

Access to linguistic resources: Key variable in second language learning

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Abstract

Until recently, sociolinguistic approaches to the study of second language learning focused on the role of language variation and linguistic interaction in the learning process. In the past few years, several scholars argued for the broadening of the scope of sociolinguistic inquiry in SLA. In accordance with this call and with recent developments in the field of sociolinguistics, the present paper examines the issue that remains ignored in mainstream SLA –access to linguistic resources of the second language. It is argued that the L2 learners' and users' linguistic, racial, ethnic, gender, cultural and social identities mediate access to linguistic resources and interactional opportunities in the L2.

Key words: second language learning; interaction; access; linguistic, racial, ethnic, gender, cultural and social identities; non-native speaker (NNS) status; linguistic resources.

Resumo

Ata datas recentes, as achegas sociolingüísticas ó estudio da aprendizaxe dunha lingua segunda estiveron centradas no papel da variación das linguas e da interacción lingüística no proceso de aprendizaxe. Nos últimos anos, algúns investigadores defenderon unha ampliación do alcance da investigación sociolingüística na ALS. De acordo con este obxectivo e mais cos recentes desenvolvementos no eido da sociolingüística, este artigo examina esa cuestión que fica ignorada pola corrente principal da ALS –o acceso ós recursos lingüísticos da lingua segunda. Argumentarei que as identidades lingüísticas, raciais, étnicas, de xénero, culturais e sociais dos aprendices e usuarios de L2 median no acceso ós recursos lingüísticos e ás oportunidades interaccionais na L2.

Palabras clave: aprendizaxe dunha lingua segunda; interacción; acceso; identidades lingüísticas, raciais, étnicas, de xénero, culturais e sociais; status de falante non nativo; recursos lingüísticos.

1. Introduction

For many years, psycholinguistic approaches dominated the field of second language acquisition (SLA). Several key SLA textbooks do not even contain a separate chapter or section that deals with sociolinguistics of SLA (cf. Gass & Selinker, 1994; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Sharwood Smith, 1994), implicitly supporting Long's (1997) view that "to date insights into SL *acquisition* from sociolinguistically oriented research have been relatively minor" (p. 322). The sociolinguistic research that did take place until recently focused on the role of language variation and linguistic interaction in the acquisition process, and on variability in learner language, oftentimes conflating sociolinguistic and sociopsychological aspects of second language (L2) learning (Beebe, 1988; Ellis, 1994; Gass, 1997; Gass, Mackey & Pica, 1998; Gass & Selinker, 1994; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Long, 1983, 1996; Preston, 1989, 1996; Wolfson & Judd, 1983).

Recently, several scholars objected to what they perceive as an exceedingly narrow focus –and a resulting secondary role– of sociolinguistic approaches to SLA, pointing out that the main goal of these approaches is to create psycholinguistic models of L2 learning and performance, something that psycholinguistic approaches are much better equipped for (Bremer, Roberts, Vasseur, Simonot & Broeder, 1996; Firth & Wagner, 1997; McKay & Wong, 1996; Miller, 1997; Norton Peirce, 1995; Rampton, 1995). This call for change comes at a time of a more general shift in the field of sociolinguistics whereby the discontent with the 'correlational fallacy' of the assumption that 'language reflects society' led several scholars to question the central role of variationist sociolinguistics and to go beyond the quantitative approaches to the study of the relationship between language and society (cf. Cameron, 1990). Cameron sets a very specific agenda for the project of 'going beyond' suggesting that the researchers will need

to examine the linguistic practices in which members of a culture regularly participate or to whose effects they are exposed. As well as being of interest in itself, this undertaking would help us to make sense of the process noted by Romaine: the constraining of linguistic behaviour by the social relations in which speakers are involved and the linguistic resources to which they have access.

(Cameron, 1990: 93)

The proponents of reconceptualization of SLA argue along very similar lines for a much broader poststructuralist framework which would allow the field to theorize and examine the social –and not just the linguistic– aspects of sociolinguistics of L2 learning, and result in studies of second language socialization that go beyond acquisition of grammatical accuracy and sociolinguistic appropriateness. Firth & Wagner propose three major changes in the field of SLA that would redress the imbalance between psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic approaches to the study of L2 learning:

(a) a significantly enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use, (b) an increased emic (i.e. participant-relevant) sensitivity towards fundamental concepts, and (c) the broadening of the traditional SLA database. (Firth & Wagner, 1997: 286)

The arguments above and resulting new directions in sociolinguistic inquiry are reflected in more recent overviews of sociolinguistic approaches to SLA which now include the study of intercultural communication and miscommunication, the role of social identity in the learning process, and larger sociopolitical concerns (cf. Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Young, 1999). However, while more inclusive than the previous discussions, these overviews still do not fully embrace the role of critical inquiry in sociolinguistics of L2 learning. The goal of this paper is to begin filling this gap by reviewing recent studies which address one important aspect of this inquiry, delineated by Cameron (1990): examination of L2 learners' access to linguistic resources and interactional opportunities in L2.

2. Theoretical framework

The investigation of access to linguistic resources in the process of second language learning can be best understood within a poststructuralist framework which is relatively new in the study of SLA (Miller, 1997; Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 1997, 2000; Pavlenko, in press; Pennycook, 1990; Rampton, 1995). While the terms poststructuralism, postmodernism, or critical inquiry, serve as an umbrella for a variety of theoretical approaches adopted by different researchers, in the present paper, for purposes of clarity and simplicity, I will focus not on the differences between these various strands, as real as they may be, but on similarities which they all share. I see all of these approaches as having a common focus on language as the locus of social organization, power and individual consciousness. Thus, in the present paper, *poststructuralism* is understood broadly as an attempt to investigate and to theorize the role of language (or rather discourses within it) in construction and reproduction of ideologies and social relations, and the role of language ideologies and social dynamics in the processes of additional language learning and use. Poststructuralist inquiry underscores that not all languages, discourses or registers are equal in the linguistic marketplace: some are 'more equal than others'. Many poststructuralist linguists draw on Bourdieu's (1991) view of linguistic practices as a form of symbolic capital, which can be converted into economic and social capital, in order to understand how the value of a particular linguistic variety, such as a standard or a vernacular form, derives from its ability to provide access to more prestigious forms of education, and to desired positions in the workforce or on the social mobility ladder. In other words, as Gal simply put it, "because linguistic practices provide access to material resources, they become resources in their own right" (1989: 353). The view of language as a form of symbolic capital has a significant advantage over the notion of 'instrumental motivation' for the field of

SLA as it allows us to link the individual and the social in the L2 learning process, tracing ways in which particular linguistic varieties and practices become legitimized and imbued with values or stigmatized and devalued in the linguistic marketplace (see also Blackledge, this issue).

Poststructuralist inquiry also reinterprets the notion of identity, which will be used in the present paper as synonymous with subject position. While variationist sociolinguistics views identities as stable and unchangeable, poststructuralist scholarship theorizes identities as multiple, dynamic and subject to change (Cameron, 1990; Weedon, 1987). Identities are seen as constructed by and in discourses which, on the one hand, supply the terms by which identities are expressed and, on the other, assign differential values to different subject positions. Davies & Harre (1990) point out that once an individual has taken up a particular subject position as one's own, he or she inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts. The subject position is not a stable entity, however, and people are continuously involved in the processes of producing and positioning selves and others. As a result, many individuals, in particular those in multilingual contexts, find themselves in a perpetual tension between self-chosen identities and others' attempts to position them differently. Thus, it is not surprising that many scholars view all instances of language use in multilingual contexts as 'acts of identity' (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985).

At the center of poststructuralist theory of SLA are the view of language as symbolic capital and the site of identity construction (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko, 1998), the view of second language learning as language socialization (Bremer et al., 1996; Jupp, Roberts & Cook-Gumperz, 1982; Toohey, 1998; Willett, 1995) and the view of L2 users as agents whose multiple identities are dynamic and flexible (Lantolf & Pavlenko, in press; McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 1997, 2000; Pavlenko, 1998; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Rampton, 1995). L2 learning outcomes are portrayed in poststructuralist SLA scholarship as influenced by individuals' identities or subject positions in two important ways. On the one hand, L2 users' subject positions, in particular, race, ethnicity, class and gender, mediate their access to linguistic resources available in the L2, as will be demonstrated in the present paper. On the other, their agencies and investments in language learning and use are shaped by the range of identities available for them in the L2. At times, the L2 discourses available to L2 users may provide them with unique means of self-representation that prompt them to cross boundaries and assimilate to the new communities (Lantolf & Pavlenko, in press; Pavlenko, 1998; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) or to become members of multiple communities (Heller, 1999; Kanno, 2000a,b). In other contexts, L2 learners may opt for constructing new and mixed linguistic identities (Leung, Harris & Rampton, 1997; Rampton, 1995). Yet in other situations, new subject positions may be seen by the L2 users as unacceptable or incompatible with the subject positions they occupied previously. This conflict often occurs in immigrant contexts when mature adults

suddenly find themselves positioned as incompetent workers and parents (Blackledge, 2000; Bremer et al., 1996; Kouritzin, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, *in press*). In this case, their desire to acquire the symbolic capital offered by the new language may conflict with their resistance to the range of identities afforded to them by that language. This situation may negatively influence any attempts at learning and learners may limit their L2 learning to the basic proficiency level refusing to modify their behavior and reconstruct their identities (Bremer et al., 1996; Polanyi, 1995; Siegal, 1996) or may stop attending language classes despite the fact that they realize the importance and value of the new language (Norton, *in press*; Kouritzin, 2000). In cases where legitimate identities cannot be fashioned through the second language, L2 learning may be halted despite the high symbolic value of the L2. Norton Peirce (1995), McKay & Wong (1996) and Miller (1999, 2000) point out that Bourdieu's (1991) view of linguistic competence as 'the power to impose reception' allows us to expand the notion of L2 competence to include the notion of 'audibility' or the 'right to speak', crucial for a successful language outcome.

Situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) provides a useful framework for understanding L2 learning in social context as a process of movement from legitimate peripheral participation to fuller participation and engagement with the core members of the community. The movement toward fuller participation presumes full access to a wide range of information, resources and activities and may be constrained by particular social arrangements in the community. Jupp et al. (1982) argue that the process of secondary language socialization is markedly different from first language (L1) socialization. In the process of L1 socialization children are provided with numerous opportunities to use language in socially meaningful ways and to receive explicit and implicit feedback on their performance. Most importantly, all negative evaluations with regard to the form of the utterances will be suspended when a matter of real importance for the child arises. In contrast, in the case of second language socialization of linguistic minority members, the white majority group may neither accept the differences in speaking practices of the minority groups, nor recognize the fact that in a multiethnic society the interactive norms are negotiable (Jupp et al., 1982: 247).

As a framework that allows us to understand the assignment of symbolic values to particular languages and discursive practices, differentiate between various types of language socialization, and interpret transformations of identity, poststructuralism is well equipped for theorizing sociolinguistic aspects of multilingualism and L2 learning. For the purposes of the present paper, poststructuralism provides a strong conceptual framework in which we can examine how linguistic, social, cultural, gender, racial and ethnic identities of L2 users mediate access to linguistic resources. While acknowledging that the notion of linguistic resources encompasses a range of discursive practices and material resources, in my discussion I will focus mainly on access to interactional opportunities in the L2, seen by many scholars as the key to successful L2 learning. In accordance with the *emic*, or participant-relevant, perspective, commonly

assumed in poststructuralist inquiry (cf. Firth & Wagner, 1997; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995), I will pay particular attention to opinions and insights provided by the actual L2 users.

3. Access to linguistic resources

Variationist and interactionist sociolinguistic approaches to SLA are predicated on the assumption that L2 learning is facilitated by negotiation of meaning with native speakers and more competent interlocutors (Gass, 1997; Gass, Mackey & Pica, 1998; Long, 1983, 1996). Poststructuralist SLA inquiry confirms the key role of informal interaction (Bremer et al., 1996; Miller, 1999), at the same time finding a number of problems with ways in which interaction has been conceived of and examined in mainstream SLA. To begin with, many scholars point out that the main focus in the study of interaction was on linguistic and cognitive aspects of idealized communication between native and non-native speakers (NS-NNS), as well as between non-natives (NNS-NNS). Native speakers were generally depicted as helpful facilitators of the interaction or as the victims of NNSs' 'defective competence' (cf. Long, 1983, 1996). Moreover, the fact that the majority of the studies of linguistic interaction come from laboratory settings obscures ways in which these conversations are deeply embedded in social contexts and relations of power and ways in which the speakers' other identities may have a profound impact on linguistic interaction and negotiation of meaning.

Moreover, as Norton Peirce (1995) pointed out, in mainstream sociolinguistics of SLA access to linguistic resources and interactional opportunities is depicted as unproblematic and equated with motivation. With the exception of Mitchell & Myles (1998), none of the key texts in the field of SLA discuss the fact that L2 learners and users may not always have full access to linguistic resources and interactional opportunities. Spolsky (1989: 166), for instance, mentions briefly that in some contexts native speakers may be reluctant to use their language with non-natives. However, he immediately dismisses this possibility as irrelevant to his discussion of opportunities for L2 learning and focuses on the formal/informal learning dichotomy, suggesting that only informal learning exposes the learners to a sufficient range of language variation which would then permit easy natural communication (Spolsky, 1989: 185). Many poststructuralist scholars agree with this conclusion, suggesting that no amount of classroom instruction can replace spontaneous interaction in the target language (Bremer et al., 1996; Miller, 1999, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995). At the same time, they emphasize that unlimited access to linguistic resources and interactional opportunities should not be taken for granted in the study of SLA, pointing out that "inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities L2 learners have to practice the target language outside the classroom" (Norton Peirce, 1995: 12).

In what follows, I will examine ways in which access to linguistic resources could be limited in a variety of contexts. For the purposes of this discussion, *access*

will be defined as ways in which

systemic and interpersonal power relationships at work in multiple language-learning contexts have an impact on decentred, non-unitary, postcolonial subjects.

(Kouritzin, 2000: 14-15)

Linguistic resources, as already mentioned above, will encompass educational practices, such as ESL classes, discursive practices, such as literacy, material resources, such as bilingual texts and dictionaries, and, most importantly, interactional opportunities in the L2. I will demonstrate that outside of laboratory settings access to interactional opportunities and other linguistic resources is mediated by the L2 users' gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, culture, social status, linguistic background and non-native speaker status.

3.1. Linguistic identities

To begin with, access to linguistic resources and, in particular, to interactional opportunities, may be mediated by linguistic identities of the speakers and, more generally, by non-native speaker status of the L2 users. In many contexts, target language speakers may simply refuse to interact with L2 users, perceived as incompetent communicators. The lack of interactional opportunities based on negative perceptions of non-native speakers and speakers of indigenized varieties of English has been documented in a variety of contexts, ranging from Britain (Jupp et al., 1982) to Australia (Miller, 1999, 2000), US (Lippi-Green, 1997) and Canada (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Kanno, 2000a; Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 1997, 2000, in press).

An ethnographic study of language use of migrant students in Australia, conducted by Miller (1999, 2000) draws an interesting comparison between ESL and mainstream educational contexts. It appears that several students in her study enjoyed many more opportunities to interact in English while they were in the intensive English reception center for high school age migrants and refugees. Upon transition to the mainstream high school, many felt that they lost the chance to speak English. One Bosnian student, Neta, described her Australian peers in the following way: "So all these Australian people, they are nice but like, now they really won't, you know, talk to you" (Miller, 1999: 157). Neta's feelings are echoed by Sawako, a Japanese student learning English in Canada:

"...we want desperately to get into the mainstream, but we can't because Canadians don't allow us and also because we know that they look down on us and despise us."

(Kanno, 2000a: 7)

In contrast, other Japanese students in Kanno's & Applebaum's (1995) study saw the ESL program as an impediment to their successful integration and language learning. One of the students, Kenta, stated:

"I don't really know what I learned in the ESL program. I'd rather have studied together with my friends in my grade 7 and 8 homeroom classes... I think it would have been more useful for me to know, at the onset, the level of English my Canadian-born peers were dealing with." (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995: 40)

Even in educational contexts where communication is almost ensured, non-native speakers may find themselves isolated and discriminated against. Sawako recalled a classmate yelling at her: "Are you deaf or ESL?" (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995: 43), thus equating lack of communicative competence with non-native speaker status and disability. Another Japanese student, Ritsuko, complained that there is not much interaction going on in mainstream classes even when group work is required:

"You go to [a non-ESL class] and sit with white people. You understand the content of the class, but when you have to find a partner and work on a group project, you can't get into a group. You feel too embarrassed to ask someone to be your partner. You feel like you're gonna be a burden on them. So you don't ask them; you wait until they ask you." (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995: 40)

A very vivid example of gatekeeping in ESL contexts is discussed in Norton (in press). When Katarina, one of the L2 learners in the study, asked her ESL teacher for permission to take a computer class, the teacher refused saying that her English wasn't good enough and intimating that she spoke 'immigrant English'. Fortunately for Katarina, she decided not to listen to the teacher and, angry with what she perceived as a dismissive attitude toward immigrants, left the ESL class altogether. She then entered the computer course and successfully completed the 18 month program, thus gaining new professional and linguistic competence.

Toohey's (1998) three year long ethnographic study of second language socialization in a Canadian elementary school demonstrates that even some common classroom practices may contribute to community stratification and prohibit full access to linguistic resources to L2 learners. Building on Foucault's (1979) argument that classroom spatial arrangements facilitate supervision and hierarchy, she suggests that in the classroom in which her observations were conducted, opportunities for ESL children to interact with English-speaking peers were severely curtailed by seating arrangements and the separate location for ESL instruction. In many cases, ESL children were seated in the front of the room, next to other bilingual children (but not speakers of the same L1) or Anglophone children who were not managing well the demands of the Grade 1 curriculum. While facilitating communication with the teachers, these seating arrangements also excluded ESL learners from lively conversations taking place in the back of the room, among Anglophone children considered to be good students. As a result, L2 learners were "systematically excluded from just those conversations in which they legitimately might peripherally participate with child experts, English old timers" (Toohey, 1998: 81). Only the practice of moving around the classroom to borrow scissors, crayons, rulers, or glue sticks allowed the children to resist their physical separation from one another, at

least to a certain extent. Similarly, native and non-native speakers may be separated –or even separate themselves– in institutional contexts. “We never mix up English ladies and Asian ladies. We didn’t bother to each other... we are going to the factory, we are working, we’re getting our money and come back. Our supervisor, she don’t want to talk to us”, states a South Asian worker in Jupp’s et al. (1982: 241) study of interaction between South Asian workers and their English colleagues in British workplaces.

It is important to emphasize here that the lack of interactional opportunities for non-native speakers is not limited to English-speaking contexts. As Siegal (1996) points out, Japanese typically address non-Asians in English and often refuse to interact with them in Japanese even when addressed in the language. In Pichette’s (2000) study of Westerners living in Japan, all six participants, relatively fluent in Japanese, admitted that they have been in situations where people refused to speak Japanese with them. These situations are not necessarily simple service or institutional encounters, often they involve people who are positioned as the gatekeepers to a particular linguistic community. For instance, Sally, one of the participants in Siegal’s (1996) study complained that her efforts to engage her professor in a conversation in Japanese continuously failed as he would always switch to English when conversing with her. Moreover, even when conversations are carried out in Japanese, native speakers of Japanese may not be providing Westerners with the necessary feedback about instances of inappropriate pragmatic usage, thus withholding important forms of linguistic capital (Pichette, 2000; Siegal, 1996).

Similar problems in accessing interactional opportunities were faced by some American students while studying abroad in France (Kline, 1993; Levin, 2000; Wilkinson, 1998). Wilkinson’s (1998) ethnographic study of a summer program in Valcourt, France, suggests that the general enthusiasm for linguistic gains achieved in study abroad programs may at times be unfounded. The participants in her study did not encounter easy opportunities for informal interaction and returned home with their linguistic aspirations unfulfilled. As one of the study participants, Paige, observed:

“I’d hang around in town –sometimes I would just sit in town and read or something, and there’s people around you, but it’s not that easy... to meet someone who’s French.”
(Wilkinson, 1998: 33)

Similar frustration is expressed by another student, Ashley: “I was just so surprised that you could be in France for a month and... really not speak French that often” (Wilkinson, 1998: 33). The author suggests that, in addition to the short length of stay, the possibilities for interaction were curtailed by numerous cross-cultural misunderstandings in service encounters and interaction with the host families. Levin (2000) describes similar experiences of another American student, Megan, in a year long program suggesting that intercultural miscommunication may impact the students’ desire and ability to learn French. Megan, who always saw herself as a good

student excelling in American academia, got very frustrated with her academic experience in France:

"I don't want to say this year was terrible because the academic experience was bad. I don't want to admit it was such a big part of the year, but it really colored my whole experience." (Levin, 2000: 3)

Even when NSs and NNSs are engaged in linguistic interaction, negotiation of meaning and modified input are not necessarily part of the dialog, as emphasized by Bremer et al. (1996). Discussing the results of their longitudinal study of adult L2 learning by migrant workers in several Western European countries, the authors focus on unequal institutional encounters between target language (TL) speakers and L2 users and identify a number of explicit and implicit linguistic strategies employed by TL speakers for gatekeeping purposes. In particular, they demonstrate that in some cases, majority speakers refuse to acknowledge immigrant L2 users as legitimate interlocutors. Such is the case of a Chilean immigrant in France, Berta, who reported an interaction with the surgeon who had operated on her daughter after an accident at school. When Berta ran to the hospital, it was late and past visiting time. The surgeon told her that she should leave at once, and never told her anything about her daughter's health. Berta interpreted his behavior as a refusal to consider her as a legitimate speaker of French and as a mother of the injured child he had just taken care of. Frustrated and emotional, she was unable to find French words to protest and to argue against such behavior, and thus acceded to meaning that was not 'negotiable'.

More subtle –but nevertheless discriminatory– linguistic strategies were found in the speech of job counsellors in sessions with migrant workers. The NS counsellors in the study either spoke too rapidly, or, when speaking slowly, produced long and complex sentences, with no clear pauses or other prosodic cues. They also produced a number of indirect questions and requests which did not facilitate understanding by the interlocutors with low levels of L2 proficiency, and could not be described as modified input. These findings, which suggest that in many cases it is NSs who are responsible for misunderstanding and confusion, are in direct contradiction to Long's (1983, 1996) view of native speakers as facilitators of L2 learning. The findings also explain why in many cases NNSs may opt out of any but minimal interaction with the target language speakers, choosing avoidance as a general strategy:

avoidance of contact, avoidance of interaction, avoidance of signalling and misunderstandings based on a negative expectation of the majority speakers' discourse. (Bremer et al., 1996: 95)

Similarly, Jupp et al. (1982) demonstrate that in the British workplace, attempts by South Asians to communicate may be treated with contempt, and even as a confirmation of negative characteristics assigned to them. As a result, South

Asian workers feel increasingly more isolated and cautious about even the most neutral attempts by their British supervisors to establish particular facts. Together, these studies suggest that future research should pay significantly more attention to role of NNS status in the balance of power relations between the interlocutors, and to the role played by native speakers in intercultural miscommunication.

3.2. Racial and ethnic identities

The studies discussed in the previous section also indicate that the speaker's linguistic legitimacy is often conflated with ethnicity and race: members of ethnic minorities are often perceived as weak L2 learners and/or illegitimate L2 users. At times, as argued by Jupp et al. (1982) such perceptions may persist despite the evidence that contradicts them. To illustrate their point, the authors cite a part of an interaction recorded when a South Asian man was interviewed for a job by a white British supervisor (Jupp et al., 1982: 239):

Supervisor:	Can you speak English?
Applicant:	No (ironically)
Supervisor:	(addressing observer) Oh, you see, he can't speak English.
Applicant:	If I can't speak English, what am I speaking to you now?

Miller's (2000) ethnographic study of ESL students' socialization into the mainstream in an Australian high school reinforces the importance of race in the study of access to interactional opportunities, suggesting that white and fair-haired Bosnian students assimilate quickly, establishing friendships with the English-speaking students and appropriating a range of discourses in English, while the dark-haired Chinese students remain isolated from the mainstream. The Chinese students in her study stated that they had felt discriminated against, because neither their peers nor teachers acknowledged their legitimacy as L2 users of English in the same way they acknowledged the legitimacy of their European immigrant classmates who resemble Australians physically. One of the Chinese students, Nora, wrote in her diary: "I just don't know why the teachers always likes fornigner, they always like white skin, gold hairs?" (Miller, 2000: 87). Another Chinese student, Tina, similarly complained about her Australian classmates:

"Seems they don't like the "black hairs". Because I have a classmate from Bosnia now in my class. If we go to [a mainstream] class together, they, they know that she is not Australian, don't speak much English, but go to talk to her not me."

(Miller, 2000: 82)

Another way in which schools reproduce racial and ethnic biases is by creating particular physical arrangements and by exhibiting preferential treatment toward certain groups of students. McKay's & Wong's (1996) study of a Californian high school suggests that the school was most biased against particular racial

minorities. As a result, the seating arrangements in the classrooms and the cafeteria reproduced the bias, with Latinos and African-Americans most marginalized. Kanno (2000a) and Miller (2000) also note the physical separation between the white and the Asian American students, reproduced by the students' own seating arrangements in the cafeteria.

In addition to educational contexts, racial and ethnic discrimination can be encountered in the workplace and in service encounters where different NNSs would be treated differentially depending on their ethnic and racial origin. Lippi-Green (1997) discusses a number of cases in which people made judgments about someone's linguistic proficiency based on their physical appearance. Similarly, several participants in Bremer et al. (1996) study complain about routine racism experienced in everyday life. The authors demonstrate that this racism has important implications for language learning outcomes. Contrasting the narratives of two young Turkish workers in Germany, they show that Cevdet, who had a good relationship with his supervisors and coworkers, continued to progress in German, while Ilhami, subject to racial discrimination in the workplace, was thrust into a negative cycle of misunderstanding, limited interaction, negative reaction to the target language and, consequently, little progress in German.

Once again it is necessary to emphasize that the importance of race as a mediating factor in access to interactional opportunities and linguistic resources is not limited to English-speaking contexts, but has also been documented in other contexts, such as Japan, where Westerners' attempts to interact in Japanese may be rejected by target language speakers (Pichette, 2000; Siegal, 1996) or Spain, where an African-American student in Talburt's & Stewart's (1999) study felt discriminated against and, consequently, lost any desire to interact with local people.

3.3. Gender identities

One of the key aspects of identity that structures differential opportunities for access to linguistic resources is gender. Numerous studies demonstrate that in some minority and immigrant communities, where second language skills are highly valued and associated with social and economic benefits, men have a privileged access to this symbolic capital, while women are prevented from learning and using the language by a number of gatekeeping practices, which restrict women's mobility, access to majority language education and the workplace (Goldstein, 1995; Harvey, 1994; Hill, 1987; Holmes, 1993; Kouritzin, 2000; Losey, 1995).

To begin with, immigrant and minority women's access to education in the target languages, such as ESL classes, interaction with target language speakers and other linguistic resources may be significantly constrained by their status as housekeepers and mothers, which, in conjunction with the lack of governmentally funded daycare, may result in complete immobility. In some contexts, women's status as financially dependent on the breadwinner males may also bar them from government-funded ESL classes (Kouritzin, 2000). However, as Kouritzin (2000) insightfully points out, it is overly simplistic to equate access with availability: lives

of immigrant and minority women may be complicated not only by gendered and systemic inequalities but also by cultural conflicts. Even in contexts where classes, professional training and other linguistic resources are available, access problems may arise. The availability of daycare solutions did not appear to help an Indian woman in Kouritzin's (2000) study, as her husband was adamant that only family should care for the children. Similarly, lack of family responsibilities did not help young Portuguese women in Toronto who were still prevented from going to ESL classes as their being in the same classroom with male strangers was considered inappropriate in their community (Goldstein, 1995). Thus, even the best of solutions such as evening and weekend classes and externally funded daycare do not help women who are culturally required to be home with their children and to prioritize their roles as housekeepers, mothers, wives, caretakers, and 'guardians of the home language'. In addition, as demonstrated in Losey's (1995) study of classroom participation patterns of American and Mexican-American men and women, even when minority women are in class, they may be doubly marginalized as ethnic minority members and as women and thus prevented from turn-taking, expressing themselves and interacting in the target language.

Participation in the workforce also doesn't appear to guarantee unlimited access to linguistic resources of the majority language. Holmes (1993) shows that while immigrant men in Australia and New Zealand are more often employed where English is required, immigrant women oftentimes work in places where they use their native language. Goldstein's (1995) investigation of linguistic practices in a Canadian factory demonstrates that the unspoken rules of this workplace prevent immigrant Portuguese women from using English by positing Portuguese as a solidarity code. The researcher points out that while this practice ensures solidarity and cooperation on the factory floor, it may also keep the women in question from social and economic advancement, enjoyed by Portuguese men, more fluent in English.

Studies conducted in indigenous communities in South America provide evidence of a similarly complex relationship between gender, degree of L2 proficiency, and access to education and workforce. Hill's (1987) study of the use of Spanish and Mexicano (Nahuatl), an indigenous language of Mexico, in rural communities in the region of the Malinche Volcano, demonstrates that having less access to education than men, women speak less Spanish and, as a result, have no access to the industrial labor force, for which the use of Spanish is crucial. Moreover, in some communities women's attempts to use Spanish may encounter derision and criticism. Harvey's (1994) study demonstrates that women in Ocongate, Peru, clearly recognize that their inability to use Spanish has negative implications for their social position. However, their attempts to use Spanish are met with negative attitudes from the men in the community and their performance is subject to ridicule and insult, whereby they are portrayed as trying to pass themselves as better and more educated than they are in reality. As a consequence, many younger women have a good passive understanding of Spanish but are afraid or ashamed to speak it in public.

Interestingly, it is not only disadvantaged immigrant women who may be denied access to linguistic resources or allowed limited access only but also middle- and upper-middle class American females, who temporarily live abroad as students or expatriates and temporary workers. Several studies conducted with Americans studying or living in France, Spain, Russia, Japan and Costa Rica suggest that these contexts also provide unequal opportunities for male and female learners to participate in informal interactions and that negative reactions to behaviors perceived as sexual harassment may limit these opportunities even further (Kline, 1993; Pichette, 2000; Polanyi, 1995; Siegal, 1996; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Twombly, 1995). Pichette (2000) has interviewed a number of male and female Westerners living in Japan comparing contexts in which they use the language and their linguistic achievements. She concluded that white Western males have many more chances to participate in informal interactions and, as a result, acquire the language naturally than do females. She said that one of her male colleagues simply 'picked up' the language in the local *izakaya* (Japanese pub) from the regular customers, a group of elderly Japanese men, who enjoyed his company and the experience of male bonding with a young British man. The woman then stated:

"While I'd love to try to pick up the language from "a bunch of old men" at the local *izakaya*, entering as an unescorted foreign female would be quite odd. The fact is that while it is quite normal for men to go out to the *izakaya* alone, females are often discouraged from this practice. In truth, if I were to sit down and start up a conversation with the locals, they would undoubtedly think I was interested in much more than just improving my language skills. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be any equivalent to the local *izakaya* for females. There is no "local tea room" where women get together to chat on a regular basis." (Pichette, 2000: 1)

Polanyi's (1995) study compares test scores on the Russian Oral Proficiency test by male and female American students prior to and upon return from a study abroad in Russia. While prior to the trip males and females achieved similar scores, upon return male students showed greater gains and outperformed female students, in particular on the listening test. The author links this differential achievement to sexual harassment experienced by American females, which in turn led to these women's growing reluctance to interact with Russians. Gender and race also appear to have limited the interactional opportunities of Misheila, an African-American student on a study abroad trip to Spain (Talburt & Stewart, 1999). During the trip, Misheila had found herself consistently singled out and sexually harassed by Spanish males:

"My observation is very negative. For me, while I've been in Spain I notice that the African woman is a symbol of sexuality. When I walk in the streets I always receive comments on my skin and sexual commentaries, especially with old men and adolescents between the age of 15 and 20." (Talburt & Stewart, 1999: 169)

This sexual harassment, whether real or perceived, provoked a negative reaction in her toward Spanish and its speakers, and curtailed any future investment in learning Spanish. In contrast, the men in Polanyi's (1995) and Pichette's (2000) studies explicitly stated that they had enjoyed their opportunity to be different and visible as it brought them a lot of attention, in particular from local women.

Willett (1995) underscores that class and gender mediate opportunities even for the youngest L2 learners. In her study of second language socialization of four 7-year old ESL children in a mainstream classroom, she found that the combined effects of differences in boys' and girls' peer cultures and the seating arrangements—which were designed to keep the boys apart but allowed the girls to sit together—favored the three female learners. The friendship between three ESL girls allowed them to collaborate and support each other, thus earning a high status in the girls' subculture and the status of 'good learners' in the eyes of the teacher. In contrast, the working class Mexican-American boy, Xavier, did not get any help from his female seatmates and was not allowed to get out of his seat to get help from his male bilingual friends. As a result, he had to rely on adults for help, thus earning a status of a needy child, unable to work independently. Unlike with middle class students, the school personnel did not automatically assume that he would develop normally or that he had support at home, stating that children from the *barrio*, like Xavier, were semilingual and their parents were unable to help them academically. As a result, when Xavier scored a level 4 on the Bilingual Syntax Measure, he was not exited from ESL classes, while the three girls, daughters of international graduate students, were exited with the same score due to their reputation as independent workers and middle-class students. Similar outcome is described by McKay & Wong (1996) who point out that the high school teacher in their study reduced the number of ESL hours for the quiet Chinese girl, based on the stereotypical perception of the 'quiet Asian' achiever, rather than on real—and quite low—grades.

In sum, we can see that unequal gender relations may structure differential interactional opportunities and mediate access to other linguistic resources for male and female L2 users of different ages, class and ethnic backgrounds in a variety of contexts.

3.4. Cultural and social identities

Finally, the discussion above also demonstrated that access to linguistic resources may be mediated by the speakers' cultural identities and resulting cultural misunderstandings in target language contexts (Levin, 2000; Wilkinson, 1998) and their social status and class (Bremer et al., 1996; Jupp et al., 1982; Heller, 1999; Norton, 1995, 2000, in press; Willett, 1995). In particular, low social status was found to disempower migrant workers and immigrants in Europe and Canada, limiting their opportunities to interact with interested and friendly interlocutors (Bremer et al., 1996; Heller, 1999; Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, in press). All of the learners in Norton's (in press) study said that they felt their access to anglophone

Canadians was compromised by their position as immigrants in Canadian society. Similar to the participants in Bremer et al. (1996) study, these L2 users in Canada felt that in intercultural communication the onus to understand and be understood is at all times on the L2 user rather than on the speaker of the target language.

It is also necessary to emphasize here that while the present discussion artificially separates various aspects of identity for purposes of clarity and focus, most of the time the factors mediating access to linguistic resources act in combination. For instance, Heller's (1999) ethnographic study of a French-language school in Ontario demonstrates that, in addition to gender and ethnicity, age and social status also mediate access to linguistic resources; as a consequence, the most underprivileged students are older female recent immigrants who have most difficulty gaining access to English. Similarly, age in conjunction with the immigrant status appears to have limited opportunities for social interaction for an older ESL learner Antonio from Salvador who was surrounded by much younger kids in an Australian high school and felt immensely isolated for that reason (Miller, 1999).

Blackledge's (2000) study of the relationship between immigrant parents and school personnel in Birmingham, UK, demonstrates that Bangladeshi mothers' multiliteracies in languages other than English were ignored by the school authorities which positioned the mothers as illiterate and incompetent parents (also, see Blackledge, this issue). Race, class and minority status conspired in this positioning, as the teachers emphasized that the ways in which the families brought up their children were different from stereotypical white middle-class ways. In an interview with the researcher, one teacher stated directly:

"It's a class thing, isn't it, really, in many cases, and you're trying to make people have a set of rules which are really middle-class white rules, aren't they? In order for children to achieve in Britain today, you've got to have those really."

(Blackledge, 2000: 131)

As a result of this positioning, the parents were not provided with dual-text books which would have been very helpful to them and were not involved in their children's English literacy learning.

While extremely complex, the picture of limited access to linguistic resources is neither entirely bleak nor deterministic. Bremer et al. (1996) and Norton Peirce (1995) persuasively demonstrate that some L2 users resist marginalization and struggle to create opportunities for language learning and use. For instance, Eva, a Polish immigrant in Canada, describes ways in which she tries to claim her 'right to speak' at the fast food restaurant in which she works:

"Because everybody there is Canadian and they would speak to each other, not to me, because I was always like they sent me off to do something else. I felt bad. Now it's still the same but I have to do something. I try to speak... For example, they talk about Canada, what they like here, the places which they like... Then I started talking to them about how life is in Europe. Then they started to ask me some questions."

(Norton Peirce, 1995: 25)

Some L2 users even see the experience of overcoming challenges as a positive one, as does Dan, a young Russian immigrant in the US, in Lantolf & Pavlenko (in press):

"I mean, if I had any other way... if I had to do it all over again, I'd probably pick the same experience, because just the whole emigration experience, it taught me a lot... I guess it taught me to be persistent, go through a lot of before I came here, and then, once you come here, you don't really, the obstacles never stop, you keep meeting people that don't like you, and don't wanna talk to you..."

(Interviewed by A. Pavlenko, March 1997)

4. Conclusion

Recent studies, reviewed in the present paper, strongly suggest that access to linguistic resources, and, in particular, to interactional opportunities in L2, may be mediated by non-native speaker status, race, ethnicity, gender, class, age and social status (such as migrant worker or immigrant status). In many contexts, non-native speakers, in particular those who are racially or ethnically different from the prototypical speakers of the target language, are persistently positioned as illegitimate speakers of the target language and may have limited, if any, access to interactional opportunities in that language, as well as to other symbolic and material linguistic resources. Based on the evidence discussed in the paper, I suggest that access to educational and institutional linguistic resources and to interactional opportunities is not a trivial issue but one deserving close attention and an in-depth further examination in the field of SLA. Unfortunately, until recently, most SLA researchers examined L2 learning and interaction either in the classroom or under experimental conditions in laboratory settings (cf. Gass, 1997; Gass, Mackey & Pica, 1998; Long, 1996), thus separating themselves from the negotiation of meaning—or lack thereof—that goes on in the real world, despite the acknowledgment that informal interaction is key to successful L2 learning. As pointed out in Wagner (1996), this limitation of scope to one setting allows us to make generalization about one context only, and needs to be complemented by studies of naturally occurring NS/NNS interaction, where speakers may be oriented toward other goals than learning.

While power relations appear to be a key factor in mediating access, the view of power relations assumed in the present paper is not a deterministic one. Rather, it is closely aligned with that of Bremer et al. (1996: 220) and Norton Peirce (1995) in viewing the social world as fractured and destabilized by the possibilities offered by individual agency, creativity and resistance to discriminatory social practices. It is the agency and resistance that explain how learning could sometimes take place despite the most unfavorable circumstances. This is not to say, however, that the L2 users should be left to their own resources in their continuous battle for recognition and the right to speak. In the interests of social justice, researchers, language policy makers and educators should present a united front in identifying the gatekeeping

discriminatory practices, examining the ideologies which legitimize them and recommending ways in which educational and institutional establishments could challenge marginalization of minority groups and provide safer and more just environments in today's multilingual and multicultural world.

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