Chapter 20
Culture, Communication, and Identity in Anglophone Study Abroad English Language Provision

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ABSTRACT

Under the assumption of sociocultural theory (e.g. Lantolf 2005), language learning is both a highly individual and contextual phenomenon. In the specific case of English as a global language, the complexities are compounded. Recent insights from identity studies (e.g. Mercer 2011) further enrich the domain. This chapter offers a novel framework, the SCERT model, for conceptualising the interactions between learner identity and sociocultural interaction in specifically Anglophone contexts. The model provides a framework for constructing workable curricula which will support HE learners' language learning journey in Anglophone study contexts.

AN ARRAY OF APPROACHES TO SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The sciences of language, as with any science of pedigree, have assumed various and varied guises across time and space. To restrict ourselves only to the Western linguistic tradition, the historical reconstructive and largely phonological preoccupations of the Europe's Neogrammarians in the 19th century were as far a cry from Boas', Sapir's and Whorf's anthropological fieldwork in North America as the structuralist analyses of Bloomfield (1933) are from the abstract models of the generativists (Chomsky 1995). Pedagogical linguistics is no exception to the ebb and flow of trends and fashion in scientific reflection. Although younger than some disciplines of language sciences, adult second language learning[1] (ASLL) has worn a number of masks since its earliest formulations in Lado's (1957) contrastive hypothesis through to an array of contemporary approaches.

Thus the question, 'How might adults learn foreign languages?' has generated a rich array of answers in the last few decades of systematic research into adult second and foreign language learning, answer not all of which are necessarily compatible with each other. Llinares (2013) summarises the status quo in terms not dissimilar to many writers noting 'three main disciplinary approaches: generative linguistics, … psycholinguistic / cognitive models, … and, more recently, contextual or social approaches to second language acquisition'. The first approach, influenced to some degree by the concerns of Chomskyan perspectives on grammar (Chomsky 1957, 1965), places emphasis on the linguistic aspects of language learning. Work done from this perspective includes claims to universal linguistic constraints on learning such as the noun phrase accessibility hierarch (NPAH) of Keenan and Comrie (1977) and subsequent work, as well as Pienemann's Processability Theory (Pienemann 1998) which approaches orders of acquisition from a partially linguistic perspective. The linguistic perspective can sometimes follow an explicitly Chomskyan motivation, defending and applying the notion of Universal Grammar to ASLL (Gregg 2003; Schwartz & Sprouse 1996; Slabakova 2013; White 1989, 2003; Whong et al. 2013).

While linguistic approaches are often concerned with the putative linguistic specificity of language learning, the second approach Llinares identified, the cognitive approach, usually situates ASLL as a form of very similar cognitive processes to other skills. Recent work in this area from N. Ellis (e.g. 2009) stresses the role of input, statistical processing mechanisms and general learning strategies. In contrast to both preceding perspectives, the final approach, which, following Lantolf (2000), will be termed socio-cultural theory here (SCT), instead places its emphases most firmly in the dynamic and real-world interactions between and among language learners (and native speakers) in the living social and cultural contexts which they can inhabit. As such, it looks somewhat suspiciously upon what it perceives as the abstractions of both the linguistic and cognitive models, and embraces instead the contextual, interactional, embodied and situational relationships and exchanges of real-world language learning. Although relatively recent, with Firth & Wagner's (1997) seminal threefold critique of the positivism of much linguistic and cognitive inspired theorising[2], the emergence of SCT has been seen as a 'social turn' (Block 2003; Darvin & Norton 2015) in language studies and as such analogous to the linguistic turn of the early 20th century (Rorty 1967).

SCT is not without its criticisms. Mitchell and Myles (1998) for example question the lack of a 'detailed view of the nature of language' (p.161), a criticism which is echoed by Gregg (2000) in his critique of SCT. The direction proposed by Lantolf and Thorne (2006) appears to be somewhat in the vein of construction grammar (Goldberg 2006; Tomasello 2003[3]) in which internalisation of chunks of language allows grammatical properties to emerge. Lantolf and Thorne also see value in the not dissimilar holistic grammars such as emergent grammar (Hopper 1988, 1998; Su 2016), in which grammar rules are seen as pattern generalisations resulting from interaction.

While noting this concern, it is important to acknowledge the advantages that the SCT orientated brings to the adult second language learning as opposed to linguistic or cognitive frameworks. SCT invites and indeed demands and requires, consideration of certain key themes which strongly linguistic or cognitive approaches have perhaps neglected. Ellis (2008) discusses one such theme, mediation, at length. Mediation is a broad brush concept that considers how humans interact with and shape the world through any artefact, behaviour or indeed language. The concept of mediation allows language to be framed as part of wider symbolic practices in the human world. Moreover, for Ellis mediation represents a resolution to what Lantolf (2005; 343) has called the 'dialectical and inseparable relationship' between a learner's mind and the 'external world'. Gánem-Gutiérez (2013) adds praxis to the concept of mediation, which invites into play the rich resources of activity theory (e.g. Leont'ev 1981 [1947])[4].

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