Mobilizing Space and Time: Interactional Resources in Narratives of an Immigrant Student

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Building on Ochs and Capps’s (2001) observation that stories tend to occupy several temporal dimensions at once and recognizing the historical layering of language practices across timescales (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008), this article investigates the narratives of a Grade 9 student from Vietnam, Daniella, who was the recipient of a Singapore government scholarship. Daniella was part of a larger group of students who had been actively recruited by the Singapore government, which sought to attract academically students from neighboring Asian countries in the hope that they would take up Singaporean citizenship in the long term. Drawing on data from a year-long ethnographic study conducted in an English-medium school, I illustrate how Daniella’s references to dimensions of time and space ended up being interactional resources (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012), which were dialogically constructed with the researcher over a series of interviews. Significantly, these resources were deployed, to varying degrees of success, by Daniella to make sense of and to negotiate the intense academic pressures placed upon her. These pressures were amplified as a result of a larger narrative within the school and society which constructed her as a ‘scholar’. By juxtaposing Daniella’s narratives with the circulating ‘scholar’ narratives, I demonstrate how a recognition and analysis of the multiple intersecting spatial dimensions and timescales (Baynham, 2009; Lemke, 2000) not only shaped her experience of learning English, but also generated insights into how languages are acquired by learners who cross physical and cultural borders in an increasingly globalized world. These insights will subsequently be used to offer pedagogical recommendations to teachers who work with transnational language learners like Daniella.

Keywords: scales, narratives, mobility.