Identity, Agency, and Adult Literacy in an Unequal Digital World

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Structure of Presentation


• Towards an enhanced model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015)

• Storybooks Canada

• Global Storybooks

• Storybooks Norway/Denmark
Integrating language learner and social world

How to theorize the complex relationship between the language learner & the social world?

Under what conditions does social interaction take place?

To what extent do social relations of power – racism, sexism, elitism, homophobia – limit opportunities for language learners to speak?
"I feel uncomfortable using English in the group of people whose English language is their mother tongue because they speak fluently without any problems and I feel inferior.”
Language and Identity

Every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. They are, in other words, engaged in identity construction and negotiation.

(Norton, 1997, p. 410)
Defining IDENTITY

“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.

(Norton, 2013, p. 45)
Extending communicative competence

“rules of use”
(Hymes)

“the right to speech”
“the power to impose reception”
(Bourdieu)
Mai: Highly motivated but not invested

I was hoping the course would help me the same as we learnt [in the 6-month ESL course], but some night we only spend time on one man. He came from Europe. He talked about his country: what’s happening and what was happening. *And all the time we didn’t learn at all.* And tomorrow the Indian man speak something for there. Maybe all week I didn’t write any more on my book.

Mai, in Norton, 2013
Motivation & Investment

**Psychological**

"individual" unitary, coherent

"character trait"

**Sociological**

"social being"

- complex identity,
- changing across time and space,
- reproduced in social interaction

*centrality of power*
Defining Investment

If learners invest in a second language, they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will increase their cultural capital and social power.

Norton (2013)

Symbolic: Language, education, friendship
Material: Capital, real estate, money
Mai’s Classroom: Practices Imperfect

- Essentializing identity (ethnicity seen as only salient feature of identity)
- Focus on past not present and future
- Neglect of literacy as central to learning

Question: Was Mai “unmotivated”? What is Mai’s investment in language learning?
Investment &
Imagined Communities

After work today when I was walking by myself on New Street then I met Karl who was go to the same school with me last course... I just told him about my job and the course I am taking. He said to me, “The good thing for you is to go to school then in the future you would have a job to work in the office.”. I hope so. But sometime I’m scared to dream about that.

Mai, in Norton, 2013
Reframing questions

Are students motivated to learn a language? Are teachers motivated to teach a language?

Are students and teachers *invested in the language and literacy practices of a given classroom and community*?

(student and teacher identity is central)
Keeley Ryan: April 2012
(in Norton, 2017)

Pre-Investment:
25 students, 9 remained.

Post-Investment:
29 students, 25 remained

“I began by imagining what a good English teacher would look like for my students …I altered my practice to reflect what I imagined their idea of a good school would look like”.
(Term paper).
New economic world order

Evolving theories on language ideologies, linguistic capital, and symbolic competence

(Blommaert, Bourdieu, Kramsch)
Technology
Mobility

(Gee & Hayes, 2011, Blommaert, 2013; Vertovec, 2010; Crompton, 2008)
Darvin and Norton, 2015

“Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics”

Challenges for the 21st Century

• New “social world”

• New forms of “social interaction”

• New ways of conceptualizing “speech”

CLAIMING THE RIGHT TO SPEAK IN THE DIGITAL ERA
Towards an expanded model of investment

claiming the right to speak given the way power operates materially and symbolically in the digital era
Capital

ECONOMIC: wealth, property and income
CULTURAL: knowledge, educational credentials, cultural forms
SOCIAL: connections to networks of power

(Bourdieu, 1986)
IDEOLOGY

Dominant ways of thinking that organize and stabilize societies while simultaneously determining modes of inclusion and exclusion

Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 72
To what extent are language learners invested in the language and literacy practices of a given classroom or community?

Digital storytelling and family literacy
The bed was too short.
The mattress was too short.
Èrì vilé é'bú rè
ndráà èrí
në àlíárú tù
WWW.AFRICANSTORYBOOK.ORG
> 1000 UNIQUE STORIES
> 5000 TRANSLATIONS

> 150 AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND ENGLISH, FRENCH, PORTUGUESE
What is Monica’s investment in the African Storybook?

How does this investment provide insight into her language teacher identity?
Betty
Ugandan schoolteacher

*I feel very powerful like a man* because I had never held a camera in my life. I have always seen only men carrying cameras and taking photos in big public functions like may be independence celebration, political rallies and wedding ceremonies. But now as I move in the community taking pictures with my camera, I feel I am also very powerful, like a man...*I am now a learned person!*

(Andema, 2014)
Democratizing knowledge flows between the Global South and Global North:

The African Storybook and Storybooks Canada and Global Storybooks
Storybooks Canada
A digital innovation for multilingual children

Storybooks Canada is a free open educational resource that promotes literacy and language learning in homes, schools, and communities. It makes 40 stories from the African Storybook available with text and audio in English, French, and the most widely spoken immigrant and refugee languages of Canada. We are also developing Indigenous Storybooks and the Global Storybooks literacy portal. Share and enjoy!
Unique features of Storybooks Canada

• Targets specific needs of a given country

• Makes connection between sound and symbol, to promote early reading and self-directed learning

• Connects to educational policy and practice of a given country

• Focuses on the particular languages of a given community
I like to read!

Zama is great!
“The magic of Canada Storybook Project finding and building, translating, remixing the African Storybook project is the magic we hoped for but didn't know we could dream of. This is the power of open.”

Kelsey Wiens, Creative Commons Public Lead, Canada, October 3, 2017
The Storybooks Canada team

- Bonny Norton, Research Lead
- Espen Stranger-Johannessen, Project Manager
- Liam Doherty, Technical Advisor
- Darshan Soni, Website Developer
- Sara Davidson, Indigenous Outreach
- Asma Afreen, Researcher
- Michelle Gilman, Researcher
- Rahat Zaidi, French Immersion
- Approx. 60 volunteers (see Acknowledgements)

- Funding
  - UBC Language Sciences
  - UBC Research Cluster Grants
  - UBC Community University Engagement Support
Questions for Practice and Research

(i) How can community agencies best use Global Storybooks to support the language learning needs of immigrant and refugee families?

(ii) How can parents help their children maintain their mother tongue while learning additional languages?

(iii) How can elementary school teachers support the development of multilingual literacy in classes where many languages are spoken?

(iv) How can we promote home/school connections for immigrants and refugees?

(v) How can Indigenous communities share their own stories?
Please spread the word!