”stoy proud siendo hispana”: A study on identity formation across time and place

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Taking a discourse analytic approach to data from active interviews, (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004) supported by a discussion of themes emerging from writing assignments, word associations, and audio recordings regarding identity, informed by an open-ended survey, this study focuses on how students in an asynchronous online/blended Spanish for heritage speakers (SHS) course construct their identity. I draw on Hornberger and Wang’s (2008) emphasis that the centrality of heritage language learners’ multiple identities are constantly being (re)negotiated and contested and on one of Gidden’s (1990) notions of the dynamism of modernity where the time-place distanciation has allowed for a “disembedding of social systems” (pp. 16-17).

The six extracts analyzed demonstrate how multi-sited families, parental influence, traveling to parents’ home countries, becoming an adult, and taking a SHS course all contribute to a redefining of what it means to be Hispanic/Latin@/Mexican-American/American. One theme that emerged was that of identity crises due to multiple possibilities for identity and to the measures used to determine who “fits in” and where they do or do not. Interestingly, one participant talked about his parents’ country as home even though he had only lived there for two years as a young child, supporting the notions of the complexity of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007). Finally, the languages used during the interviews are revelatory of the flux of possible identities present in the participants’ interactions. My analyses provide further documentation of the range of identities present (both chosen and imposed upon) across time and place for users of multiple languages, situated in the globalizing world of superdiversity. They also reveal positive outcomes for those under the scrutiny of the constant (re)negotiations of their multiple identities and cultures.

Keywords: Multiple Identities, Spanish as Heritage Language, Time-Place Distanciation.