The development of L2 identity among Anglophones during residence abroad

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To interpret variability in L2 learning success, there is increasing interest both in learner motivation, and in broader conceptualisations of L2 identity (Benson et al., 2013; Block, 2007; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). Identity theory itself has moved beyond a deterministic view of structural factors such as gender or nationality toward conceptualisations allowing a greater role for agency and self-identification.

This paper explores the emerging L2 identity during residence abroad of Anglophone (British) students of languages, a distinctive group who reject the prevailing ideology of English monolingualism. Efforts to encourage Anglophones both to study languages and/or to venture abroad, currently rely heavily on employability arguments (e.g. Hurley et al. 2016); such efforts need to be better informed about current sojourners’ motivations and identity.

The study reported tracked a group of 57 undergraduates, throughout a year-long sojourn in France, Spain or Mexico; relevant data include questionnaire surveys of multicultural personality and social networking, as well as regular interviews and limited participant observation. The paper explores the origins of sojourners’ initial multicultural orientation through analysis of pre-departure interviews. Secondly, interviews and observations in-sojourn are analysed to trace further identity development abroad. Two main components are identified: a general ”coming of age” process as young adults, plus strong enhancement of feelings of self-efficacy as L2 speakers. Most sojourners however do not identify long-term with the particular location visited, sustain strong home links, and envisage their future L2 self as ”multilingual” rather than e.g. ”French” or ”Spanish”.

References


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