'intercultural competence' (see her 8 assumptions coupled with the 20 precepts of the theory of identity negotiation). Another example where negotiation of identities has been applied is 'critical pedagogy' (an approach that caters to inherent power inequalities in education and attempts to empower the disadvantaged; the concept will be taken up later in more detail). To this end, Cummins (1996) has discussed the options that the negotiation of identity process can offer to deal with these inequities (see also Norton and Toohey, 2004).

Meanwhile, research in meaning in discourse and pragmatics has repeatedly stressed the idea of a continuously 'negotiated' meaning (Widdowson, 2007), against the traditional approach of a 'fixed', 'predetermined' or 'given' meaning. Meaning has been displayed as so complex and fluid, that it can be said to take its shape in the interaction as it unfolds, lying deeply buried in the 'negotiation' process itself. Pertinently, Widdowson identifies two types of knowledge: systemic knowledge and schematic knowledge. The former deals with linguistic rules whilst the latter is based on the extra-linguistic knowledge (the background/socio-cultural aspects of knowledge). However, there is more to the distinction than just the normal Grice's (1975) "Co-operative Principle" and the related maxims or the conversational "implicatures', understood in their small-scale sentence or utterance-level forms, albeit that even these simple 'alignments' "are symptomatic of how the co-operative and territorial imperatives operate in discourse as a whole, written as well as spoken, for the assertion of the self and the manipulation of the other", (Widdowson, 2007:65). Indeed, Grice's (CP) and its associated four maxims and implicatures (when the maxims are deliberately violated), have, in many ways, proved to be quite useful tools in conversation analysis and have been used by some literary critics to illuminate fictional texts. Similarly, Leech's (1983) maxims stemming from his 'Interest Principle' approach, such as (modesty, agreement, sympathy, generosity, tact, and approbation), and which are designed to parallel or affront Grice's (CP), could be seen to further lend support to the negotiation of identity theory and practices.

A more powerfully illuminating theory, however, is Sperber and Wilson's (1986, 1995) Relevance Theory (Black, 2010). Critiquing Grice's maxims for their inability to deal with the complexity of communication, and for the excessive relativity which results in a too large number of 'implied meanings', that could be elicited, Sperber and Wilson, consequently, argue that only the maxim of 'relevance', is valid, and proposed a parallel theory labeling it the "Relevance Theory" which includes both 'implicatures' and 'explicatures' (the latter combines both explicit encoding and implicit decoding). Some scholars, like Black (2006/2010), have hailed the 'relevance theory', for the particular capacity to deal with some aspects of literary discourse (e.g. metaphor), but also argue that the maxims theory can be very useful in interpreting literary texts (despite being particularly designated for oral conversation). Though the controversy is too large a topic to be sufficiently explored here (e.g. the weaknesses of the 'relevance' theory to account for ambiguities), both theories (Maxims and

Relevance), illuminate a great deal of important facets of meaning and identity negotiation; notwithstanding the problematization inherent in each.

In more recent applied linguistics research, Norton (2011) has argued that "multi-modality", provides more identity options for language learners, and that in "transformative classrooms" learners "conceive of language, not just as a linguistic system, but as social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated" (p. 321).

2.9. Identity Negotiation and Languaging

'Languaging' is a term coined by Swain (2006/2010) and Swain and Watanabe (2012) to refer to the process by which some abstract and vague thoughts remain unclear until being verbalized or transformed into words. The relationship between language and thought has a history that stretches as far back as the 6thcentury. In modern linguistics, the notion, believably, goes back to Humboldt to whom Chomsky acknowledges, among others, the concept of competence (inner speech). As a matter of fact, the Whorfian hypothesis of the 1940s could be viewed as a theory of languaging (though nowadays, in its extremist forms, would be mostly unacceptable).

With its usual even rather loose definition as "the shaping and organizing of higher mental processes through language" (Swain, 2006; Lapkin, Swain, and Psyllakis, Paula, 2010), the term has attracted scholars and researchers from a variety of backgrounds (applied linguistics, psychologists, cognitive scientists, socio-cultural scientists, literary critics, etc.). This attraction seems normal when one considers the predicament of many disciplines in today's rapidly increasing knowledge, and, as a result, the continuous need for new paradigms in these fields. Thus, it is no surprise that a literary critic such as Jean (2014), conceives of languaging as providing a "third space", while commenting on the works of a Korean-American poet whose poems portray a combination of both Korean and American feelings, scenes, atmospheres, and culture.

In applied linguistics and language education, the term is often discussed within the realm of the sociocultural approach of Vygotsky and his (ZPD) (see the section on Vygotsky above) where language is seen as a mediating tool for the process of learning and development through the cognitive and affective dynamics created by participants' interaction while learning. Thus, it is primarily a "negotiation" perspective to learning. Within language learning, languaging is often manifested in the discussion of two aspects: Learners' Dialogue/Collaboration and the role of Private Speech (inner talk). Collaborative learning which takes place when learners cooperate with one another to understand aspects of a second language has proved to be a fruitful source of second language learning (see the literature on Cooperative Learning and Task-based Learning). Similarly, private speech, self-talk (talking aloud to oneself), has been shown to be a useful source of learning. In both cases, learning occurs as a result of a process of negotiating things with oneself or another person.

Another interesting sphere where languaging is seen to be operating is in the act of 'co-authoring'. When two or more authors collaborate to produce one book or research, ideas merge and become more concrete when they are put into words (Van Nieuwenhuijze, and Wood, 2006; Wood, 2013). The process of syncretism that takes place via languaging, would probably work best when researchers work across the disciplines or specialty boundaries. If that is achieved, then both personal and disciplinary identities could better be exchanged, understood, and 'negotiated'. This is also consistent with the findings of Faez's (2011) study of the validity of the native-nonnative speaker dichotomy already discussed in this article in which he concludes that "linguistic identities should be viewed using a sociocultural lens whereby the dynamic, dialogic, multiple, and situated nature of identity is emphasized. The reconceptualization of the native/nonnative dichotomy indicates that individuals negotiate various linguistic identities in different social contexts for specific purposes".

2.10.   Impact of Critical Pedagogy on Identity Theory

Critical pedagogy is a new movement in education, that tends to take a more profound outlook on education inequalities and injustice by taking into account the deeply ingrained and inherent socio-cultural systems, structures, and milieu from which these inequalities emanate. In other words, classroom injustices are based on a larger framework that does not only make them possible but also maintains and perpetuates them. The critical education movement was initiated by the Brazilian Freire's book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" and then developed further by numerous others. The movement also subsumes a multitude of ideas, activities, methods, and strategies such as learning, unlearning, relearning, delearning; which can all happen simultaneously. Other relevant concepts within critical pedagogy, include a process of endlessly criticizing, meta-criticizing and re/evaluating ideas, methods, strategies, beliefs, etc., about objects, including oneself.

Such multiplicity, complexity, diversity, criticality and changeability, brought about by the movement of critical pedagogy, in the field of education, have not only meant a revolutionary more complex in education, but also a more complex and destabilised human subject. A complex and destabilised human agent would necessarily imply one whose identity is also complex, multiple, transformed, dynamic and self-reflective. Thus, it would be reasonable to argue for an influential role of critical pedagogy on the new perception and description of identities.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

This section will present, analyze and discuss some qualitative data collected over a period of four to six years from the department of English, College of Education, Majmaah University, KSA. The data consists of observations of various sorts, interviews with eight good learners (high-achieving students), who are studying for a B. Ed, in English language, at the College of Education, of Majmaah University. The grade of the students observed and interviewed range from very good to excellent according to the university grade system. Some of them were later recruited as Teaching Assistants in some Saudi universities, including two being recruited in our department.

3.2. Data

3.2.1 Observation Data

For well over four to six years of continuous teaching at the department of English, Majmaah University, the behavior and thinking (towards English) of several high-achieving learners were closely observed and documented. It could be shown from these observations, that for those students who exert clear effort to excel in the language, quite observable manifestations of L2 identities reveal themselves in a variety of interesting ways. Part of this is exhibited in the way these students begin to identify themselves with a rapidly changing global world in which English is more of a necessity than a mere desire, and in which job taking and job security and a range of other activities rest, to a greater or lesser extent, on this language. And as they do so, these learners' awareness of the significance of the language increases and with the current surge in ICT technology use, they get more involved with it and with the world that is getting increasingly and sweepingly changing and immersed in "Hyper-culture". In this respect, Norton (2013:10) notes that "identity, practices and resources are mutually constitutive". This also appears in tandem with a recent Arabic study, referred to by Damanhouri (in a Saudi Gazette article, 2015) that" the use of Arabic on the Internet is decreasing and is currently at less than 1 percent. The use of English, however, is rapidly increasing and its share of online usage is approximately 55 percent." In addition, a lot of borrowing from English is presently taking place on

the internet, especially among the youth across the Arab World; itself delineates a kind of identity negotiation through a foreign language, which could also be conceived of as a degree of ongoing "languaging/translanguaging". As such, the language practices of several high-achieving and successful learners observed over a period of four to six years would find Norton's theoretical model known as "investment" quite fitting here. The model integrates the traditional psychological construct with the socio-cultural construct concerning motivation. Making English as part of their future, the students observed here, do seem to invest in English language learning, by particularly engaging in a range of outside classroom activities that optimize their language acquisition. At least six of the eight subjects got recruited later as teaching assistants in some Saudi universities and colleges. The observation occasionally utilized field notes and informal talk.

3.2.2 The Interview Data

A group of 8 highly achieving and distinguished students (evident from both their academic records and the researcher's experience in teaching them for several terms) have been interviewed to explore their thinking and feeling of English, their views of themselves as English language speakers along with their future plans and aspirations with studying English (the latter aspect labeled by Norton as the construct of "investment"). The questions included the following:

Interview Questions/Guide
1.   What is distinctive about your English language learning experience?
2.   What do you think about English?
3.   What do you feel about English?
4.   What does English represent to you?
5.   Do you feel that you have an English language identity, along with or beside your Arabic language identity?
6.   If so, how do the two identities deal with each other? Do they interact, get along well, or at times conflict? If they conflict, why? how?, how often? and when?
7.   What are your English language future plans? Do you feel you are investing in English?
8.   Does learning English make you feel global? If so, How?
9.   Does using technology (the Internet, social media, etc.) while communicating in English help you expand your identity/self? If so, how? Which social media that most reflects this aspect?
10.   Do you prefer to be taught by a native or non-native speaker? Why? Don't you think that being taught by a non-native (bilingual/multilingual speaker) contribute to your global identity associated with English?

The academic records of the subjects showed that their accumulative averages ranged between 3.75-4.75 (which by the college rating system means they range between very good and excellent). The interviews were deliberately intended to be exploratory, to ensure a profound understanding of the subjects' own learning stories, thinking, inner feeling, idiosyncrasies, self-image and future prospects about their study and use of the English language. These interviews were administered in an extremely friendly and relaxed atmosphere and most of them were audio-recorded so that data could be repeatedly and adequately accessed and effectively analyzed. This ease of accessibility has also contributed to the data validity and reliability via making it possible to be checked by a panel of experts with high expertise in linguistics, language education, discourse studies, and qualitative research.

The learning stories about these students, would in many respects, line up with Norton's conclusion "that language is not only a linguistic system of words and sentences but also a social practice in which identities and desires are negotiated in the context of complex and often unequal social relationships." (Norton, 2016: 2).

4. Analysis And Discussion

4.1. Common Themes

The qualitative data obtained from the interviewees' answers were probed and examined for common themes. Major among these are:

1.   A view of oneself through the second language.
2.   The feeling of having an English language identity connecting oneself to the world.
3.   A reflection on the relationship between an L1 identity (Arabic) and L2 identity (English) and a feeling of the complex relationship between the two.
4.   The existence of a special "space" created by the Internet and digital communication, and one in which English plays a distinctive role.
5.   The existence of what can be called "learner-idiosyncrasies" (some very particularised ways and strategies of learning, particular ways of self-reflections and self-evaluation, etc.).
6.   Thoughts and attitudes about the issue of native-nonnative EFL education and its implication for L2 identity construction and negotiation.

It is noteworthy that these themes, as will unfold in the analyses, are in many ways interconnected and interrelated.

1. A View of Oneself through the Second Language

Interview data largely suggest that those high-achieving learners tend to construct a distinctive L2 identity. This is manifest in a variety of ways. One informant points out that:

Learning a second language does have an impact on a person's character, and that degree of influence differs from one person to another. In my case, the second language happened to be English, which is a global language that is being used by millions of people around the world and has become a lingua franca. English has affected my personality quite a big deal, and on many levels such as interests, way of thinking and open-mindedness. One personal example of that effect is that I find myself more interested in English literature rather than Arabic literature.

As is shown in the above quote, the informant mentions the impact of English on his "personality" and "many levels of interests, way of thinking and open-mindedness." In addition, he points out that he has become more interested in English literature than Arabic literature (his own mother tongue). Interestingly, this aspect of L2 identity seems very consistent with the account of an English-speaking woman who learned French and used it for communication for a long time and when she moved to Britain with her French-speaking husband reported her French-learning experience in a piece for the Guardian, " I can't bear to lose my French; it's part of who I am. I even wrote a book about it, for God's sake. I want to speak the language of Molière, if not like Molière then at least like a reasonably articulate adult." (GN, 1 Jan 2019).

2. The feeling of having an English language identity connecting oneself to the world

With the exception of one, all 8 participants reported they felt some kind of an L2 identity. But even this one, whilst we got deeper into the interview did seem to confirm some sort of a "vague" connection with English that allows him some outer global *space*. Observation data also suggest the existence of both that space and the identity.

3. A reflection on the relationship between an L1 identity (Arabic) and L2 identity (English) and a feeling of the complex relationship between the two.

Participants' reflections during the interviews do suggest a complex interplay between L1 and L2 identities. Some would even find it difficult to spell out the nature of this relationship. One participant reflects as" I try to use English in my daily life as much as I can whenever I had the chance, and as long as it could be an alternative to Arabic. This can be seen in my daily communication during classes and my daily use of social media and google search." This participant would not miss any opportunity to speak and use English reaching out for spaces other than those Arabic can allow. The spaces reached out seem to provide interesting room for a sort of continuous "identity negotiation". In addition, this displays that the complexity of identity could even subsume a global aspect (indeed some participants showed this feeling when asked about it). This particular space (part of the spaces discussed) apparently intersects with the "special space" of the following theme.

4. The existence of a special "space" created by the Internet and digital communication, and one in which English plays a distinctive role

Participants, in general, appear to believe that the digital world opens up a "special space" for them. While very often, most cannot adequately describe this space and how it is special, they do seem to agree that it exists and that English in many ways plays a role in shaping it. One participant does think that he sometimes feels a sort of being "a global citizen" while chatting and communicating with friends around the world. Particularly so, comments underneath a global thread, may in themselves constitute a rich source of learning English in a social context, as many have noted in the interviews. Much more interesting, the learning here appears to not merely include the words and expressions used in the right context, but also something which goes beyond that, presumably an aspect of "cultural competence". This is evident in the rich resources that English provides for them on the internet, as pointed out by one participant *"we have a bigger chance of making the best out of the language that we put so much effort on. And also means that the sources of information are now wider and more various in English than in any other language."*

Lazy *or low-achievers* may particularly be using these spaces as safe houses as " sites of identity construction and negotiation", and by which they resist mainstream classroom practices and "resistance is seen as a form of "meaning-making activity which offers powerful teaching moments", as put by Norton (2011: 324).

5. The existence of what can be called "learner-idiosyncrasies" (some very particularised ways and strategies of learning, particular ways of self-reflections and self-evaluation, etc.).

Learner-idiosyncrasies could be deciphered from the many ways in which participants appear to have employed to be successful learners and users of English. In fact, the more the strategies get idiosyncratic and particularized, the more it seems difficult for them to spell out. Expressions such as *"I don't know why I do it like this"; "I really have my own way"; " It just happens like this", etc.,* were not uncommon among participants. This could include particularised ways of focusing on certain words, usages and expressions rather than others; self-talk, repetitions, preferring to read comments underneath main threads, articles, videos and other materials and vague ways of retaining and retrieving information. Concerning self-talk, it was interesting that some of the participants had not even been conscious of the strategy until it was explained to them. As discussed in the literature, self-talk is designated as one of the ways learners manifest unique identities via languaging.

In many ways, participants appear at times to demonstrate what Cor van Halen, Harke A. Bosma & Matty van der Meulen (2020) call "self-definition problems". To this purpose, they may activate what these researchers name "self-reflection as a major mechanism. Thus, it appears that these high-

achieving learners perform and conceptualize themselves in a way very consistent with a possibility of a complex subjectivity with varying and multiple levels necessitating negotiation between them as discussed in the literature by Canarajah, 2004. Thus, results seem consistent to some extent with those of (Omer, et al., 2020) in as far as the discursive nature of identity construction is concerned, though without the use of the same strategies such as shifting the pronoun as part of the construction strategies. However, the polyphony and multi-voiceness of identity construction and negotiation could also be sensed.

6. *Thoughts and attitudes about the issue of native-nonnative EFL education and its implication for L2 identity construction and negotiation.*

With full awareness of the complexities of the contentious native-nonnative issues in the FEL literature, participants were probed for their thoughts and feelings therein. Concerning the high-achieving learners, the feelings deciphered appeared mixed adding more to the complexities and contentiousness of the issue. Whilst around half of the learner participants appeared positive about nonnative speaker teacher, the other half expressed either rather reserved feelings or exhibited somehow negative feeling and attitudes with expressions like "I really don't know… I think I prefer to be taught by native speakers." However, when pierced deeply through the sessions, with questions like *"Don't you think that being taught by a non-native (bilingual/multilingual speaker) contribute to your global identity associated with English?",* they started to realize the benefits of being taught with a multilingual speaker. They grew even more positive when asked about their benefits from communicating with international interactants via the Internet. They would soon recognize that languaging through English with mostly nonnative speaker global friends in cyber forums contributed to their feeling of a global identity and L2 self.

Considering the faculty members interviewed, they all sounded categorically positive about the significance of nonnative speaker instructors and multilingual interactants. They cited a wide range of advantages that the nonnative instructor can bring to the classroom; which would generally fit well into Cook's multicompetence described in the literature (see section 2.6). Among the various things they cited: the L2 learning experience, ability to foster learners' intercultural competence, bringing more enriched languaging processes inside and outside the classroom; one instructor referred to the ability of nonnatives to activate greater schematic knowledge than can monolingual natives do. Positive transfers including sociolinguistic and pragmatic transfer appear to be implicit in their view about the merits of nonnative multilingual instructors. This is consistent with Kubota (2013) who has insightfully urged L2 researchers to "think in terms of complex ecologies rather than relatively stable communities in theorizing linguistic contexts" (p. 239). In general, these multilingual instructors really feel the need for more recognition and empowerment.

7. Conclusion

The question of identity has been brought to the forefront once again and is currently undergoing an unprecedented surge of interest across the humanities, in general, and language studies, in particular. The new surge of interest in identities has been brought about by a range of new factors, facts, and trends in both the humanities and real life. In the humanities, there has been an immense influence of movements such as poststructuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction, critical theory, critical pedagogy, critical applied linguistics, critical race theory (CRT), the revival of Vygotsky's theory, a community of practice (as a tendency going beyond speech community and discourse community), etc. At the level of real-life facts, identity research has been tremendously impacted by the changes caused by the processes of globalization, digitalization, cyberization, unprecedented waves of social mobility across the world, etc**.**

The study of identity in the context of Gulf/Saudi EFL, is shown in this study, not only to be extremely under-researched but also one of the great implications for the field.

Situated in Majmaah University, this exploratory study examined the issue of identities construction, negotiation and shift among 8-high-achieving and successful EFL learners. A combination of observation and semi-structured interviews were used. The observation took place over a period of four to six years, during which time their L2 identity development and practices had been observed. In addition, a group of nonnative faculty members were likewise explored for their thoughts and feeling about L2 identity issues in their context. A thematic analysis of the responses was conducted (clustered around six themes, as shown in section 4.1).

Findings largely indicate that the participants did develop a range of complex and dynamic L2 identity practices. These include distinctive ways of self-images (self-reflections and self-definition); a feeling of possessing an L2 identity; a complex L1-L2 interrelationships (including positive identity-related sociolinguistic and pragmatic transfers and subsuming indication of negotiation and shift (discussion further indicates that the L1 may not only be reinstated as a useful and important learning strategy, but also that the complexity of its interrelationships with the L2 be better understood and recognized), a creation of some special spaces which may constitute a site of struggle, negotiation and resistance of mainstream classroom practices; the existence of learner-idiosyncrasies (subsumes self-talk, some particularized ways of preferring certain words, sounds, expressions, some vague retention and retrieval ways along with idiosyncratic digital world practices); a mixed and complex feeling about nonnative speaker instruction on the part of the learners, but a clearly positive viewpoint on the part of nonnative instructors on what they see as the largely unrecognized benefits of the nonnative speaker instructors and interactants. The discussion suggests the need to empower and maximize the positive features of these multilingual nonnatives English language instructors. It has been argued that these nonnative multilingual (both as teachers and interlocutors) may well help utilize multicompetence and languaging. Their role would need to be restored and an effort should be exerted to remove many misconceptions about nonnative L2 instruction. This may probably take place via a process of unlearning, delearning and relearning in the context of Saudi EFL education, as many false beliefs and practices seem to be persistent and hard to die.

Statement

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