

# Negotiation of Identity in Second Language Socialization

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## 1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, the relationship between gender and language has been focused, influenced by *feminist poststructuralist approaches* to the study of language and gender (Cameron, 1992, 1996, 1997b, 1998) and to the study of second language learning and multilingualism (Peirce, 1995; Notron, 2000). Since then, many researchers have examined the issues and dilemmas faced by people who cross national and cultural boundaries as adults and (re)consider their own gendered identities (Ogulnick 1998; Pavlenko, 2001; Peirce 1995; Piller, 2001; Price, 1996; Siegal, 1994, 1996). Moreover, the study of gender in terms of immigrant experiences has been focused under the influence of feminist and post modernist reconceptualizations of history and sociology (Pavlenko, 2001).

Furthermore, in the area of second language learning (SLL), the view that SLL can be seen as the struggle for participation was informed by sociohistorical and social constructionist theories. Especially, the concept of *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998) has presented a very useful framework for research on multilingualism, second language learning, and gender. Learning is viewed as socialization, or a situated process of participation in particular communities of practice, which may entail the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context (Wenger, 1998). The concept of communities of practice makes it possible for us to focus on the learning process, to examine ways in which gender mediates access to various practices, and to theorize the gender-based marginalization of particular community members (Pvlenko & Piller, 2001). This makes it possible to focus on gender as an important construct in analyzing immigrants' and expatriates' experiences of learning language. It is the speech communities that produce gendered styles, while individuals make accommodations to those styles in the process of producing themselves as gendered subjects (Cameron 1996). From the perspective of gender, the speech communities have great influence on how women should behave.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how female second language learners transform their identity as they seek to obtain new gendered subject positions in the new community as immigrants or expatriates. More specifically, this paper focuses on changes in the discursive performance of gender in the process of second language socialization. First, this paper shows the theoretical background in Section 2. Then it discusses discursive practice and gendered identity, focusing on a higher and lower pitched voice in Section 3. Narrative of immigrant and expatriate language memoirs are analyzed from the gender perspective in Section 4. Then, discursive performance of gender in second language socialization is discussed in Section 5. Final section concludes this paper.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Gender as a system of social relations

*Feminist poststructuralist approaches*, outlined by Cameron (1992, 1997b) and Weedon (1987), have contributed to investigating the role of language in the production of gender relations, and the role of gender dynamics in language learning and use. Gender can be viewed as a system of social relations and discursive practices, which has significant implications for both the 'gender' and the 'language' (Pavlenko & Piller, 2001). Furthermore, focusing on gender as an important construct in analyzing immigrants' experiences is meaningful because the construct of gender cannot be separated from other constructs such as race, ethnicity and class. They are intertwined in an individual's identity. In addition, "remembering the narratives of women of color" (Ruiz, 2008) has significant meaning in understanding what have actually happened to them in terms of cultural contact and transformation. Immigrants or expatriates have had the unique experiences. It means that they contacted the different cultural norm in the new community and have been required to assimilate into it if they wanted to be full participants of the community.

### 2.2. Gendered agency and second language learning

Many SLL theories have viewed the second language (L2) learners as passive vessels for input and output (Pavlenko, 2001). However, poststructuralist approaches portray L2 learners as agents in charge of their own learning. The study of multilingualism, SLL, and gender has revealed the intrinsic relationship between gender and agency—i.e., individual decisions and actions—in the process of L2 learning and use (Pavlenko & Pillar, 2001). When L2 users attempt to

develop proficiency in the language and gain acceptance in the culture, they must often decide for themselves how willing they are to follow those practices used by native speakers (L1 users) to express gender in the target culture. (Ohara, 2001).

Transformations of gender performance can be analyzed with a language socialization perspective, which views second language learning as an essentially social process. More specifically, the language socialization perspective sees the relationship between the learner and the learning context as dynamic and constantly changing (Peirce, 1995). If we view identities as dynamic, fluid, multiple, and socially constructed, we can demonstrate that linguistic and cultural transitions of immigrants and expatriates represent a meaningful and fertile site for exploring and problematizing the relationship between language, gender, and identity (Pavlenko, 2001).

### 2.3. Participation in the community

As mentioned in the previous section, from the language socialization perspective, immigrants' second language learning should be perceived as an essentially social process. As Goldstein (2001) points out, "One way people create and maintain a particular social identity and reality in interaction is through the language or language variety they choose to use with others" (p. 82). If one is an immigrant to the new community in which social or cultural norm is different from her/his own native country, in other words, bilingual or multilingual, the expression of social identity may be through the use of one language over another language according to particular obligations and expectations. They attach the language to different social roles and relationships they assume in everyday interaction. In that sense, the concept of the participation in the community is critical in analyzing the discourse—what kind of community one is assigned to and what kinds of roles they are expected in that community.

## **3. Discursive practice and gendered identity: a higher or lower pitched voice**

This section focuses on the Japanese second language learners who have studied English in an American university. From the perspective of the second language users, new femininity is often connected to new ways of self-expression (Pavlenko, 2001). They may choose either to assimilate or to resist to new speech community. Ohara (1992, 1997) analyzed the voice pitch levels of Japanese L1 speakers who possessed high proficiency in English, focusing on pitch and

gendered identity. The participants of her study were Japanese female and male students studying at a university in the U.S. The results showed that females produced a higher-pitched voice, when speaking in Japanese than in English while males did not alter their pitch level across languages (Ohara, 1992, 1997). Ohara attributes this difference to cultural constraints. A feminine image is expected to present through a high-pitched voice in Japanese society. However, when they speak in English, they produce a lower-pitched voice. Japanese female students know that a high-pitched voice is not required to present a feminine image in the U.S. culture. They discriminate the pitch according to the language they use. They respond to the new gender ideologies and discursive practices in speaking English, even though they have kept their internalized gendered discursive practices when they speak Japanese.

In sum, Ohara (1992, 1997) demonstrated that a high-pitched voice is a resource for projecting femininity in Japanese culture. She also showed that their voice pitch levels point to a certain degree of awareness of the difference between the social meanings attached to voice pitch in the two cultures (Ohara, 2001). This means that language is interlocking with gender. More specifically, Ohara showed that female native speakers of Japanese effectively deal with this cultural difference by using lower-pitch levels when speaking English. In Japanese society, certain social values are attached to a high-pitched voice, and Japanese female students recognize the role of gender as important factor when they speak their native language. However, when they speak English, they don't have to categorize themselves according to gender because such an incentive does not exist for the speaker of different varieties of English (Ohara, 2001).

According to Pavlenko (2001), many women using English as a second language consider "English as the language that gives them enough freedom to be the kind of women they would like to be" (p. 147). Many second language users in the corpus in her study "perceive English as liberating" (Pavlenko, 2001, p. 145). As Ohara (1992, 1997) shows, it can be said that Japanese female university students studying English feel liberated from the imposed gendered role when they speak English, but they cannot escape from their own native language and gendered identity.

## 4. Narrative of immigrant and expatriate language memoirs

### 4.1. The meaning of first-person narratives in L2 language socialization

In second language (L2) learning, linguistic and cultural transitions of immigrants and expatriates represent a meaningful and fertile site for exploring and problematizing the relationship between language, gender, and identity (Pavlenko, 2001). Narrative of immigrant, ethnic, and expatriate language memoirs give us significant clues in answering the questions: How have second language learners negotiated and transformed gender performances? In other words, personal narratives help us analyze possible stages in the process of the negotiation of gender identities in second language socialization (Pavlenko, 2001). The main analytical concept used to analyze the data in Pavlenko's (2001) study is "*positioning*, which is the process by which individuals are situated as observably and subjectively coherent participants in the story lines" (p. 139). The process of self-positioning is seen as closely linked to the following two: (a) ways in which dominant ideologies of language and gender position the narrators, and (b) ways in which the narrators internalize or resist these positionings. Moreover, the two aspects of positioning are emphasized in Pavlenko (2001)'s study: (c) the multiplicity of subject positions occupied by an individual at any given moment, and (d) their temporality, whereby identity work is seen as an ongoing process. The critical point is that these concepts can help researchers to analyze what happens to a self when an individual moves from participation in the discursive practices of one culture, in this case, the native culture, to those of another culture (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). The memories of bicultural bilinguals constitute a rich, compelling, and informative source of evidence about the process of adult second language learning (Pavlenko, 1998).

In sum, analysis of first-person narratives as legitimate data can contribute to widening the space within second language research. In other words, first person L2 learning narratives help researchers to examine how gender subjectivities, shaped by ideologies of language and gender, may be questioned, challenged, negotiated, and restructured in the process of second language socialization (Pavlenko, 2001).

### 4.2. Negotiation of identity in second language socialization

This section examines how female immigrants and expatriates have engaged in negotiation of identity in second language socialization. The question is

whether female immigrants and expatriates experience changes of ideologies and discursive practices in terms of gender in the new community, where gender norm is different from their own home country. This section especially focuses on the relation between the ideologies of gender in the learner's community of origin and the repositioning of themselves in the new community. For that purpose, this section focuses on two authors: (a) a Japanese-English bilingual Kyoko Mori, and (b) temporary expatriate, American scholar Karen Ogulnick.

#### 4.2.1. The narrative of a Japanese-English bilingual: Kyoko Mori

This section focuses on the narrative of a Japanese-English bilingual Kyoko Mori. A Japanese-American writer, Kyoko Mori, who fled Japan at the age of twenty, describes her relocation to America as an escape from the restrictions of Japanese women's language and from the gender roles. She attempted to become a native speaker of her second language, English. Mori (2000) describes the gap between her perceived ideal identity and the gender role imposed on her in the Japanese society. She states, "There was no future in Japan for a woman from my upper-middle class milieu who wanted to be a writer more than she wanted to be a nice suburban homemaker" (p. 139). According to Mori (1997), she continued to "feel unsafe in Japan because of the way women are embarrassed or pressured into silence" (p. 243). This shows one of the aspects of gender discourse which dominated her first language, Japanese, putting pressure on women into silence. Mori had the negative attitudes toward gender ideologies and discursive practices of speech community in Japan since she perceived them as hierarchical and demeaning. Mori was aware of the relationship between this internalized sense of oppression and her native language, especially with the experiences of being forced to use particular forms of politeness in her childhood. She decided to leave Japan and to go to the U.S. Mori (2000) wrote, "The day I left Japan, I knew that I would never go back there to live. There was no future in Japan for a woman ..." (p. 139). Learning English for Mori means escaping gender relations and gendered linguistic practices of Japanese culture. The narrative shows that Mori has chosen English as the language that gives her enough freedom to be the kind of woman she would like to be. In that sense, she intended to use English as a language of empowerment. This means that differences in gender relations between particular speech communities may motivate individuals—oftentimes women—to learn a second language which will ensure them a higher, more respectable social and economic status (Gal, 1978; McDonald, 1994).

The question is whether learning a second language actually has made Mori have the feeling of liberation for a female immigrant in the new community in

the U.S. Mori escaped from Japan and studied in the university in the U.S. Even though she has been successful as a writer in the U.S., she encountered with the questions, reminding her as outsiders:

A few months ago in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, a librarian asked me if I felt “more and more American these days.” *I’ve lived here for twenty-two years*, I thought. The question was particularly disappointing because we were at an annual convention of the Wisconsin Library Association, where I had been invited to read my work as a Wisconsin author—my graduate degrees are from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee—and I now live and write in Green Bay. (Mori, 2000: 138)

Mori has still been treated as an outsider after twenty-two year stay in America. Mori escaped from the gendered expectation imposed upon her as a daughter in the upper-middle class in Japan, where becoming a home-maker was considered to be the best way for women. Even though she escaped from that kind of gender norm, she had to face the ethnic categorization as a woman of color. Her academic background and the profession as a writer were not suitable enough for the librarian to acknowledge her as *an American*. Mori felt frustrated by the fact that she was still considered to be a foreigner being treated as not fully American. Mori (2000) responded to the question:

“I don’t know what it means for anyone to feel *American or un-American*. I’m not sure if *feeling American* is something that happens to people in degrees, as in *more and more*.” The question made me defensive for the same reason that another often-asked question does: “When you first came to this country from Japan, what was the hardest thing for you to adjust to?” When people ask these questions, there is something they want and expect to hear. The stories they are waiting for—of a brave but disadvantaged immigrant woman trying to understand an unfamiliar language, missing the custom and the foods of the homeland, overcoming one “culture shock” after another—having nothing to do with me. (Mori, 2000: 138-139)

Since her formal training as a writer took place in an American setting, she always considers herself as an American writer. She didn’t have to experience culture shock since her positioning was not in Japan where she had been expected to become a suburban housemaker, but it was in the U.S. where she thought her dream would come true. She positioned herself as an American

writer:

Because all of my formal training as a writer took place in an American setting, and because I only write in English, I always thought of myself as an American writer—a writer who has learned much from contemporary American literature and expects to be measured by its tradition. (Mori, 2000: 141)

However, even though she has been an American citizen since 1984, she had to encounter the question asking if she feels American. “As an adult, I have never been or felt anything else” (Mori, 2000, p. 142). Her established identity as an American, however, has not been fully accepted in American society:

There have never been many people of color in any part of Green Bay. Most people are third- or fourth-generation European immigrants...though the people themselves may not be very aware of their own ethnic heritage. They came to think of themselves as having always been “American.” I don’t fit into these people’s preconceived notions about Asian women as war brides or refugees. (Mori, 2000: 142)

She has to suffer from the gap between who she thinks she is and the stereotype people have toward her. In Japan, Mori rebelled against “the male-dominated expectations and attitudes that underlay every marriage, family, and other personal relationships” (Mori, 2000, p. 143). Her dream has come true as a creative writer in the U.S., but she has to suffer the stereotype which positions her identity as someone who doesn’t fully belong to the new community. As Pavlenko (2001) suggests, “The workplace is another important site where gender is performed and negotiated discursively, and where negotiation may make a difference in one’s status”(p. 159). Mori’s narrative shows that even if a female Asian immigrant wants to become a full participant of the community, she won’t be fully accepted if the community itself rejects her or marginalizes her.

Furthermore, Mori’s narrative (2000) shows that as a result of second language socialization in adulthood, her performance of gender in the first language, Japanese, may no longer be seen as authentic for her. When she returned to Japan after nearly twenty years of residency in North America, she realized that she had no longer a Japanese voice. When she tried to participate in the discursive practices of her former native language, Japanese, she had to rely on her English, inner and social, voices. Mori’s narrative shows that she had lost



pragmatic competence in Japanese: "I was supposed to have been calculating the other person's age, rank, and position in order to determine how polite I should be for the rest of the conversation" (Mori, 1997, p. 10-11). The loss of her ability to perform a gendered identity in Japanese can be interpreted as resistance to such performance. She states, "In Japanese, I don't have a voice for speaking my mind" (Mori, 1997, p. 16). This can be interpreted that late or adult bilingualism requires agency and intentionality. The concepts of agency and intentionality play a critical role in analyzing the language socialization. And this decision may be influenced by various factors, including one's positioning in the native discourse and the power relations between the discourse involved (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). In Mori's case, she tried to escape from the Japanese discursive practices with gender role imposed. Then it was through intentional social interactions with members of the other culture, in her case, American culture that she tried to become an equal participant in new discursive spaces. Mori has continuously attempted to construct new meaning through new discourses, as a result she had lost her ability to perform a gendered identity in Japanese.

#### 4.2.2. The narrative of temporary expatriate: Karen Ogulnick

The narrative of temporary expatriate, American scholar Karen Ogulnick (1998), adds the new perspective to the issue of language, ethnicity and gender. She had gone through most of her life with very little conscious awareness of how gender was affecting what and how she was learning. After first being immersed in Japanese language and culture for two years, she experienced changes in the way she felt, acted, and perceived herself as a woman:

Since there are many different levels of politeness in Japanese, where one stands in the hierarchy in relation to whom one is speaking is more explicitly encoded in Japanese than in English. I became more aware of the role of social identity in communication, and that I was generally expected to defer to men.... My desire to be accepted and recognized as a speaker of Japanese overpowered any subconscious resistance I may have had to complying with what I perceived as submissive female behavior. (Ogulnick 1998: 135-136)

Ogulnick (1998) at times felt hurt and excluded from conversation by her Japanese friends. In learning the second language, Japanese, Ogulnick could not help but conform to the traditional gender role prescribed for Japanese women because of the social pressure. This shows that individuals choose a code that matches their identity desired or required in a given situation. This means that

language learning and language use is “a complicated task of discerning power structures within a social order and power hierarchy” (Siegal, 1996, p. 358). Ogulnick felt the necessity to change her mannerism and her identity according to the situation: “My experience replicates the strong internal sense I had when I first went to Japan, of wanting to find my place among a group of women, even if it meant having to change the way I looked, acted and spoke (Ogulnick, 1998, p. 105). She unconsciously allowed herself to speak *onna rashiku* [like a woman] in Japanese as a temporary expatriate in order to get Japanese friends:

The extent to which I was acquiring a Japanese feminine persona along with the language did not occur to me until I saw myself for the first time on a videotape, which had been recorded at the end of my 2<sup>nd</sup> year in Japan. ....I hardly recognized myself as the person who was sitting on her knees, speaking in a high-pitched tone of voice, and covering my mouth while giggling. What had happened then was mostly unconscious. (Ogulnick 1998: 136)

However, she showed the ambivalent feeling: “Conversely, I became more resistant to speaking ‘like a woman’ or, ‘pretty Japanese’, when I sensed that, by doing so, I was submitting to patriarchal control” (Ogulnick, 1998, p. 105). She had the ambivalent and complicated feeling toward L2 learning. She might have perceived the link between language and gender, so that she resisted new subjectivities and discursive performances.

Her narrative also shows half-assimilation and half-resistance (Pavlenko, 2001) as L2 learners. While she was practicing Japanese discursive assimilation, she realized that she herself has been imposed upon the gendered expectations in her home country. While Ogulnick stayed in Japan as a foreigner, studying Japanese and having learned how to speak *onna rashiku* [like a woman], she has become aware of the similar way of disempowering women, such as speak “like a woman” in English language and her native culture. This awareness made her think more deeply “how I had been socialized to be woman in my white, American, Jewish, working-class subculture” (Ogulnick, 1998, p. 136). She recalled her language and cultural socialization in her childhood:

Flashbacks to childhood experiences brought me back to times when I was controlled, punished, and sexually suppressed. ...thinking back to my own cultural socialization process. I recall the gender-polarizing ways I was taught how to speak act, and look like a girl. (Ogulnick, 1998: 33)

Ogulnick realized that the male dominance represented in language and thoughts was basically the same between Japanese society and American society even though language and its prescribed gender role appeared to be different. She wrote, "...by being aware of how I was learning Japanese, I was also learning the many subtle and not-so-subtle ways I had been taught to speak 'like a woman' in my native language and culture" (Ogulnick, 1998, p. 10). This shows that exposure to gendered discursive practices of Japanese made Ogulnick reflect back upon gendered discursive practices of English, which led her to realize that her native language itself was similarly disempowering for women. In other words, experiences of second language learning and use have made Ogulnick aware that her native country, America is not 'gender-free' heaven either. This awareness seems to have made Ogulnick think about freedom from discrimination in her own country:

For many Japanese individuals, going to the United States is an opportunity to escape from strong pressures to conform in a society in which people's identities are so powerfully shaped by the perceptions others have of them. But the Japanese who are entering the United States in search of freedom from discrimination must be troubled as we are imagined to be. (Ogulnick 1998: 106).

## **5. Discursive performance of gender in second language socialization**

When immigrants or expatriates try to participate in the new community, language mastery is required for assimilation in a new society. In the process of assimilation, immigrants or expatriates experience 'self-translation' (Pavlenko, 2001). In other words, they need the reinterpretations of their subjectivities in order "to position oneself in new communities of practice and to 'mean' in the new environment" (Pavlenko, 2001, p. 133). As Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) suggest, in one case the individuals undertake the construction of new identities, appropriate to the new surroundings, while in another they assume an overarching identity as non-native speakers--legitimate but marginal members of a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As Ohara (1992, 1997) shows, female native speakers of Japanese effectively deal with the cultural difference, responding to the new gender ideologies and discursive practices in speaking English, while keeping their internalized gendered discursive practices when they speak

Japanese.

Whether the subjects resist new social identities or not may depend on what kind of social identity the community required of them. This dilemma was illustrated in the narratives of immigrants or expatriates. The narratives of Mori (1997, 2000) and Ogulnick (1998) show the common characteristics in the process of second language socialization. First, both Mori and Ogulnick experienced questioning gender ideologies, especially interrogating the prevailing ideology of gender. As the result of border crossings, they gave deep insights into the relationship between language and identity. Moreover, they realized that they would not be able to assimilate to a particular community if the community marginalizes them as 'outsiders'. Facing new femininities, Mori tried to opt for assimilation to new ways of self-expression in English, while Ogulnick had been agonizing between half-assimilation and half-resistance, showing rather resistance to new subjectivities. It is because L2 language socialization process made Ogulnick question the gendered roles imposed on her both in her native language (English) and the second language (Japanese). It might have been through their own intentions and agency that Mori and Ogulnick decided to undergo or not undergo the agonizing process of linguistic, cultural, and personal transformation.

However, their own free choice should not be overemphasized in deciding their subjectivities since they are "co-constructed with others who can accept or reject them and impose alternative identities instead" (Pavlenko, 2001, p. 135). What this matter complicated is the power balance in the society. It is not just one's free choice how they position themselves in the new community; it is often others who define who they are (Pavlenko, 2001). In that case, one is forced to accept or refuse the required gendered roles. Since gender identity is constructed socially and culturally, Mori and Ogulnick had the opportunity to modify their previous gender identity according to the new social norm not by just the acceptance but by constant negotiation between themselves and outside factors.

This idea of constant negotiation is crucial in analyzing discursive performance of gender in second language socialization. Focusing on the transformation of gender performance, one's identity should not be considered as stable and fixed. It should be treated as dynamic, fluid, multiple, and socially constructed. Furthermore, the participation metaphor and the derivative metaphors of 'becoming' and 'border crossing' help us analyze second language learning in the perspective of not just about taking part in new cultural settings; it is about a profound struggle to reconstruct a self (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

## 6. Conclusion

The social constructionist theories help us analyze the issues and dilemmas faced by people who cross national and cultural boundaries as adults and (re) consider their own gendered identities. As the social constructionist view claims, identities do not exist within people but are constructed between them in interaction. Second language learning should be perceived as an essentially social process from the language socialization perspective. More specifically, particular obligations and expectations attach the language to different social roles and relationships in the community. In that sense, the concept of the participation in the community is meaningful in analyzing the discourse, focusing on what kinds of roles they are expected in that community. Gender performance, however, within the new community should not be considered to be fixed or predetermined. A transition to a different culture, a different society may involve a change in how one views and performs gender.

Furthermore, immigrants and expatriates who have experienced transitions between cultures face changes of ideologies, including various aspects such as discursive practices and gender identity. It is not simply ideologies of gender that are questioned in the narratives; gender is intertwined with other aspects such as race, ethnicity, class, and culture. As an agent, an individual has to go through the constant negotiation with the cultural norm or gender role in a particular society, trying to become a full participant in the new community. The critical point is that the identity is not stable but transformative, being reconstructed in communications with members of another discourse. In that sense, the social constructionist view helps reveal how individuals struggle to reconstruct themselves in the linguistic cross-over, illuminating an intentional renegotiation of one's own multiple identities.

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