Agency, identity, and second/foreign language education: The mediating role of investment

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The initiation of poststructuralist perspective toward identity in SLA by Norton Pierce (1995) firmly grounded by Firth and Wagner (1997) digressed the attitudes toward perceiving second/foreign language learning as a socially constructed experience while prioritizing emic perspectives of such process. Foreign language learners have also been viewed as socially situated beings enacting on the basis of their diverse needs, wants, and identities. One of the most challenging concepts in the poststructural perspective toward researching L2 learner identity is the concept of investment as opposed to the post-positivist account of motivation supported by psycholinguistic researchers. Defined as the ambivalent desire of the learners to develop a social and historical relationship to the process of L2 learning (Kalaja et al., 2015), investment has been treated as a reflection of Bourdieu’s (1977) capital metaphor, which might receive varying degrees of values depending on the social contexts. On the other hand, agency defined as “the sociocultural mediated capacity to act” (Ahearne, 2001, p. 112) points to the learners’ ways of making informed choices within the social context. The purpose of this presentation is to provide a critical overview toward the role of investment learners make in an educational setting as a major part of today’s social world in the development of their agency and identity. More specifically we will focus on the ways L2 learners invest their selves in exercising their agency and developing their identities. We will draw from ethnographic research informed by socio-cultural theories of L2 learning to show the contributory role of investment in agency, identity, and SFL education cycle and propose some practical procedures helpful to learners in directing and developing their identities through their investment in learning a language as a social experience.

Keywords: Agency, Identity, Investment.