1 Introduction

As a fundamental construct in the field of language and intercultural communication, identity provides a lens through which to understand the way we position ourselves and are positioned by others during interaction. Our sense of self, our subjectivity, is constructed through language (Weedon, 1987), and we perform identities in different intercultural contexts by deploying our linguistic and semiotic resources and negotiating affiliations and ascriptions of identity such as race, ethnicity, nationality, and social class (Block, 2012). Whether we are learning a second language, migrating to another country, studying abroad, working in multicultural contexts, or interacting online, intercultural communication takes place in increasingly diverse forms and contexts. In this globalized world, the transnational flow of capital, goods, people, and ideas (Appadurai, 1990), together with advancements in technology, have contributed to new modes of interaction, allegiances, and notions of citizenship. Identities have become unbounded and deterritorialized, no longer tied to fixed localities, patterns, or cultural traditions, transforming life strategies while exerting new demands on the self (Elliott & Urry, 2010). As people traverse the local and the global and the online and the offline with greater fluidity, they shift identities in complex ways as they interact with diverse others. The paradox of globalization, however, is that while the interconnectedness of the world has become more apparent, particularly with the immediacy and simultaneity of news and social media, the world has also become increasingly fragmented and polarized. Power operates in these changing contexts and networks in often concealed ways, ushering people into isolated spaces while constructing new forms of inequality and modes of othering (Holliday, 2010).

While our sense of place in the social world shifts across time and space, certain identities can also be assumed or imposed on us (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) with a certain degree of fixedness, and as we negotiate these different positionalities, identity becomes a site of struggle: dynamic, multiple, and oftentimes contradictory (Norton, 2013). Understood from this poststructuralist perspective, identity contributes to a critical understanding of intercultural communication by resisting essentialist notions of culture and recognizing the intersectionality of social categories. Past theories of cultural identity tended to uphold the notion of cultures as geographically and nationally distinct entities and presupposing that "a world of human differences is to be conceptualized as a diversity of separate societies, each with its own culture" (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 1). In recent years, what constitutes "culture" has become more difficult to apprehend and some identity scholars have drawn attention to how the attribution of qualities to specific groups of people can

essentialize and reify identities in ways that do not account for changing contexts and situations (Atkinson, 1999). More than regarding culture as a product, something shared by groups of people, it has been understood as discourse and as practice (Baker, 2015), and that while there are ways of communicating that can be attributed to culture, not all issues of intercultural interactions are necessarily about cultural differences.

By recognizing intercultural communication as a social practice (Piller, 2017), identity research challenges the structuralist view that language, culture, and nation are stable and contained elements that one can draw correlations from (Kramsch & Uryu, 2020). Instead of ascribing an essentialized cultural identity to nations and individuals, a fluid and open intercultural communication examines "how individuals, in order to achieve their communication goals, negotiate cultural or linguistic differences which may be perceived relevant by at least one party in the interaction" (Zhu, 2019, p. 210), and for Baker (2015), these parties can include either the researcher or the interlocutors themselves. This conceptualization of intercultural communication provides a way to understand the tension between recognizing the fluidity of identities and acknowledging the temporary fixedness of self-ascription. It asserts how researchers cannot make a priori assumptions of speakers in intercultural situations in terms of their race, ethnicity, or nationality, but that these inscriptions of identity do take shape when interlocutors refer to them to position themselves or others in discourse (Davies & Harré, 1990). This perspective draws attention to the micro-level of interaction and meaning making, and recognizes how identity is socially constructed in diverse situations while also negotiated within conditions that bear the mark of historical and institutional constraints.

Aligned with this view of intercultural communication as contextualized and situated (Holliday, 2010; Kramsch, 2009; Piller, 2017; Zhu, 2019), this Element draws attention to how identity is constructed, mediated, and negotiated within contexts of difference and power. Operating within the tensions of structure and agency (Block, 2013), it is constituted not only by language but also by systems of thought and their symbolic power (Kramsch, 2009). These ideologies shape dispositions, beliefs, and practices, including the way we position ourselves and others in intercultural encounters. To introduce this notion of identity, this Element traces the history in which this pivotal construct has been theorized in applied linguistics, from social psychological, poststructural, and critical perspectives, and discusses how it has been researched in diverse intercultural contexts using different methodologies. It draws on studies that have either been framed explicitly as intercultural communication research or that involve communication in intercultural

contexts and situations. Weaving all these ideas together, the Element concludes by describing contemporary challenges in identity research and suggesting future directions.

2 Theorizing Identity

In applied linguistics research, different terms have been associated with identity: "self," "role," "subjectivity," "subject position," and "agent," and while they may refer to the same object of study, they represent different theoretical perspectives and foreground specific ideas. The self, for instance, is regarded as a psychological entity, and self-concept refers to the cognitive and affective dimensions that shape what we believe about ourselves (Mercer, 2011). Subjectivity, on the other hand, is a poststructuralist term that refers to the conscious or unconscious self produced through discourse, that is, how we are "formed as subjects through the symbols we create, the chains of signification we construct and the meanings we exchange with others" (Kramsch, 2014, p. 215). Subject position foregrounds how speakers position themselves in discourse in interaction with others (Kramsch, 2009), while agent, from a sociocultural perspective, highlights how individuals can be shaped but not completely determined by context and have the capacity for self-determination.

2.1 Social Psychological Perspectives of Identity

Scholars in the 1970s and 1980s interested in identity research tended to draw distinctions between social identity and cultural identity. Advancing a social identity theory that highlighted the dichotomy between in-group and out-group, Tajfel (1982) referred to social identity as the relationship between individuals and the larger social world, mediated through institutions like families, schools, workplaces, social services, and law courts (e.g., Gumperz, 1982). Cultural identity, on the other hand, referred to the relationship between an individual and members of a particular ethnic group who share a common history and language, as well as similar ways of understanding the world. Drawing on Tajfel's (1982) conception of social identity that highlighted how people categorize the social world and perceive themselves as members of groups, Giles and Johnson (1987) theorized how ethnolinguistic identity and solidarity shaped predispositions toward speech accommodation and language maintenance, and how in both conceptions identities are constituted through differentiation of specific traits or values. Identity categories of race, gender, or nationality served as independent variables where speakers were classified according to their membership of different social groups, and certain correlations or causal relations were investigated between these groups and certain qualities, behaviors, or attitudes.

Questions regarding identity were tied to notions of culture or community and shared history, language, or geographical region.

Social psychology research has also understood identity in terms of the way people define themselves in part by their membership of social groups. In this sense, belonging is both initiated and sustained: a knowledge of group membership and an emotional attachment to this belonging, and where such membership has a causal relationship in terms of actions and behaviour (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). In language learning research, developing competence in another language meant being able to identify with a target second-language (L2) community and taking on aspects of their behavior (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Recognizing the significance of individual differences and the thoughts and motives of the self, Dörnyei (2009) theorized the notion of the ideal self and the ought-to self to refer to the attributes a learner would like to possess and believes they should possess. For Mercer (2011), it is the unique set of self-beliefs of individuals that influences their choices and actions, helping them make sense of their position in the world.

2.2 Poststructuralist Perspectives of Identity

Resisting notions of a fixed and coherent core of an individual, poststructuralist perspectives of identity recognize that individuals construct *subjectivities* (Weedon, 1987), "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p. 28). These subjectivities are produced through language in ways that are always situated, dynamic, and variable. While social constructionism (Burr, 2015) highlights how identity is constructed through interaction in specific environments, poststructuralism emphasizes how such construction occurs in discourse. Mediated through symbolic forms, constituted and shaped in interaction, subjectivity is always in process as it responds to and interprets the discourse of others (Kramsch, 2009). Identities, on the other hand, are "points of temporary attachments to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (Hall, 1996, p. 6). While subjectivities are emergent and ongoing, identity suggests a certain permanence or fixedness (Block, 2022). For Weedon (2004), it is the "limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one *is*" (p. 19; emphasis in the original). While one can be a subject without identification, identity involves a degree of self-recognition together with an understanding of what one is not. It foregrounds how selves are constructed in practice, that is, individuals produce, enact, or perform identities (Blommaert, 2005; Butler, 1990; Hall & Bucholtz, 1995; Wodak, 1997) as they relate or interact with others in the social world (Norton Peirce, 1995).

In her landmark study of five immigrant women in Canada from Vietnam, Peru, Poland, and the former Czechoslovakia, Bonny Norton (1995) demonstrated how the identities of these women, as immigrant, as mother, or as worker, shaped the way they understood themselves and their place in society. Conducted at a time when large-scale migration was transforming postindustrialist societies and providing more contexts for intercultural communication, this study examined how migrants occupied a variety of spaces in their country of settlement, and how acquiring a country's official language was key to social integration and meaningful employment. Native speakers of the host community, however, often served as gatekeepers to participation in different contexts by controlling access to language resources and determining rules of use. For immigrants to claim their rightful place in a new country and to imagine better futures, they had to negotiate relations at work, school, and other community settings, and assert their own identities.

In the study, Martina from Czechoslovakia would frequently refer to herself as "stupid" and "inferior" because she did not believe she was fluent enough in English:

> "I feel uncomfortable in the group of people whose English language is their mother tongue because they speak fluently without any problems and I feel inferior" (from Martina's diary, in Norton, 1995, p. 21).

However, when she had to talk to her landlord on the phone about their lease agreement, a matter that was critical to their family's finances, she mentions how she was able to go past this perceived lack of fluency and engage in a long conversation. "I got upset and I talked with him on the phone over one hour and I didn't think about the tenses rules. I had known that I couldn't give up. My children were very surprised when they heard me" (from Martina's diary, in Norton, 1995, p. 22).

Norton (1995) suggests that Martina's perseverance with speaking at that particular moment intersects with her identity as a mother responsible for the wellbeing and security of her children. During this phone conversation, she resists her feelings of inadequacy and refuses to "give up," asserting her legitimacy in this particular discourse. Understood across multiple sites of identity formation, Martina demonstrates how identity is nonunitary and contradictory, as different situations enable different subjectivities.

To draw attention to these shifting identities, Norton (2013) defines identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 45). This definition highlights how it is fluid,

context dependent, and context producing while shaped by various historical and material circumstances. When people speak, they not only exchange information but also reorganize "a sense of who they are and how they relate to the world" (Norton, 2013, p. 4). These contingent positions are shaped not only by lived experiences but also by imagined futures (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton & Pavlenko, 2019).

2.3 Critical Perspectives

While poststructuralism highlights how identity is constructed through discourse, critical perspectives associated with poststructuralism draw attention to how the discourses made available to us are themselves limited. There are dominant discourses in society that can constrain the way we perform our identities, and these discourses are constructed and reproduced through power. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) recognize identities as "social, discursive, and narrative options offered by a particular society in a specific time and place to which individuals and groups of individuals appeal in an attempt to self-name, to self-characterize, and to claim social spaces and social prerogatives" (p. 19). For Holland and Lave (2001), while identities are always in process, practices of identification are historically produced, shaped by broader structural forces, constituting a "history in person."

Identity research informed by critical theories recognizes that identities are not only multiple and dynamic but also negotiated within different contexts of power. When individuals draw on language to perform identities, language not only constructs meaning but also imposes power. Highlighting this dynamic, Gumperz (1982) notes that

> Language differences play an important, positive role in signalling information as well as in creating and maintaining the subtle boundaries of power, status, role and occupational specialisation that make up the fabric of our social life. Assumptions about value differences associated with these boundaries in fact form the very basis for the indirect communicative strategies employed in key gatekeeping encounters. (pp. 6–7)

From this perspective, every encounter involving intercultural communication is a site of struggle where meanings are negotiated and strategies are employed to assert the legitimacy of one's statements. To participate in such encounters, speakers need to negotiate structures and relations of power that can position them in unequal ways. Davies and Harré (1990) use the term "position" as "the central organising concept for analysing how it is that people do being a person" (p. 62). They and other poststructuralist theorists have asserted that identities