Failure in Communication in a Second Language Context, a Threat to Identity

Mehrdad Erfanian Jalali[1], Gholam Reza Zarei[*2]

[1] *Department of Foreign Languages, Sheikhbahaee University, Isfahan, Iran*
[2] *English Language Center, Isfahan University of Technology, Iran*

Abstract

The present study investigated the effect of L2 communication failure on the identity of an individual. As identity is a social construct and a function of communication and group membership, we aimed to investigate how failure in language use by itself, as a dimension of socialization process, can influence an individual's identity. To study the effect of communication failure on the mental states of individuals, 25 adult subjects of both genders, 13 men and 12 women having had a failing experience of L2 communication in L2 context were randomly selected. An in-depth interview including and reflecting the feelings of the research participants at the time of their unsuccessful communication rendered much information about the social effects of such failure. A qualitative analysis of the interviews revealed that communication failure resulting from low language proficiency can threaten a person's identity not only in the second language, but also to some extent in the first language.

Keywords: identity, socialization, communication, agency, L2 context.

Introduction

The field of research in SLA experienced a paradigm shift in the mid-1990s towards the social dimension of language acquisition under the aegis of sociocultural theory stemming from Vygotskyan socio-cognitive approach,

---

* Corresponding Author's Tel.: +9884156-83111
Email address: grzarei@cc.iut.ac.ir

Ochs and Schieffelin's language socialization and Norton's identity theory in SLA. Contrary to the purely cognitive account of the description of language acquisition process accepted up to the 1990s, the new paradigm shift signified the fact that language acquisition is a social process in which the learner, as a social member, has to participate in the process of interaction in order to receive the necessary input as well as feedback to develop the L2 system in mind. Among the most challenging notions of social dimension of language acquisition in individuals is the concept of "identity". Macmillan's Encyclopedia of Sociology (Borgatta & Montgomery, 2000) defines identity as the active negotiation of an individual's relationship with larger social constructs, in so far as this negotiation is signaled through language and other semiotic means.

Within sociocultural approaches (Atkinson, 2011; Bakhtin, 1986; Ochs, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978), identity is not viewed as a fixed, invariant attribute in the mind of the individual learner. Rather, it is a contingent process involving dialectic relations between learners and various worlds and experiences they inhabit. Being most recently scrutinized by applied linguists, identity is considered to be socially constructed, always dynamic, contradictory and constantly changing across time and place (Norton, 2000). The process of identity formation is not a function of what a person would like to be, but rather the function of negotiating identity positions in larger sociocultural, political and economic structures that he inhabits (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2004). Elsewhere, Young (2008) stated that identity is constructed by the self and others, but we should not delude ourselves into believing that free individual agency is all that there is in identity construction. As a matter of fact, some identities are imposed by powerful others in the socio-political context. An important dimension in communication is that while one person may be exchanging information with another person, they are both sending messages about their cultural identity whether intentionally or unintentionally. According to Young (2008), communication entails a special competence and ease of use of discourse that demonstrates membership of a particular group and the cultural territory to which a person stakes a claim. This can even go so far that communication participants may struggle for presentation of self against the identities that are imposed upon them by others. Similarly, as identity composes a part of our ego, any serious challenge to it in the act of communication can lead to many social and psychological problems. The introduction of the notion of culture shock by Schumann (1978) is an attempt to point to such failure to acculturate with the L2 society because of cultural differences, with culture being the core constituent of identity, between the homeland cultural norms and those of the L2 community. A question that may arise at this point is whether failure in communicating in L2 within the second language context may have influences on the identity of a second language

learner and user. More precisely speaking, is an unsuccessful SLA experience a potential threat to the identity of an individual?

Providing a clear answer to these questions can bring about implications for further understanding SLA process as a highly social phenomenon which can, at the same time, influence individuals psychologically. A clearer picture of the relationship between language acquisition and identity construction can lead us to find solutions to the unpredictable problems of language learning stemming from social dimension of communication and particularly those related to the concept of identity formation.

Method and Material

Psychological processes internal to the individual, such as Freudian pre-linguistic identification, fantasy and desire, and their role in identity formation (Lacan 1977; Zizek 1996) are difficult to study under the standard empiricist lens of variationist inquiry unless they are overtly signaled in interaction. The rise of social turn in SLA in the recent decades has contributed to a shift of focus from language learning as a cognitive and psychometric process to an emphasis on the context of learning as a sociocultural and at the same time, socio-cognitive phenomenon. As a matter of fact, the nature of reality (ontology) in social aspect of SLA (Second Language Acquisition) calls for special ways of recognizing and knowing such reality (epistemology) (Gass & Mackey, 2012). Two schools of thought, constructivism and critical theory, which are the bases of sociolinguistic paradigm in SLA, state that there are multiple perspectives to reality and that the aim of research is to explore and document this diversity. The paradigm in which researchers are operating can have a profound effect on how they collect and interpret data.

Since the present study focuses on identity as a sociolinguistic concept, it calls for an interpretive, multiple perspective mode of enquiry and also necessitates attention to context. As we deal with the concept of identity and aspiration of power and agency in social and linguistic context, we shall need to deal with a critical view of SLA which is highly sociolinguistic and phenomenological in nature. Such features of research in the field of identity as a social construct can explain our choice for a qualitative methodology to answer the relevant research questions and generate emerging issues for further investigation. In sum, the emergent, cyclical characteristic of qualitative research paradigm is compatible with the nature of the present study.

To study the concept of identity and its possible interaction with L2 development, we utilized Stryker's symbolic interactionist framework of identity theory (Stryker, 1980). The premises of the framework are as follow:
1. Human beings are actors as well as reactors (Actor/ Reactor premise).
2. Human action and interaction are critically shaped by definitions or interpretations of the situations of action and interaction (Situation premise).

3. The definitions and interpretations of action are based on shared meanings developed in the course of interaction with others (Shared meaning premise).
4. The meanings which persons attribute to their self-conceptions are especially critical to the process producing their action and interaction (Self-conception by the self premise).
5. Self-conceptions, like other meanings, are shaped in the course of interaction with others and are, at least in the initial instance and at least largely, the outcomes of others' responses to the person (Self conception by the others premise).

A host of empirical research studies support the validity of the above framework with regard to social studies. Burke and various associates (Burke & Hoelter, 1988; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Burke & Tully, 1977) show the link between identity and gender, academic attainment and aspirations, and occupational aspirations, finding evidence that the linkage reflects the commonality of meaning of identity and behavior. Lee (1998) finds that the correspondence of meanings of students' personal identities and meanings they attach to those occupying positions in scientific disciplines predict interest in science as well as appreciably accounting for gender differences in intention to become scientists. Serpe and Stryker (1987), using data on student-related identities obtained at three points in time from students entering a residential college, provide evidence that the salience of these identities is reasonably stable over time; that in a situation in which earlier commitments have been attenuated by a move to a residential university, high identity salience leads to efforts to reconstruct social relationships that permit playing the role associated with the salient identity, efforts taking the form of joining appropriate organizations; and that when such efforts are not successful, the level of salience of the identity subsequently drops and self-structure is altered. Sparks and Richard (1992) observe, to their considerable surprise, that identity theory–based predictions stand up well in accounting for behavioral intentions with regard to green consumerism, the predicted relationships holding when examined in the context of the variables of a theory of planned behavior.

Participants

Since the focus of our study was to investigate the effect of communication failure on the identity construct of individuals, immigration candidates with experience of communication failure in the target L2 community were selected for the study. As the first step in our sampling and randomization procedure, a total number of 120 adults with the experience of having traveled to English-speaking countries for the purpose of immigration were selected from the data-base of an immigration institution established for such a purpose in Tehran. One necessary condition for such selection was that the immigration candidates

had returned to Iran so that there was easy access to them for doing the research. All the research participants were chosen with the condition that less than one year had passed from their failing communication experience in the English-speaking country, so that firstly time interval could not damage the validity of our study. Secondly, limited time interval of one year could assure us that the subjects of the study would remember as much detail about that experience as possible. All study participants were married and their age ranged between 35 and 50. To operationalize communication failure and its degree of severity and significance, our criterion was to choose those individuals who reiterated that their return to Iran and change of the whole immigration program was mostly due to linguistic communication problems. In order to narrow down the scope of our study, a brief initial interview was performed to make sure that the reason for return was mostly linguistic incompetence and not cultural misunderstandings or lack of ability to use communication strategies. To guarantee this criterion, the participants were asked at the beginning of the study to tell us about their problematic encounters and unsuccessful communication efforts and episodes of communication failure during their stay in the landing country. Those who mentioned reasons for communication failure which could be categorized as non-linguistic problems like deficiency in using communication strategies or problems with cultural differences were deleted from our study.

The other important point was that the study participants hadn't had much English language learning background at the time of their arrival in the landing English-speaking country and their knowledge of language was very basic. This was checked in the initial interview by making sure that the selected individuals didn't have any prior academic education and the maximum degree they held was high-school diploma. Also, the kind of job they had was not one which needed communication with English speakers. Moreover, they hadn't travelled abroad before their immigration process and also they hadn't taken any serious courses in English language prior to their immigration. The reason for adopting such general preliminary steps in our sampling procedures was to directly enter language deficiency into our study as the independent variable, while controlling other intervening variables such as cultural misunderstanding or lack of communication strategies.

The other criterion for choosing our research participants was that at the time of their landing, they had to socialize with the native speakers of English language in those communities at a functional level whether for daily and occupational purposes or for some office works such as opening bank accounts or pursuing official immigration procedures in the administration system of the landing country.

To narrow down the study, it was checked in the initial interview if communication failure happened merely with English native speakers or it also happened with other immigrants. To narrow and specify the scope of the study,

only those who faced communication problems with native speakers of English were included in the interview.

The result of our sampling procedure was that 24 study participants, 13 men and 12 women, bearing the characteristics that were mentioned above were randomly selected form the data-base of the immigration office. The participants' time period of staying in the landing country ranged between 4 to 8 months. At this stage, an in-depth interview in Persian language was carried out with the twenty five study participants, in which they were asked to talk about the failure they faced at the beginning of their communication with English native speakers and the kinds of feelings they experienced as a result of such failing effort (Appendix 1). The questions of the interview were designed in a way to maximally elicit the type of feelings, thoughts and reflections that the research participants had with respect to their failing experience in L2 communication.

To make the study feasible, the study participants were also expected to answer and reflect on the questions in the interview in Persian so that lack of ability to use English language and to express their feelings and thoughts in English would not damage our investigation.

The analysis of the data obtained from the interview could open up the window towards the impact linguistic communication failure could have on a learner's perception of his individual and social identity.

Data Analysis and Discussions

In order to investigate the kinds of feelings L2 users associate with failure in L2 communication in the L2 context, an in-depth interview was designed to be as much reflective as possible of the influences the research participants received from their involvement in L2 community and communication with the L2 native speakers, especially the linguistic aspect of such communication. Therefore, the interview was carried out in a way to thematize the situation as naturally as possible by helping the individuals remember what exactly happened at their communication effort with L2 native speakers, and what happened after communication failed to fulfill the intended need. To do so, the interviewer tried to be as cooperative and empathic as possible with the individuals under investigation like in case of psychological counseling group therapy. However, as we aimed to avoid group effect in our study and collect valid data about each individual case, the interview was performed individually with every single study participant.

A characteristic of the interview was that it did not exactly follow a fixed routine, and whenever necessary, the question was further focused in particular cases to reveal what really had happened to research subjects during and following communication failure. A very important point in the present study is that the questions of the interview were not aimed to be used as question-answer pairs, but they were designed as a tool to involve the research participants in their memory of their experience so that as much information as possible could be elicited form them. In other words, the tabulated responses

are in fact statements made by research participants during the interview and cannot be ascribed to special questions of the interview individually. The results of the interview with all individuals were transcribed and later tabulated and described based on Stryker's identity theory framework mentioned in the previous section to detect how individuals' identities could have been influenced by communication failure.

The identity theory framework utilized in the present study categorizes the concept of identity into five classes. Our task in the present study was to investigate how the results of the in-depth interview could fit the categories of identity theory. To do so, first the results of the interview were qualitatively analyzed and the types of feelings in each question were listed as follow. In order to preserve the validity of our study, much care was taken to include all episodes of feelings the research participants shared during the interview as part of their experience with failing communication. An analysis of the discourse that the participants produced as a reflection of what happened to them in the second language context provided us with lots of clues on how such an experience can influence a language learner as he enters the real second language context and as he feels that his ego is threatened by lack of communication ability in that milieu. The following are samples of the participants' reflections of their unsuccessful L2 communication experience, which were done in Persian language and we report their translation to English for our study purposes.

 "… first, I thought that I faced hearing problem because I couldn't understand even the sounds of what was said to me by a native speaker on the street as he was giving me directions to a clinic on one street in Los Angeles. …"

"… I felt I was somebody extra to that community, a second-rate citizen indeed, a person who cannot be hopeful to find his place in society. …"

"… I didn't belong to there. Why did I ever decide to immigrate to somewhere I didn't belong to? I felt stupid, so much stupid…."

"… I couldn't even make sure I could meet my immediate needs in case a dangerous thing might happen. I had never experienced fear in my life as deep as in that situation. The only escape from that fear was one of my neighbors who knew my language (Persian) and I could talk to her when I had a problem. But what if I faced a danger and she was not available? Now that I remember those first days of my stay there, I shiver in fear. …"

"… when I couldn't understand what they said, I felt totally disabled, like a paralyzed person who couldn't move…."

"… when I reviewed my failing experience of daily life in that community every evening, a strange feeling of sadness and loneliness captured me. …"

A classification of the types of expressions and episodes of feelings the participants stated as the most marked of the special experience they had with communication failure which mostly arose from lack of language proficiency is as follows. It is worth noticing that although these instances of feelings are not mutually exclusive and we can sometimes trace a fuzzy continuum which can

include two or even more of the following feelings, a categorization of the types of feelings in general can help us form a clearer picture and reach a better understanding of the mental states of the study participants. In other words, for the purpose of categorization and providing the ground for more clearly investigating the results of the interview, the details of the responses of the research participants were summarized to the following categories.

However to further validate our data-coding and make sure that our transfer of the data elicited from the interview was based on reality, the 15 tabulated types of feelings and reactions along with some distracters were formulated into a test which was administered with a time interval of one month to see if the research participants still pointed to the same kinds of feelings and reactions as those of what they had mentioned in the in-depth interview. To this end, the 15 observed cases along with 8 distracters were listed randomly and administered to the research participants who were asked to rank the feelings and reactions based on their experience with communication failure. The responses to the test by research participants were compatible with their responses to the interview questions since for all the participants, the top ranks were allocated to the types of feelings which they had mentioned in the interview.

In the following table on the left column, the types of reactions research participants shared as consequent feelings related to their experience with failure in L2 communication have been tabulated. On the right column, the type of category that each feeling is related to is mentioned.

Table 1. *Feeling Types Resulting from Failure in Communication and the Identity Category Affected*

The episodes of feelings associated with linguistic communication failure	The category of identity to be affected by the feeling
1. Feeling of alienation	• Shared meaning premise
2. Feeling at loss of communication skills even in L1	• Actor/ Reactor premise
3. Feeling of loss of ability to understand events beyond language and losing one's place in the world.	• Self-conception by the others premise+ Self-conception by the self premise
4. Lack of willingness to continue communication with L2 native speakers	• Shared meaning premise
5. Deciding to seek for Iranian community	• Shared meaning premise
6. Choosing a place of residence as far apart as possible from L2 native-speakers.	• Self-conception by the others premise
7. Feeling weak: evaluation and devaluation of the self	• Self-conception by the self premise
8. Feeling of being a second-rate citizen	• Self-conception by the others premise resulting in Self-conception by the self premise
9. Feeling doubt about their IQ level (They believed that they were not as intelligent as they thought up to that time.): evaluation and devaluation of the self	• Self conception by the self premise
10. Feeling insecure	• Situation premise
11. Feeling shame	• Situation premise
12. Feeling devalued and losing social agency	• Self-conception by the others premise
13. Feeling regretful about losing chance to learn the language before moving (active role & agency)	• Actor/ Reactor premise
14. Feeling regretful about immigration or travel to the new environment	• Situation premise + Actor / reactor premise

As it can be observed, based on the findings of our research interview, the types of feelings that the research participants face correspond with the five categories of identity recognized by identity theory. The relationship between the types of feelings with the categories is a bilateral relationship in that each of the feelings can influence the corresponding identity category and at the same time, be influenced and even be caused by that special category.

Another point about the corresponding relationship between the observed feelings in the research participants and the stratified categories of identity is that in most cases, the observed feeling or experience can be recognized as being associated with more than one category. For example, in case of the category of situation premise which states that human action and interaction are critically shaped by definitions or interpretations of the situations of action and interaction, almost all observed cases seem to have some link to this category in some way. Moreover, there are observed cases which are primarily associated with one category, but also marginally influenced by or influencing other categories as well. However, for ease of categorization and matter of feasibility, for each feeling of the research participants, the most obvious category of identity is recognized to provide a clear picture of the type of relationship between the instances of feelings and the relevant category of identity.

In order to investigate the reasons for the types of feelings encountered by study participants, we need to touch upon different dimensions of language learning and use in society. An important fact behind language acquisition and language use is that such a process and activity is necessarily a social phenomenon to the point that some scholars call it "language socialization" which entails two aspects. On one hand, we have socialization through the use of language and on the other hand, we have socialization to use the language (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1986). On one point, we have socialization as an end and on the other, we deal with socialization as the means.

When language comes to play as a phenomenon flowing in the social channel and projecting onto issues such as culture, identity and social discourse (discourse in its wide-ranging and all-inclusive concept), we can understand that language both encodes culture and is employed by culture in contextually sensitive ways – what Silverstein (2004) refers to as the language-culture nexus.

Although a second language learner and user has already possessed an identity which is associated with his first language, it does not mean that he is not in need of developing a second language identity when he is trying to learn that language, because language, whether being first or second, cannot be split from the social context and the consequent identity generated and allocated by that context (Atkinson, 2011). There is a desire in language users to be associated with other members of that language community, and such a desire is the very important driving force at the core of language socialization process.

Items 1 of the table of data drawn from the interview shows that when an L2 learner or user fails to communicate with L2 native speakers in the L2 socio-cultural milieu, a sense of lack of belonging to that society emerges in his mind. The lack of belonging stems from the fact that the meaning system between the individual and the new society are not in harmony with each other. According to Stryker's symbolic interactionist framework (Stryker, 1980), the definitions and interpretations of action are based on shared meanings developed in the course of interaction with others. Such lack of shared meaning system leads to alienation which means that the person does not recognize himself a legitimate member of that society and hence, is deprived of the immediate society to provide him with the new identity reference (Stryker, 1908). Such a negative feeling will lead to failure in developing an L2 identity which is prerequisite to the language socialization process.

Item 2 of the table alluded to the fact that sometimes, lack of success in L2 communication as a second language (in L2 environment) renders the feeling in unsuccessful L2 user that he has also lost some of his ability of communication in L1. The reason for such a feeling is that an adult has always been able to communicate his feelings and ideas based on his immediate needs in his native community. In other words, usually, a healthy normal adult has no experience, at any point of his social life, of not being understood by the people of his community as far as the surface layer meaning of his messages have been concerned. Such an experience threatens the actor/reactor principle of identity which recognizes the possibility of choice as a ubiquitous feature of human existence. At the same time, however, identity theory recognizes the sociological truth that social structure and social interaction are equally ubiquitous in constraining human action (Borgatta & Montgomery, 2000). Usually, a failing communicative experience in L2 is also the first experience of communication failure of any kind which has mental influences beyond the limitation of L2. Undoubtedly such a bitter experience has some implications for the person's mental state, both socially and psychologically and undoubtedly can initiate identity crisis both in L2 and consequently, as we discussed, for L1. According to sociocultural approaches to language acquisition, identity formation is a contingent process involving dialectic relations between learners and various worlds and experiences they inhabit (Tajfel, 1981). As far as L2 context is concerned, if an individual's emotional needs are not met by their identification with a particular group, that person may change his group affiliation. Such an effect is so marked that some theoreticians even talk of ethno linguistic identity theory in which language is posited as a prominent marker of group membership in that a change in affiliation involves linguistic adaptation resulting in subtractive bilingualism or even language erosion (Brown, 1994).

Another reason for response item 2 of the table is that one aspect of any L2 acquisition process is the emergence of an inner speech. Findings in

psycholinguistics show that as an L2 acquirer is trying to adopt the L2 and its sociocultural features, the L1 inner speech starts to cease functioning while the L2 inner speech has to emerge (Holliday *et al* ,2004). At such shoulder stage of L2 development, the L2 acquirer has no way of organizing and making sense of his experiences. If the acquisition process does not become successful, the L2 acquirer may feel that he is living in a split world where the signifier, in Saussurian terms, has become severed from the signified. This crisis will be followed by disability to describe the world around oneself where the new language in one's mind lacks in the power to refer to any conceptual system or experience to back them up. The very serious crisis may emerge when, according to Holliday *et al* (2004), inability in L2 to intimately name the world (both inner and outer) is accompanied by a deterioration process of the same ability in the native language.

For item 3 of the table, a relevant point for consideration is that according to Hymes (1972), language is not at all limited to sounds and morpho-syntactic structures, but extends to matters of pragmatics and discourse, identity being one aspect relating to them. Such a social shift in language studies has been so raised that social psychologists even talk of developmental pragmatics. In a study, Baquadeno-Lopez (1997) pointed that identity is effectively socialized as a consequence of language choice. In fact, what we have with respect to identity is the process of identity construction which is never the work of a single individual but a process of creating identity by using language that constitutes one's membership in social categories such as gender, class or rank, profession, ethnicity and sexual preference. This feature is in line with self-conception by the others premise (Stryker, 1980) which states that like other meanings, self- images are shaped in the course of interaction with others and are the outcomes of others' responses to the person. However, also some basic aspects of identity are constructed by the self. Such self-construction can be more understood when a person deals with answering the very basic question of "who am I?" According to Young (2008), the interaction between the social identity construction and self's construction is termed as identity co-construction, which results from resistance to ascribed identity and identity confusion. To that end, linguistic forms and interactional patterns are selected by a speaker in response to the identity or identities that the speaker perceives in the audience. An individual speaker creates identity with the linguistic and interactional forms that are employed in the discourse (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Based on such assumptions, language use in its social context is the association of language with the person's sense of self. In fact, there is a natural connection between the language spoken by members of a social group and that group's identity through the type of accent, vocabulary and discourse patterns applied by the members of that group.

Based on the items 4 and 5 of the tabulated data, lack of willingness to continue communication with L2 native speakers and deciding to seek for Iranian community can be explained based on the fact that, according to Schuman (1978), the unsuccessful L2 user feels distant to the L2 sociocultural community due to lack of understanding which results from communication failure. This phenomenon is in line with the shared meaning premise of identity theory where the absence of a shared meaning system can directly threaten identity formation in an individual. Since the unsuccessful L2 user is far away from the L1 environment, his innate L1 identity, if it is playing any functional role at all in such a dilemma, is limited to the very basic personal features many of which genetically and neurologically (naturally) determined (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). At this point, the unsuccessful L2 user has no other way except for seeking for his L1 community in the landing country. The crisis will arise when there is no access to L1 community in the immediate environment, or in case it does, it lacks what Schumann (1978) terms enough cohesiveness and power to enclose that person as a member.

Accordingly, based on the item 6 of the tabulated responses to the research interview, when accessing L1 speaker community is not feasible, or is not effective enough to provide the individual with necessary social and mental support, the person feels no choice but to choose a place of residence as far apart as possible from L2 native-speakers. Such a decision will further lead to being alone and deprived of social contacts which will further lead to identity crisis and sense of loneliness. This reaction is in harmony with situation premise which states that Human action and interaction are critically shaped by definitions or interpretations of the situations of action and interaction. In fact, the situation of not accessing a compatible social context imposes itself on the individual to select isolation as a new mode of life.

With respect to item 7 of the table of data elicited from the research participants, the reason for feeling of weakness and inferiority can be traced and understood with respect to the self-conception by the self premise of the identity theory which states that the meanings which persons attribute to their self-conceptions are especially critical to the process of identity-formation producing their action and interaction. In other words, when the agentive role of a participant in a society is threatened, the whole identity-development process will be negatively influenced. Elsewhere, the more recent identity studies in the field of SLA by Norton (2000) which focus mostly on qualitative studies of the concepts of power and L2 use and communication state that learner's identity influences motivation and acquisition of a second language. She believes that there is a high integration between the language learner and language learning context. In fact, based on Faucault's ideas (1980), we can say that power does not operate only at the macro-level of powerful institutions, but also the micro-level of everyday social encounters which are inevitably produced within language (Norton, 2000).

Elsewhere, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) talked about the concept of "cultural capital" and the "right to speak" in which he underscored the relation between identity and symbolic power. Bourdieu and Faucault's notions of power translate to the notion of "investment" in Norton's terms which characterizes the complex motives and desires that language learners have vis-à-vis a target language. According to Norton, if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital (Norton, 2000).

Item 8 of the responses pointed that unsuccessful L2 user feels as being a second-rate citizen of the L2 community. The reason for such a feeling is that such an L2 user feels at loss of agency in the world which could have been constructed through linguistic means and discourse. When the individual cannot understand or make his message understood by other members of the society, he feels that at least in the most basic feature of that society which is language, he is not capable of functioning correctly as a legitimate social member (Norton, 2000). Therefore the person's felt membership to that society shall be under doubt by him. In fact loss of agency is not only about severing one's union with the world inhabited by others. It is, and perhaps more profoundly so, about losing connection to one's own inner world- the world of mind (Holliday *et al* ,2004). Therefore the categories of identity involved in such feeling is Self-conception by the others premise resulting in self-conception by the self premise.

In a similar way, Item 9 of the responses refers to the bitter experience of inequality from two aspects. Firstly, the L2 user believes that he is not able to understand L2 speech which is normally expected to be understood by a normal citizen of that community who enjoys very normal level of IQ. Secondly, he feels that he is not able to make others understand what he means. In either way, a sense of inferiority and even lack of enough intelligence and also a sense of social immaturity imposes itself upon the individual. Here, it is not very important if that person enjoys high level of IQ or not. What is important and influential is the very feeling that the person associates with his failure in communication. In fact, the felt inferiority, both at the social and mental level, plays its destructive role whether it is real or not (Clarke, 1976). Such effect on the individual shall target the self-conception by the self premise of the identity theory which results in devaluation of the self and one's capabilities. Undoubtedly, feeling of inferiority of such type which determines a person's level of intelligence as being lower than the average level will cause an individual to feel being incapable of functioning as an effective member of a society, especially in an L2 context.

To explain items 10 and 11 of the table, L2 acquisition has been recognized by some psychologists as being associated with schizophrenia in which social encounters become inherently threatening and defense mechanisms are employed

to reduce the trauma (Clarke, 1976). This is compatible with Stryker's situation premise of identity theory (Stryker, 1980). In fact, the threatening condition resulting from feeling ashamed and insecure leads the unsuccessful L2 user to develop a resistance mechanism in his social encounters and even decide to avoid L2 community membership process. Looking back at the acculturation process (Brown, 1994; Larson & Smalley, 1972) as proceeding through four stages of euphoria, culture shock, culture stress and assimilation (adaptation), we can understand from the results of the interview that linguistic failure in communication (failure stemming from linguistic weakness rather than sociocultural distance or pragmatic understanding) forces the L2 user psychologically to feel being an incompetent member of the L2 sociocultural community. Therefore, he subconsciously refrains from passing through the four stages of acculturation and hence, identity development, which is in large part the result of language socialization and an outcome of going through the developmental procedure per se, will fail flourishing at the very beginning stage and hence becomes impotent.

Item 12 of the table of observed feelings in the research participants tells us that they feel devalued when they cannot communicate with L2 native speakers effectively. This experience is compatible with the self-conception by the others premise of the identity theory. According to this theory, being valued as a social member is a prerequisite for identifying and socializing with any community (Stryker, 1980). Such a value emanates from and contributes to social agency which is a significant component of language socialization as well as pragmatic and discourse development (Atkinson, 2011). The feeling of inferiority resulting from failure in communication emanates from the fact that an individual's identity in L2 context is mediated by the reactions of others to that individual's social and cultural position (Vygotsky, 1962). A very important point which is relatively new is that sometimes, there is a gap between L2 native speakers' reaction to unsuccessful L2 user and what the L2 user feels about the reactions of those native speakers to such failure. This means that even if the reaction of native speakers to an unsuccessful L2 user is not that much negative, the L2 user interprets their reactions as being highly negative on his part, which is the result of threatened identity stemming from communication failure and also the very threatening L2 acquisition experience. An attempt to sound native-like by many successful L2 users is to guarantee the factor of being valued by the L2 speakers in the social context.

Items 13 and 14 of the table tell us about how the L2 user evaluates his whole plan of immigration and the steps he has taken as the preliminary stages for such a plan. Among such preliminary stages are to study and learn the L2 before moving to the L2 speaking country. The relationship between feeling of regret for doing a plan and identity is clear in that first of all, feeling regretful is among negative feelings that can harm a person psychologically and destroy his motivation and self-esteem (Brown, 1994). Also, according to Tajfel

(1981), human-being have unconscious knowledge of the preliminaries for developing new identity in the new society they enter. This means that when a person cannot effectively socialize in a new social context and hence cannot develop an identity compatible with that society, he starts to review the root of such a failure consciously or subconsciously. As identity formation requires that persons be placed as social objects by having others assign a positional designation to them and that the persons accept that designation (Stryker 1968), such feeling of regret with regard to immigration process can further damage the ability to socialize and develop new identity in L2 contex.

In general, since identity is not a unitary level of actualization, learners as human individuals always reorganize a sense of who they are and how they are related to the social world. Similarly, based on post-structuralist views, language is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols, but also a complex social practice through which relationships are defined, negotiated and resisted (Weedon, 1997). As Weedon the post-structuralist philosopher points out, language is the place where our sense of selves, our subjectivity, is constructed. A characteristic of subjectivity is the role the concept of power plays in such a notion. The post-structuralist notion of subjectivity means that the individual is considered to be diverse, contradictory, dynamic and changing over historical time and social space (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

When a communication failure happens and continues to happen in L2 context, the reorganization process of identity-reshaping is disturbed and the process of L2 identity construction which is an essential part of L2 socialization will be threatened. The outcome of frequent failure to communicate is nothing but a feeling of alienation, lack of power and agency, disorientation, loneliness and detachment from the immediate society (L2 society here), loss of societal legitimacy to function as an individual member, culture shock and even depression, which altogether both initiate identity crisis and are caused by the first feeling of identity loss. In other words, there is a two-way relationship between identity crisis and all those negative socio-psychological states listed.

Conclusion

The acquisition of a second language is a challenging and threatening social experience in which the individual can be highly influenced both socially and psychologically. Any failure in the use of language and communication in the L2 environment can negatively influence the L2 acquirer even with respect to identity. The interesting point is that failure in second language learning and use not only disturbs the formation of L2 identity as a necessary stage of language socialization, but it can also threaten the L1 identity of an individual by damaging a person's self-esteem and sense of belonging to the immediate environment and society.

References

Atkinson, D. (2011). *Alternative approaches to second language acquisition*, Routledge.

Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin, TX: Texas University Press.

Baquadeno-Lopez, P. (1997). Creating social identities through doctrina narratives. *Issues in Applied Linguistics, 8*(1), 27-45

Benwell, B. & Stokoe, E. (2006). *Discourse and identity,* Edinburgh University Press Ltd.

Borgatta, E. F. & Montgomery, R. J. V. (2000). *Encyclopedia of sociology. (2nd ed.).* Macmillan Reference USA.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). The economics of linguistic exchanges. *Social Science Information*, *16*(6), 645–668.

Brown, H. D. (1994). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ:Prentice-Hall.

Burke, P. J., & Jon, W. H. (1988). Identity and sex-race differences in educational and occupational aspirations formation. *Social Science Research, 17,* 29–47.

Burke, P. J., & Donald, C. R. (1981). The link between identity and role performance. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 44,* 83–92.

Burke, P. J., & Judy, T. (1977). The measurement of role/identity. *Social Forces,55,*880–897.

Clarke, M. A. (1976). Second language acquisition as a clash of consciousness. *Language Learning, 26,* 377-390

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972–1977* (C. Gordon, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.

Holliday, A. & Hyde, M & Kullman, J. (2004). Inter-cultural communication. Routledge.

Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride and J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics,* (pp. 269-93). Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Larson, D. N., & Smalley, W.A. (1972). *Becoming bilingual: A guide to language learning*. New Canaan, CN: Practical Anthropology

Mackey, A. & Gass, S. M. (2012). *Research methods in second language acquisition*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Ochs, E. (1988). *Culture and language development: Language acquisition and language socialization in a Samoan Village.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lacan, J. (1977). *Écrits a Selection*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Lee, J. D. (1998). What Kids Can 'Become' Scientists? The effects of gender, self- concepts, and perceptions of scientists. *Social Psychology Quarterly 61*:199–219.

Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Harlow:Pearson Education.

Pavlenko, A. & Blackledge, A. (2004). *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Schieffelin, B. & Ochs, E. (1986). Language socialization. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *15,* 163-191

Schumann, J. H. (1978). *The pidginization process: A model for second language acquisition. Rowley, MA*: Newbury House

Sparks, P & Richard, S. (1992). Self-Identity and the theory of planned behavior: Assessing the role of identification with 'Green Consumerism. *Social Psychology Quarterly 55*:388–399.

Serpe, R. T. & Sheldon, S. (1987). The construction of self and the reconstruction of social Relationships. In J. Edward Lawler and Barry Markovsky, (Eds.), *Advances in group processes* (pp. 191-205). Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press.

Silverstein, M. (2004). "Culture" concepts and the language-culture nexus. *Current Anthropology*, *45* (5), 621-652

Stryker, S. (1980). *Symbolic interactionism: A Social structural version*. Menlo Park, Calif.: Benjamin/Cummings.

Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and language.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). London: Blackwell.

Young, R. F. (2008). *Language and interaction.* Routledge.

Zizek, S. (1996). *The indivisible remainder*. London: Verso.

Appendix

The questions of the interview

The questions of the interview focusing on the experience of linguistic communication failure

1. How long did you stay in the English-speaking country?

2. Who was the first person you had to communicate to on your arrival in that country? How did it go on?

3. What was the topic of communication in that first conversation?

4. What was your first failing experience in L2 conversation there? Who was your conversationalist and what was the topic of the talk?

5. What was the exact reason for failing in communicating with that person?

6. Was the person who you were talking to supportive? Did he try to help you in conveying you message?

7. What was your worst experience with communication failure? What were the immediate consequences? Did a material loss or inconvenience follow or was the consequence limited to a mere feeling of shame? How were your exact feelings when you found out your misunderstanding or miscommunicating? What were the words you were telling yourself when communication failure happened?

8. Are you ready to repeat the same experience? Why? In what case do you feel the gust to face a similar situation?

9. Do you think if the conversationalist in the failing experience were more congenial and supportive, you wouldn't have the bitter feeling that you have now?

10. What did you have to do before immigrating which could possibly prevent such an event? Are you sure those measures could help?

11. When communication failure happened, did you try to remedy it right at the same time?

12. What hindered you from trying the same conversation right at that time?

13. What hindered you from trying to learn the language while you were staying in that country?

14. Who were you mostly ashamed of?

15. When you wanted to communicate with English native speakers, did you prefer to be alone or with your family?

16. As a rough estimate, how many communication efforts did you have during your stay and how many of them failed?