



Speaking and Individual Identity Reflection

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Abstract: Identity is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses an individual's sense of self, their unique characteristics, beliefs, values, and affiliations. It is a dynamic construct that evolves over time and is shaped by various internal and external factors, including personal experiences, social interactions, cultural background, and societal norms. This paper explores the various dimensions of identity and examines the role that identity plays in shaping human behavior, beliefs, and attitudes. It also discusses the challenges and opportunities associated with identity construction, as well as the potential implications of identity-related issues for teaching and learning.

Keywords: speaking; identity; language teaching

1. Introduction

The concept of identity has become widespread in many areas for several years, cutting across disciplines from psychiatry and psychology to political science and sociology. All individuals claim particular identities given their roles in society, groups they belong to, and characteristics that describe themselves (Burke, 2009). Also, according to Burke (2009) we have as many “selves” as we have others with whom we interact. But the idea of multiple selves has changed according to James (2009) who points out that we now talk about identities rather than selves, but the basic components of the concept have remained. We take on many identities over the course of a lifetime, and at any point in time we have many identities that could be activated.

2. Background theory

Identities do not always operate in isolation, but they interact with other identities in particular situations. In social context, different situations can trigger different identities by the same person and the situation in which different identities are held by different persons interacting together in a social setting (Paltridge, 2015). And identity can be constructed and can be reflected by language use. This is also supported by Cameron (2001) who points out that identity is not something fixed, stable, and unitary that they acquire early in life and possess forever afterwards. Rather identity is shifting and multiple, something people are continually constructing and reconstructing in their encounters with each other in the world. Since identity is unstable, individuals' identities can be constructed and reconstructed in many ways. And according to the summary of trend of Rodgers and Scott (2008), context, relationship are factors which affect individual's identities.

Experience is one of the factors that influence the identity construction. “That identity is constructed by experimentation, by bricolage and by retrieval of earlier forms. Conflict, error and sin are inherent aspects of the concrete church, and so self-criticism is a necessary element in its further construction.” (Gospel, 2009, p. 35).

Factors such as socioeconomic status, level of family acceptance of the interracial relationship, racial makeup of city or town in which the individual grows up, skin tone, and growing up in a family composed of one or both parents have been found to relate to identity and psychological well-being in biracial individuals (Byrd & Garwick, 2004). This is also supported by Sim (2002) who has found that multiracial people have ethnic identities that change depending on the social context that they are in (Harris & Sim, 2002).

Discourse community is absolutely one of the factors that influences individual's identity. According to Paltridge, “the discourse community will have particular ways of communicating with each other and ways of getting things done that have developed through time” (Paltridge, 2015, p. 24). And according to Bloome et al (2005), People are making connection between and among texts and between and among events. That means people build their own discourse community through events and interest and things like that. And in the discourse communities, “the information a person “gives off” about themselves, then, and in turn, their identity, depends on the context and occasion of the discourse. It also influenced by the social and geographical place a person comes from, where they have spent time, the social and physical space in which they are speaking and the values that are attributed to these” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 356). So that is why what kinds of context engagements serve the proper context for the shape of individual's identity.

Reaction is another factor that influence the individuals' identity. Options are available to deal with the situation and what might be done in a proper situation are valued. According to Burke and Stets (2009), people will try to change this mismatch of behaviour and identity standard into a matching couple. This suggest that individuals' identities may change in order to better adjusted to situation.

3. Analysis

3.1 participant

My data comes from Gossip Girls, which is a successful American series. Gossip Girls talks about a group of teenagers in private-school living on Manhattan's Upper East Side which reflect the person reveals regarding sex, drugs and underage drinking. Most girls in this series are mean, chase after fashion. The main reason that I choose the girls, especially Blair Waldorf who experienced complicated living style and has a strong character, in this series in my study is that their verbal exchange is significantly showed their identity when her role changed.

3.2 Context

Blair grapples with a number of changes within her family. Her parents divorced after her father is a gay and runs off with another man. When her mother remarries, and her father leaves the country, Blair has difficulty accepting her stepfather. In addition, her stress over these matters occasionally affects her other relationships. However, Blair ultimately remains close to her father Harold, who she often turns to for comfort. By contrast, she maintains a somewhat tenser relationship with her mother Eleanor.

The experience of Blair also makes her special. Blair learns of an affair between her friend Serena and her boyfriend Nate. Blair's romantic life has various effects on her character development. After Nate repeatedly hurts her, she eventually refuses to take him back until she believes in his ability to commit to her. In pursuing Nate, however, Blair herself cheats on her new boyfriend Pete, which results in her losing both of them. She eventually begins to know her mistakes with her father's help.

Blair is noted for an over-achieving nature, which often appears in humorous scenes. In a review for New York magazine, Emily Nussbaum lauded one of Blair's fantasies, which involves "joining the Peace Corps, getting a killer tan, winning the Nobel Peace Prize, and having dinner with the president, 'who would then write her a recommendation to Yale, and then Yale would fall all over themselves to accept her.'" "The New Yorker's Janet Malcolm remarked that unlike some of her forerunners in film and literature," Blair already has all the money and position anyone could want. She is pure naked striving, restlessly seeking an object, any object, and never knowing when enough is enough."

Blair encounters a setback during her interview at Yale by revealing the recent stress in her life, and then kissing her interviewer on the cheek upon dismissal. Her father then makes a donation to the school, though Blair is still wait-listed.

In addition to her feelings for Nate, Blair is sometimes said to feel competitive with Serena in other areas, including matters of beauty and popularity. This also leads to an occasional envy on Blair's part.

3.3 Data collection

Observation is main instrument to collect the data in doing this study. And lots of reviews have been read. They are from electronic databases such as Sydney Online Library, Science Direct, ERIC, ProQuest Education Journals and hand searching journals in the library.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data of this study were analyzed in accordance with speaking and identity. Based on the behavior and the conversation in Gossip Girl, this study focused on Blair's voices and her behavior. The way she talks to her friend, family and acquaintances were coded and categorized, and several common themes emerged: class, reaction, experience and relationship. Member checks, also known as informant feedback or respondent validation, were used in order to corroborate the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of the study (Paltridge, 2015). The recurring themes and topics were coded and classified by research questions: how Blair's speaking reflects her identity and how her identity influence her talking and how her investment played a role in constructing her social interactions.

4. Discuss of Analysis

As mention above in the background theory. Reaction is one of the factors that influence the individuals' identity. Options are available to deal with the situation and what might be done in a proper situation are valued. This is supported by Paltridge (2015) who points out that discourse analysis examines patterns of language across texts and considers the

relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which it is used. Discourse analysis also considers the ways that the use of language presents different views of the world and different understandings. It examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between participants as well as the effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations. It also considers how views of the world, and identities, are constructed through the use of discourse. The following conversation is a perfect example of this:

B: Blair Waldorf S: Serena J: Jenny

Annual sleepover is the most important event of the fall for Blair. In this event, every girl in the school is dying to attend this event. But she only invites those who she think are qualified to. The scene happens where she met Serena (her best friend) and ask her to the annual sleepover party.

B: S, it's only the most important night of the fall.

S: Oh, the sleepover.

B: I prefer "soiree". "Sleepover" is so sophomore year.

S: You know I can't go to that, I have the plan.

B: Serena, when there is a Waldorf soiree, there is nothing else on the social calendar.

S: Blair, the plan is Dan. Remember? The guy you realized is actually a human being. Any worthy of your time and attention. No offence.

Jenny: none taken.

S: Look, I am really sorry, but this date is unbreakable. Maybe we can swing by later or something...

Blair: I am not a stop along the way. I am a destination, and if you refuse to attend, I'm gonna to find a replacement. Girls, the waiting list.

From the conversation above, Blair's identity can be shaped by her conversation with Serena and her relationship with Serena was shown. Blair is a trendy girl which can reflected in her say "I prefer 'soiree'. 'Sleepover' is so sophomore year." And her voice is full of complacent. She is also the queen of school so her tone is always unrejectable which can be reflected in "Serena, when there is a Waldorf soiree, there is nothing else on the social calendar." What's more, she is arrogant, especially when Serena said no to her. She says "I am not a stop along the way. I am a destination, and if you refuse to attend, I'm gonna to find a replacement. Girls, the waiting list." She can't stand that she is the back-up. But since she was in good relationship with Serena, she didn't say or do something mean as she usually did to other girls. Simple, she is just angry so that she increase her voice especially at the end of the conversation "Girls, the waiting list".

And from the casual talk, we can map the group boundaries and the establishment of inside and outside. Gossip solidifies a group's sense of itself by heightening consciousness of 'outside' (not included in the community) and 'inside' (same discourse community). "Gossip's ability to map social perimeters and survey insider/outsider relationships "matters more than the information it promulgates" (Spacks, 1985, p. 5-6). In gossiping, individuals are tutored in the norms and values of their social network and learn "the cultural rules of their society" (Levin and Kimmel 1997 p169). Evidence that the mapping of space is vigilantly monitored in Blair's community is scattered throughout the text, with exchanges such as this one between Blair and Jenny being commonplace:

(Blair is the queen of the school and from upper class while Jenny is from low class. After Serena reject to go to the sleepover party, Blair decided to invite Jenny to her party and play trick on her.)

(B: Blair J: Jenny Humphrey)

B: Little Jenny Humphrey, why didn't I think of you before? You have no plans, you are coming to the soiree.

J: Me? Really?

B's followers: her? Really?

B: the thing is, if you come, you have to be up to be little more than just sleeping.

J: I am up for anything.

B: My place. 7 o'clock sharp.

J: Okay, bye.

After Jenny's leaving.

B: Oh, a girl's first sleepover. Something she'll never forget. Let's make sure of it.

Follower 1: Taking bets on how long she lasts?

Follower 2: 5-bucks say an hour and not 1 minute more.

From the conversation between Blair and her followers with Jenny, discourse community can be reflected. Blair and her followers are the insider while Jenny is outsider. They don't come from the same discourse community. When Blair says "Little Jenny Humphrey, why didn't I think of you before? You have no plans, you are coming to the soiree." Her voice is

lazy and careless because she just wants to play tricks on her instead of having fun with her. And she calls her full name which deliberately shows she was not a friend of her and keeps the distance. What's more, when followers said "Taking bets on how long she lasts?" "5-bucks say an hour and not 1 minute more." Their voice is full of scorn and condescend. According to Paltridge, "the discourse community will have particular ways of communicating with each other and ways of getting things done that have developed through time" (Paltridge, 2014, p. 24). Apparently, Jenny do not come from the same discourse community from their conversation because Jenny do not share the same way of communicating.

What's more, this conversation also reflect the class between Blair and Jenny. Speaking can reflect the social relationship and this is also supported by Jaworski and Coupland who state "Discourse is language use relative to social, political and cultural formations – it is language reflecting social order but also language shaping social order, and shaping individuals' interaction with society" (Jaworski and Coupland, 2014, p. 3). From their conversation, when Jenny was invited, she was so excited felt because she was desired to enter that community. So when she says "I am up for anything", her voice is tremble due to the excitement and nervous. However, after Jenny's leave, Blair "Oh, a girl's first sleepover. Something she'll never forget. Let's make sure of it." Blair's voice was more casual and mean because she just wanted to insult her. And Blair knows that she can change her mind any time. From this point of view, Jenny is from a lower class.

When compare those two conversation, we can find that the response to Blair between Jenny and Serena is totally different. Serena reject Blair's invitation while Jenny is waiting for it. That means different identities held by different persons respond differently in a social setting. This might be caused by our expectation that the meanings of the behaviors will ordinarily match those in the standard. "People with strong leadership identities will act more like leaders, and those with weak or low leadership identities will not act like leaders or will do so much less" (Burke, 2009). Faced with Jenny, Blair is more like a queen which reflects the headship identity and makes her speak like a queen to match her identity. However, when she was with Serena, she has low lead ship identity so her tone and voice will be milder.

5. Implication for language teaching

Knowing the identity can better help students, especially for international students and immigrant students, build their proper identities and better involved in communities-----no matter the study community or live community. Most of the students can't get used to the local life because of lack of identity verification. "A lack of identity verification occurs when the person in the situation does not match with the person's interpersonal identity standard (Burke and Stets, 2009). If there is a lack of identity verification, "people become upset or distressed in varying degrees" (Burke and Stets, 2009). Unfortunately, many L2 learners have experienced difficulties with constructing their learner identities among different and diverse people and surroundings. According to Lee (2014), to catch up with practical speaking speeds and to understand native speakers' expressions without any misconceptions are the most difficult things, especially when L2 students are facing with social, cultural, racial, and national differences from the students' own home countries. As a result, L2 learners who are new to the L1 country, such as international students and immigrant students of all ages, have a hard time communicating with native speakers of English, as well as participating in their academic discourse communities. So to know how L2 adult learners shift their identity, engage with these new communities and better solve the linguistic barriers is very essential.

Another problem is that many international students come to the Australia or other English countries in order to complete their education without having had many meaningful interactions with local people. Language problem may be one of the reasons that stop them communicating with local people. Obviously, English proficiency will be helpful to understand how students' investment (Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995) have an impact on their English learning development, their learning strategies to improve both their communicative competence and their engagement skills in academic and non-academic contexts. Bur luckily, identity construction happens over time. For this reason, having more interactions with native speakers of English in a comfortable way provides them more enriching experiences of learning English and of increasing communicative competence. It can also help them gain self-confidence in using their learned English to strike up conversations with local people in a relaxed atmosphere and a friendly relationship. This can help students to improve their English competence.

Norton and Toohey (2001) also puts forwards that the key difference between good learners and poor learners is that good learners "exercise human agency to negotiate their entry into the social networks so they can practice and improve their competence in the target language" (p. 256). However, Norton (2000) also points out, "native speakers (NS) are more likely to avoid interactions with non-native speakers (NNS), rather than provide them with input and help them negotiate meaning in the target language" (as cited in Cervatiuc, 2009, p. 255). Under these circumstances, many international students and immigrants, who are exposed to few opportunities to interact with the target language and culture, are "marginalized, introverted, and sensitive to rejection" in the target language discourse communities (Cervatiuc, 2009, p. 255). Likewise,

their lack of communicative competence in the target language prevents L2 learners from gaining legitimate peripheral participation and membership in the target discourse communities, academic or otherwise.

Also participating in these communities “through the power of the imagination” led to several identity changes, strongly supporting the idea that “an imagined community assumes an imagined identity, and a learner’s investment in the target language must be understood within this context” (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 241). Similarly, interpersonal interactions in various imagined communities made it possible for students to learn about others’ cultures and getting involved in communities within those cultures, so that they could enhance their English learning and identity changes. Indeed, students’ social interactions and identity changes, as they became a legitimate member of her academic and non-academic circles. In this way, student’s identity should be further studied.

6. Conclusion

Identity serves as the cornerstone of our self-perception and the lens through which we view the world. It is a intricate tapestry woven from the threads of personal experiences, social interactions, cultural heritage, and societal pressures. Each thread contributes to the unique pattern that defines who we are and how we relate to others.

In this journey of self-discovery, it is crucial to cultivate empathy and understanding towards others' identities. By embracing diversity and promoting inclusivity, students, especially international students can better involved in communities, improve English learning and change identities. And we can create a more harmonious society where everyone feels valued and respected.

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