

Language, identity and intercultural communication

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1. Introduction

It is commonly noted that, owing to technological advances in transportation and communication, the redistribution of production and labour, and other reasons, the potential for intercultural contact is currently greater than it has ever been in human history. Moreover, with an estimated 6,900 languages across the approximately 200 countries of the world (Lewis 2009), it is very likely that intercultural contact will involve encounters between people who speak different languages. Sometimes, these encounters take place between members of groups with a long history of interaction and thus they are rather routine, such that personal and normative expectations regarding language use effectively guide the communication process to predictable, if not mutually satisfying, outcomes. At other times, we are less well acquainted with our interlocutors' practices, and so part of the process of communication involves grappling with the acquisition of new verbal and nonverbal communication systems. Regardless of the level of familiarity, a variety of sociopsychological and sociocultural processes operate within every intercultural interaction.

In this chapter, we focus on how the languages we speak are linked to feelings of identity in intercultural encounters. This relation is a reciprocal one: the languages we learn and use open up possibilities for new identities, while at the same time our identities can have implications for engagement in language learning and use. We begin with a review of how scholars in social psychology, communication studies and applied linguistics have defined identity and described its function in intercultural communication. We discuss some prominent themes that reverberate (or not) across disciplines, particularly as they relate to notions of identity, language and culture, and we consider what the various conceptualizations of these constructs imply for research methodology. In so doing, we highlight areas where we believe that theory and research can be informed through interdisciplinary rapprochement.

2. Disciplinary perspectives on identity, language and intercultural communication

Social psychology

The view on language, identity and intercultural communication taken by many social psychologists might be described as an 'intergroup' perspective, in that it focuses on the social

context in terms of the relations between two or more groups that differ in their relative sociostructural status (cf. Brabant *et al.* 2007). In this section, we describe two lines of research, both of which were conceived in sociohistorical contexts involving considerable sociopolitical tension between ethnolinguistic groups. The first line of research, originating in Montreal, Canada, highlights the implications of interethnic contact for patterns of bilingualism and ethnic identity, and the second, initially formulated in Bristol, UK, centres on how interlocutors adjust their communication behaviour in line with their group memberships. These are not unrelated bodies of theory and research; indeed, during the formative years there was considerable cross-Atlantic interaction between the two research groups (H. Giles, personal communication, 2007).

Sociostructural status, bilingualism and identity

One of the earliest psychologists to examine the relation between language and identity was Wallace Lambert (1956, 1978), who observed that the acquisition of a new language and cultural identity did not necessarily entail the loss of the original language and identity. Rather, he argued that the relative status of the language groups in contact was an important predictor of patterns of bilingualism. He suggested that people belonging to a relatively subordinate, minority group were likely to lose their original language and identity as a result of learning the language of the majority group, a process known as subtractive bilingualism. In contrast, people belonging to a dominant, majority group could acquire a new language and culture without compromising their original language and culture, a process known as additive bilingualism. In contrast to the prevailing opinion at the time, Lambert's work emphasized that being bilingual could be associated with advantages not experienced by monolinguals, and that sociopolitical disparities often lay at the heart of social psychological differences between ethnolinguistic groups.

Lambert's work has inspired many researchers interested in cognitive and social psychological aspects of bilingualism and interethnic relations (for overviews, see Dil 1972; Reynolds 1991). Working initially with Lambert, Gardner proposed that people's motivation to learn a second language (L2) was supported to the extent that they hold positive attitudes towards that language community and want to learn the language in order to more readily interact with that community, a motivational orientation termed the 'integrative orientation' (Gardner and Lambert 1959, 1972). Over 50 years of research has underlined the importance of this concept of 'integrativeness', which encompasses the notion of identity in the sense that one has a willingness to be like valued members of the language community, even to the point of identifying with that community (Masgoret and Gardner 2003). This prominent formulation has been critiqued, however, for a variety of reasons (for an overview, see Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011). Notably, the experience of many learners of English suggests that the claim that integrativeness is necessary for motivated learning is tenuous because these learners do not necessarily identify with a specific English community. Instead, it is perhaps more appropriate to frame identification with reference to a global community (Lamb 2004), or in terms of adopting an 'international posture' (Yashima 2002). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) maintain that 'integrativeness' should be reconceptualized as that part of the self-concept representing the L2 and culture, such that it is an idealized vision of what one would like to become as a language speaker within an imagined community (see also Kramsch 2010; Norton 2001). Thus, in recent years, there has been a shift from examining whether learners categorize themselves as members of particular language groups to understanding whether and how learners envisage themselves as speakers of other languages, invest in that vision, and internalize that vision into their sense of self, sometimes to the point of identifying with a new language community.

Social identity and communication accommodation

Communication accommodation theory (CAT) (see Chapter 15, this volume) and related theories such as ethnolinguistic identity theory (e.g. Giles *et al.* 1977; Giles and Johnson 1981) and the intergroup theory of L2 learning (Giles and Byrne 1982) articulate some of the identity dynamics implicated in language behaviour and the societal consequences arising therefrom. From this perspective, social identity derives from knowing in which social category one belongs and assuming the characteristics of that social group. Identity becomes salient through comparisons with other groups, and this process of social comparison is influenced by a motivational desire to see one's own group, and thus oneself, in a positive light. Social identity is linked to language when language serves as a marker of group distinctiveness. In such cases, people adjust their verbal and nonverbal styles in order to create and maintain positive identities and to create a desired level of social distance between themselves and their interlocutors (among other goals). Similarity and affiliation can be demonstrated through convergence on linguistic, paralinguistic and nonverbal features in such a way as to become more similar to their interlocutor's behaviour, and difference can be demonstrated through divergence in communication style that accentuates differences between the speaker and the interlocutor. Actual convergence or divergence may be otherwise intended by the speaker or interpreted by the interlocutor, and thus perceptions and attributions for these communicative strategies determine the effectiveness of language strategies and have implications for future encounters.

The social psychological processes outlined by CAT have consequences for larger scale relations between groups and long-term language shift and/or maintenance. Depending on one's strength of ethnolinguistic identity and perceptions regarding the relations between the two language groups (e.g. the perceived legitimacy of status differentials between groups and the penetrability of group boundaries), identity can be managed through language choices that maintain the status quo or contribute to social change in the relative status and relations between ethnolinguistic groups.

With its emphasis on how perceptions of intergroup boundaries and relative status relate to identity and language variations, the theoretical work of Giles and his colleagues complements Lambert's foundational work linking sociostructural variables at the macro level of the society with psychological variables at the micro level of the individual (for recent research with other models in this tradition, see Clément *et al.* 2003; Gilbert *et al.* 2005). Moreover, Lambert's notion of additive and subtractive bilingualism underlines the multiplicity of possible relations between language and identity, whereas CAT and its satellite theories highlight the fact that identities are managed through language use.

Applied linguistics

Discussions in applied linguistics of the role of identity in language learning and intercultural communication have been informed by social psychological theories of intergroup dynamics and, more recently, by social science theorizing relating to what can be termed a 'sociocultural' perspective (Zuengler and Miller 2006). One major contribution of the sociocultural perspective to the study of language, identity and intercultural communication is that it theorizes language as a tool for achieving social and psychological ends, and hence as a resource for managing everyday activities, including the negotiation of identities. A second contribution is its detailed analysis of the power dynamics at play in situated interactions where one or both parties must use a language they have not yet mastered.

Vygotskyan/social-historical perspective

The Vygotskyan/social-historical perspective emphasizes the relations between individuals and the society as well as culturally created artefacts in understanding individual and collective human development. Human development is a socially and culturally mediated process of learning or gaining self-regulation as an autonomous individual. The identity of individuals are forged as they gain a fuller control of their environment and of themselves. As Holland and Lachicotte (2007: 108) write regarding semiotic mediation in the formation of the self, 'The self comes to use the signs, once directed to others or received from others, in relation to the self'. Through conversations, a child learns to see himself or herself as the object of meaning. Further, symbolic artefacts such as inner speech mediate self-regulation and thoughts, whereas narratives mediate making sense of the self and of life events. According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006), learning and using an L2 amounts to acquiring a new way of mediation and can thus lead to a renewed or additional identity for an individual.

Community of practice perspective

In Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory, learners acquire knowledge and skills as they move towards fuller participation in the practices of a language community, a process that results in changes in their relationships with old timers and in the learners' identities. Participating in the practices of the host-national community means, in a sense, acculturating through acquiring normative behaviours or symbolic competences in that community. Thus, expanded behavioural repertoires in multiple languages and cultures can result in a wider range of identity options to choose from, and can affect how effectively an individual can manage identities in intercultural communication.

Community of practice perspectives are used to connect how learners' imagined identities can guide learning trajectories (Lamb 2009; Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide 2008). McMahon's (1997) study demonstrates that, as Japanese women participated in a local community of learners of English with feminism as its content, these women imagined a link to the international community of feminists. Communities of practice have also been used to understand how newcomers in a community participate peripherally but legitimately or, conversely, how their entries are rejected, which affects their L2 learning and their L2-mediated identities. Morita's (2004) study of Japanese graduate students in Canadian universities showed that non-participation in classroom discussions was socially constructed and that, in the struggle to participate more fully in the community, these learners faced their identity as Asian women with less knowledge and less than the desired level of English competence. Unless one speaks like other members of the speech community, one may not be an accepted member of that community, whereas the acquisition of symbolic competence increases audibility and intelligibility.

Language identity issues have also been taken up in recent research on study-abroad experiences (Jackson 2008; Kinginger 2008). Moving from studies mostly analysing language acquisition using pre- and post-test designs, recent research often uses narratives to describe individual learners' unique experiences as they try to participate in communities of practice available in the host countries, or it focuses on the contexts influencing language acquisition outcomes. Research demonstrates that, in study-abroad contexts, identity struggles are part of learners' daily interactions. Some learners face not only their ethnic identities but also L2 user identities (Pellegrino 2005) and gendered identities (Mori 1997; Siegal 1996) as they try to communicate with host nationals. For instance, American female students studying in Russia or France often encounter sexual harassment, which hampers their participation in the

host community (Brecht and Davidson 1995; Kline 1993). Many opt for resistance or non-participation in the community.

Poststructuralist/critical perspective

The recent surge of interest in identity among applied linguists was instigated by researchers taking poststructuralist critical perspectives, including Block (2007), Norton (2000) and Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), among others. Their theorizing is influenced by Bourdieu's (1977) conceptualization of cultural and symbolic capital, which underlines symbolic imbalances among interactants as well as the notion of the right to speak and be heard. For poststructuralists, language is not a neutral medium of communication, and the value of speech cannot be separated from who uses it. Instead, speech is used and understood with reference to the social positioning of the interactants. Language use is a site of struggle where individuals negotiate identities. Identity, then, is not a product of an individual's mind but is discursively co-constructed through interactions in the social sphere.

Much poststructuralist research has centred on migrant situations, with a focus on how learners struggle to negotiate identities in order to adapt to the more influential host community (Block 2006; Norton 2000; Toohy and Norton 2003). This inequity in power relations is inherent in the learning context as the hosts do not necessarily need to hear the voices of the newcomers, but the newcomers do need to be heard and accepted to be members of the society. In this sense, interactional patterns reflect the macro-sociopolitical situations surrounding those who participate. A number of studies have featured learners' 'identity work' through oral and written narratives (Block 2006, 2007; see also Norton 2000; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). Often, desired identities are not endorsed by host nationals, and the learners must resist imposed identities, often by appropriating languages 'to legitimize, challenge, and negotiate identities and open new identity options for oppressed and subjected groups and individuals' (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 13). These identities negotiated through discourses are complex and multiple, as is demonstrated by Norton's (2000) study of how immigrant women's ethnic, gendered and class identities intertwine with language learner identities in complex ways.

Communication

Although the study of intercultural communication within the discipline of communication is increasingly informed by research in other geographical locations, many of the current identity-based theories were developed in the US (Leeds-Hurwitz 1990; Chapter 1, this volume). Despite the fact that these theories reflect varied metatheoretical paradigms (Martin and Nakayama 1999), we seek to briefly review the shared interests among major theories of identity validation and negotiation during intercultural interactions, while highlighting their key differences.

There are a number of theories that give considerable weight to the construct of identity, especially identity management in relation to others during intercultural interactions. What drives these theories is the assumption that the identity one wishes to avow or negate may be at odds with what is granted or affirmed by one's intercultural partner; thus, identity is not only flexible but mutually negotiable (cf. Y.Y. Kim 2007). For example, both identity management theory (IMT; Imahori and Cupach 2005) and identity negotiation theory (INT; Ting-Toomey 2005) underline such mutuality of intercultural communication, whereby desired identities need to be mutually recognized and validated; the lack of mutuality or negotiation competence can lead to feelings of not being understood, respected or affirmatively valued. Both conceptualize

identity as the interpretive framework for understanding one's self and the surrounding world and focus on cultural and relational identities. INT extends IMT in also viewing intercultural communication as balancing the identity dialectics of security/vulnerability, inclusion/differentiation, predictability/unpredictability, connection/autonomy and consistency/change. Meeting those identity challenges by expanding one's cognitive, affective and behavioural repertoire could potentially transform one into a 'dynamic biculturalist' who is attuned to both self-identity and other-identity negotiation issues.

A similar conceptualization of identity as negotiable and hence inherently communicative is reflected in Hecht *et al.*'s (2005) communication theory of identity. Its central argument is that identity is formed, expressed and modified through social interaction. To capture this, it proposes four interpenetrating layers of identity (personal, enacted, relational and communal). Identity negotiation is recast in terms of the way individuals negotiate the four different layers in communicating who they are, managing the dialectical tensions between and among one's layers of identity while avoiding or resolving 'identity gaps' (Hecht *et al.* 2005).

Perhaps an even more dynamic account of identity is provided by Y.Y. Kim's (1988, 2005; Chapter 14, this volume) theory of cross-cultural adaptation that seeks to capture the evolving nature and growth-oriented aspects of adaptation as a result of one's extensive and accumulative experiences with a new cultural environment. It builds upon the open-systems principle about one's natural tendency to restore the internal disequilibrium created by the challenges associated with acculturation. Specifically, Kim proposes a stress-adaptation-growth dynamic that explains how psychological transformation gradually evolves out of the stress-adaptation dialectic. The product of this steady self-transformation is the emergence of an intercultural identity, a mindset that is both increasingly individualized and universalized. Not only does the theory envisage the intercultural identity as possibly transcending ascribed group boundaries, it also provides a developmental framework that has the advantage of explaining the emergent and reciprocal nature of identity and communication.

Finally, the poststructuralist/critical paradigm is gaining prominence in intercultural communication (e.g. cultural identifications theory, Collier 2005), partly due to the influence of applied linguistics in European scholarship (Chapter 1, this volume). Such an interpretive framework is often articulated through ethnographic work involving a 'thick description' of a particular community and gleaming insights into its distinctive communicative practices (Carbaugh 2005; Philipsen *et al.* 2005). This paradigm highlights power inequities, the production of privileging ideologies and politicization of identity, all of which are undertheorized in interpersonal approaches to identity in intercultural communication. Its engagement with the sociostructural context thus makes it compatible with the intergroup approach in social psychology reviewed above.

3. Issues in the study of identity, language and culture

Although they are informed by different disciplinary traditions and, to some extent, different metatheoretical traditions, social psychological, communication and applied linguistics scholars have wrestled with some common issues in their discussion of identity, language and culture. We turn to a consideration of these themes, with the goals of making connections between relevant work across the disciplines and indicating some areas for future scholarly enquiry.

Identity

The first theme relates to the notion that identities are multiple; most theorists eschew simplistic conceptualizations of identity in which people are categorically ascribed to externally defined

social groups, a practice that was not uncommon in the early decades of research (Leets *et al.* 1996). From an intergroup perspective, this multiplicity is asserted in the premise that certain identities are more salient in some situations than in others, such that ethnolinguistic identity is only one of a number of social identities that a person can entertain, and multiple identities may be relevant in any given encounter (Clément and Noels 1992). Moreover, intercultural encounters can be either or both intergroup or interpersonal in nature, such that, in the former, the relative status and power of the groups in contact play an important role in how the encounter unfolds and, in the latter, personal characteristics and interpersonal histories play a more prominent role (cf. Deaux and Martin 2003). In other, more relational perspectives, identity is also assumed to be multiple, in that each interaction involves the (co-)construction of identities anew, often through ongoing boundary marking and remarking as well as crossing boundaries to create new identities.

Identities can also be multiple in the sense that one might claim multiple ethnolinguistic identities. Particularly in contexts where there is continued intercultural contact (arguably including global English), it might be argued that few people come together with no knowledge of the target culture and no notion of how to communicate with its members. Thus, the researcher must consider the extent to which a person has been exposed to the target language and culture, interacted with native speakers, taken on that culture's values, norms and/or practices and identifies with that group, all of which could make the person more or less an ethnolinguistic hybrid. Moreover, there are likely to be a myriad of ways in which people can integrate ethnolinguistic identities, such that hybridity itself could be construed in different ways, depending upon the context (Dallaire and Denis 2001).

The notion that people negotiate multiple identities is closely tied to the idea that identity is contingent upon context. Defining context, however, has proven challenging. One approach is to describe macro-social factors, such as the dimensions of demographic representation, institutional support and prestige subsumed in the notion of ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles *et al.* 1977), through impersonal indicators, such as census data. The 'objective' context's influence on identity and language, however, is assumed to be mediated by social and psychological processes, such that it is the subjective perceptions of the intergroup context that predict cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to members of other groups. In a reciprocal manner, these attitudes and actions are the basis for solidifying or changing the macro-level, societal dynamics. In contrast with this conceptualization, sociocultural theorists argue against a dualist model of the individual and social context, in which context is construed as a layer that surrounds the individual, or as an independent factor influencing individuals' thoughts and actions. Rather, context is inseparable from the individuals' lived experiences; in every interaction, interlocutors constitute context and are constituted by context.

A third theme is that identity in intercultural communication is problematic in at least three respects. The first aspect concerns the competence of interactants. By definition, language learners lack the competence or the confidence to interpret host culture perspectives and/or the communication skills, including language skills, necessary to achieve effective communication outcomes, including identity negotiation. These difficulties can contribute to poorer intercultural adjustment (cf. Gudykunst 2005). To be an effective communicator, then, one must become more knowledgeable and skilled in the ways of the target culture and adopt a positive affective orientation towards that culture, two challenges that can be difficult to meet.

A second aspect concerns the power relations between interlocutors. From an intergroup perspective, a power imbalance between social groups contributes to feelings of threat, which in turn can lead to intergroup conflict. Likewise, much sociocultural research has focused on how power dynamics play into how people claim, contest and resist identities (cf. Pavlenko and

Blackledge 2004), emphasizing that, despite one's skills and knowledge, power dynamics can restrict access to resources, including those necessary for improving communicative competence and enabling identity negotiation.

A third problem arises from the premise that that identity is negotiable, and hence variable. This emphasis on the dynamism of identity stands in contrast to identity models associated with the psychodynamic tradition of Erik Erikson and his followers (Erikson 1968; Marcia 1966), which highlight the importance of the self as a unifying process, and the idea that self-consistency and coherence are essential to psychological well-being. Although this perspective has received extensive critique (e.g. Rattansi and Phoenix 2005), this dialectic between identity stability and dynamism merits greater consideration in intercultural communication research. We need to address questions such as: 'How do people maintain a sense of consistency in the face of inevitable change?'; 'What purpose do these feelings of coherence serve?'; 'In what contexts does (the need for) a sense of self-consistency arise?'; 'How are sameness and continuity (and conversely difference and change) constructed through dialogue in intercultural interactions?' (cf. Spreckels and Korthoff 2007).

Language

Social psychological research on language use has generally been directed at understanding how these choices affect impression formation and other psychological and behavioural reactions, rather than on particular linguistic and nonverbal characteristics (Brabant *et al.* 2007). From this perspective, language tends to be broadly defined, for instance in terms of accent, dialect, language, or in terms of more or less accommodative or non-accommodative styles. In order to demonstrate that social psychological processes are associated with variations in communicative competence, social psychologists have used more concrete measures of language competence. These include course grades, standardized test scores, cloze tests and tests designed specifically for a particular study, as well as self-assessments of competence, usually in terms of reading, writing, speaking and understanding (although these self-evaluations might be better interpreted as indices of self-confidence in using the target language rather than indices of competence; see MacIntyre *et al.* 1994). More recently, emphasis has been placed on predicting interactional tendencies, such as a willingness to communicate with others, rather than linguistic or communicative competence (Clément *et al.* 2003). An inadvertent consequence of this correlational approach, however, is that it tends to frame language as a cognitive process relatively independent of social processes.

In communication research, language seems at best tangential unless it is assumed that language constitutes part of the process of message encoding and decoding that occurs during intercultural interaction. There is a continued interest in how nonverbal and verbal behaviour differs across cultures, concerning mainly what transpires in the immediate context of meaning or message transaction (e.g. M.-S. Kim 2005; Ting-Toomey 1988). Little explicit attention, however, has been paid to how language and identity are conceptualized in relation to each other and the extent to which language can be said to constitute an important part of identity (but see Croucher 2009; Matsunaga *et al.* 2010). This conspicuous omission is perhaps due in part to the fact that many intercultural communication theories were generated to explain intercultural communication within the US, where the use of one single, dominant language is assumed, and in part to the emphasis on the non-linguistic aspects of culture and communication during its formative years (Chapter 1, this volume).

Not surprisingly, in applied linguistics, language is at the core of inquiries into identity. In Vygotskian cultural-historical theory concerning mediated mental development, language is

viewed in terms of intra- or interpersonal speech and conceptual meaning of words that mediates thinking, rather than as linguistic forms or referential meaning (Lantolf and Thorne 2006). Conceptual metaphors that are culturally influenced also carry importance in this framework. Critical poststructuralists, on the other hand, have devised ethnographic studies using interviews and observation and/or looked closely at conversations to analyse how identity tied to language use is constructed and negotiated discursively in interactions using L1 (first language) or L2 (Block 2006; Goldstein 1997; Kanno 2000). They often hope to disclose power relations that may be stated or unstated but assumed in the discourse. Thus, this perspective places greater emphasis on the social rather than the cognitive aspect of language.

Culture

Any examination of the relation between language and identity in intercultural interactions requires a definition of culture to clarify what it is (if anything) that sets such interactions apart from intracultural interactions. The notion of culture, however, has received varied elaboration across the three disciplines. Driven by an intergroup approach that frames intercultural relations in terms of groups' relative social status and power differentials, the social psychological perspective has had rather little to say about culture. This is perhaps because the historically established patterns of beliefs, norms and social practices more or less shared by members within an ethnolinguistic group are not assumed to systematically influence the process of intergroup communication; the intergroup dynamics of categorization, identification and comparison are considered to be sufficient to explain patterns of language learning and use. Although it is conceivable that cultural patterns might moderate intergroup processes (e.g. collectivistically oriented groups might enforce stricter boundaries between in-groups and out-groups than individualistically oriented groups; cf. Brewer and Yuki 2007), to date, little research has addressed this kind of intersection between culture and communication within the context of intercultural communication.

The notion of culture has been more extensively articulated by communication scholars, often with reference to definitions forwarded by researchers interested in cross-cultural comparisons. Such research tends to characterize cultural groups, typically nations, on a limited set of dimensions pertaining to values, self-construals and so on, such as individualism/collectivism (Hofstede 2001) or independence/interdependence (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Scholars from this tradition emphasize that these are not essential, categorical differences between cultural groups, but rather chronic 'mental habits' that predispose people to think along particular lines (Oyserman and Lee 2008). Because they are tendencies, this frame of reference varies among members of a cultural group and may shift within any individual depending upon the context. Despite such admonitions, this approach lends itself to the conceptualization of 'culture-typed identities' (Kim and Hubbard 2007: 231), which tends to pit 'individualistic' Western against 'collectivistic' East Asian nations, raising concerns pertaining to the questionable assumption that cultures are internally cohesive and externally distinctive (see Chapter 2, this volume). Moreover, such a perspective does not adequately take into account cultural complexity in the era of globalization (e.g. Dervin and Ljalikova 2008; Hannerz 1992). These concerns suggest that we reframe thinking of cultures in isolation and move from looking at mean tendencies that distinguish one culture from another to tackling the contact zone of living with and committing to multiple cultures.

Sociocultural applied linguists regard culture as the shared activity or practice of a community. From a Vygotskian cultural-historical perspective, social relationships and culturally created artefacts are central to human development. Cultural contexts are, therefore, seen as vital in

determining the nature of that development because different cultures create different artefacts, both physical and symbolic, which individuals use to mediate learning. To understand a different culture, therefore, includes understanding culturally influenced metaphors and conceptual meanings that are related to the culture's worldviews and thought patterns. In a move further away from essentialized notions of culture, some poststructuralist critical researchers focus on linguistic and discursive construction of cultural categories and how power is implicated in this process.

4. Research methodology

Like most areas of the social sciences, scholars studying language and identity in intercultural interactions have had to grapple with the different, possibly incommensurate, perspectives on ontology and epistemology that characterize positivism and constructivism. These decades-old discussions have highlighted problems with older, established points of view and offered new avenues for theory and research. At the same time, critical reflection (and self-reflection) on newer perspectives have revealed limitations in their formulations (cf. Cromby and Nightingale 1999; Kim 2007), emphasizing that it is probably counterproductive to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater' (Machtyre *et al.* 2009). In response to these debates, some have argued that we need a third way that can resolve the discrepancies between paradigms (e.g. Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) discussion of dynamic systems theory), and others have argued that the tensions between paradigms serve a useful dialectic for creating new perspectives (Noels and Giles 2009; Varghese *et al.* 2005).

Discussions of the nature of reality and how we can understand it inevitably lead to discussions of appropriate methodology. Although there has been a marked increase in qualitative research, across the disciplines, intercultural communication research has tended to rely on quantitative data, collected primarily through survey methods and, less often, experimental methods. These include questionnaires designed to tap psychological constructs and self-reports of behaviour in intercultural encounters, responses to hypothetical scenarios and reactions to written or recorded speech samples. It is perhaps a curious fact, given that language and communication are action-oriented processes, that much of the research involves self-reports acquired through survey methods (cf. Brabant *et al.* 2007). Although self-reports of the type gathered in questionnaires and interviews provide insight into people's reflections on their intercultural communication experiences, a drawback of this method is that self-reports often do not reliably correspond with people's actual behaviour (Nisbett and Wilson 1977). It is thus incumbent upon researchers to supplement self-reports with observations of intercultural encounters as they happen, whether in the laboratory or in the field.

Regardless of whether one chooses to gather and analyse quantitative or qualitative information, research design needs to better address some common assumptions about language, identity and intercultural communication. First, although few scholars across the three disciplines construe identity, communication or cultural processes as static and unchangeable, much research to date gives just such an impression because it is carried out at only one point in time. Moreover, developments in structural equation modelling (usually using quantitative, self-report data) have led researchers to emphasize unidirectional, causal relations between variables rather than dynamic, reciprocal interactions between them. Increasingly, researchers are emphasizing the need to employ longitudinal research designs that can better model the contextual and temporal dynamics of identity and intercultural communication, and better capture the reciprocal relations within and between systems. Recent advances in developmental science include quantitative analytical techniques, such as multilevel modelling and

latent growth curve analysis, which offer greater power to examine identity and language as dynamic, contextualized and interrelated systems.

Second, in order to explain the role of the social context in language, identity and intercultural communication, we should not shy away from research that adopts a comparative perspective. To date, much intercultural communication research has been comparative primarily in the sense that it contrasts the characteristics and practices of two cultures to see where there is the potential for miscommunication. This kind of comparison runs the risk of ethnocentric interpretations of cultural differences that favour privileged positions (cf. Moon 1996). Moreover, it does not provide the kind of insight that helps us to understand differences between contexts of intercultural communication (Clément *et al.* 2007). For instance, interactions between members of groups that have a long history of interaction (e.g. Anglophones and Francophones in Canada) are likely to involve different dynamics than intercultural interactions between members of groups with shorter histories (English Canadian sojourners in France). Likewise, the acquisition of a new language is likely to involve different dynamics for learners who have little opportunity for face-to-face contact with the language community outside the classroom than for those who regularly interact with speakers of the target language. This kind of comparative analysis offers more than an extensive cataloguing of intercultural interactions. As pointed out by MacIntyre *et al.* (2010), the contexts in which we carry out our research frame our theory-building, such that certain themes are brought to light and others disappear from relevance. By systematically comparing the particularities of the contexts within which we conduct our studies, we can better understand the limits and possibilities of our findings to inform theory development, research and teaching.

6. Conclusion

In this review, we have brought together representative theoretical approaches to examine the relation between language and identity across three disciplines that share a common interest in understanding how this relation is relevant for intercultural communication. Limitations of space preclude us from delving into each theory more deeply or from considering other important frameworks, but we hope that we have adequately described some major traditions and paradigms within social psychology, applied linguistics and communication studies. Their different foci highlight different aspects of the relation between language and identity in intercultural communication, including the role of sociostructural status and power, the relational and discursive nature of identity and the use of language as a tool in identity negotiation. As well, each brings into relief various understandings and debates about the constructs of identity, language and culture. The reader has no doubt anticipated that we would conclude that the understanding of language, identity and intercultural communication would benefit from more discussion between scholars in each of these disciplines, and we hope that this review will be a step towards facilitating that conversation.

Related topics

Biculturalism; bilingualism; communication accommodation; community of practice; culture; education abroad; identity; intercultural adjustment; intergroup conflict; language and identity; motivation; poststructuralism; social psychology; sociocultural theory

Further reading

Brabant, M., Watson, B. and Gallois, C. (2007) 'Psychological perspectives: social psychology, language, and intercultural communication', in H. Kothoff and H. Spencer-Oatey (eds) *Handbook of Intercultural*

- Communication*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 55–75 (focuses on language and intercultural communication from a social psychological perspective).
- Noels, K.A. and Giles, H. (2009) 'Social identity and language learning', in W.C. Ritchie and T.K. Bhatia (eds) *The New Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*, Bingley, UK: Emerald, pp. 647–70 (further discussion of various theoretical perspectives on the role of identity in language learning).
- Pavlenko, A. and Blackledge, A. (eds) (2004) *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters (provides a good introduction to the poststructural perspective on language and identity).
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