

# A Male Spouse’s Second Language Emergence with Respect to His Workplace, Family and Spouse Identities

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**Abstract:** *This paper reports on a single case study of a male spouse’s second language emergence and social adjustment as a result of moving to the US for his wife’s doctoral study. The study interprets language emergence as a socialization process. Theoretical framework of the study is built on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), the notion of investment (Norton, 1995), imagined communities (Norton, 2001), and metaphor of capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Based on these theories, language participation and non-participation of an expat moving to the US is highly affected by the concepts of silence, resistance, and power differences. In this study, second language emergence is explored by focusing on different identity categories and identity transformations of an individual such as identity at work, intercultural identity in friendship relations, and identity as a spouse. Although the present research is about the language socialization of a language learner who had formal education only for a limited of time, it provides some implications for second language teaching.*

**Keywords:** *Second language emergence, case study, and identities*

## 1. Introduction

For a long time, second language acquisition (SLA) theories considered a learner a “cognitive being” rather than a “social identity”. After social turn, learning started to be seen “as socialization or a situated process” of a learner as a participant, which “entail the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context” (Pavlenko, 2001, p. 320). Approaching learning process as “ways of being” brought a focus on the issue of multiple identities of an individual learner in his/her unique context as opposed to his/her single or fixed identity. Affected by this turn, the present study investigated an accompanying male spouse’s second language emergence as a socialization process and focuses on the shifts in identity categories in light of following theoretical frameworks.

### 1.1. Significant of the Study

There are limited numbers of studies that focus on the spouses’ challenges during the adjustment process (Martens & Grant, 2008). Therefore, the present study is significant in understanding accompanying spouses’ experiences as these experiences are highly influential on the success of international students (Van der Zee, Ali & Salome, 2005). The present research is also important as it provides some implications for language teaching although it informs the language socialization of a language learner who had limited formal education.

### 1.2. The aim of the study

The present research argues that language emergence as a socialization process can be explored by focusing on different identity categories and the transformations in these categories. For this, the research questions formulated for this study are:

1) How do workplace, spouse and friendship identities affect the language emergence of an adult married male accompanying his wife?

- 2) Are there any shifts in these categories with respect to the capital and investment differences before moving to the US and after it?
- 3) What are the effects of shifts in these categories on language socialization process?

## **2. Theoretical Frameworks**

Firt and Wegner (1997) state that SLA theories consider language learners as having only a ‘nonnative identity’ and they are described as individuals who struggle to accommodate native language standards. Rather, Firt and Wegner (1997) point to other social identities of individuals such as in the context of family, friendship, and job, and to approach identity from a socio-cultural dimension and they suggest a research methodology that uses ethnographic works in naturalistic contexts. In light of these contributions, socio-cultural dimension of identity can be understood through the notion of identity which is not fixed but dynamic, dialogic, multiple and changing (Norton & Toohey, 2005; Ricento 2005). There are multiple identities as detailed in Pavlenko (2001), which include “(1) linguistic identities; (2) national, racial, and ethnic identities; (3) cultural identities; (4) gender identities; and (5) social and class identities” (p.326). All these identity categories are inextricably linked to each other and subject to transformation.

In the ‘social identity theory’, Tajfel and Turner (1986) discuss that ‘levels of self’ is mediated by the sense of belonging to a specific community. According to Wegner (1998), identities are not simply categories that the “self” constructs but also real participation experiences in communities. For Wegner (1998), identity construction happens through participation in communities, which is shaped by many linguistic, cultural and social factors. In the socialization process, the construction and reconstruction of identities are affected by how the participation in social interaction occurs. In the same vein, participatory practices of an individual learner are determined by their identities, which are activated by a certain context. In order to fully understand the notion of participation, the present study uses Bourdieu (1977)’s “capital” metaphor. Capital, here, refers to the assets that individuals bring with them. These capitals, assets, are closely related to identities of an individual. The changes in the capital as a result of an individual’s moving to another context determine individuals’ participation in communities. As Bourdieu (1977) mentions, individuals bring their linguistic, cultural and social capital to their participation and their capital transform. For Block (2007), language learners experience changes in their social, cultural and symbolic capital, which mainly refer to prestige, fame and reputation. These changes in capital influence an individual’s participation in language learning as a social phenomenon and the ways of reconstructing multiple identities.

Following Bourdieu (1977), Norton (1995) introduces the concept of investment. Claiming that SLA’s concept of motivation is unable to explain the complexities of identity, Norton (2001) states that the concept of investment and capital helps us to understand language learners’ participation in language socialization process. In light of these frameworks, it is believed that language acquisition/ learning is shaped by investment and struggles of learners in their social environment, which is full of power differences (Bourdieu, 1977). All these have the potential to influence silence, resistance and language participation (or non-participation).

### **2.1. Studies on Accompanying Spouses**

In their study that addresses the challenges that international students’ female spouses experience, Martens and Grant (2008) reported that spouses experienced losses in their capital as a result of a shift in their identities, which transformed from a “professional” to “housewife-only” identity. Similarly, de Verthelyi (1995) mentions that as a result of losses, spouses’ identity transformations became a site for struggle, especially because they were in the position of postponing their careers to accompany their spouses and this created a barrier for their adjustment success and linguistic attainment.

### **3. Data Collection and Analysis**

The data collection started eight months after the participants' arrival to the US and lasted two months. The data of this study comprised of narratives, interviews, participant observation and field notes. The researcher had a chance to observe the social interactions of the participant, as the researcher was the wife of the participant. Discourse analysis was used as the analysis method and it aimed at understanding how three identity categories were shaped by the social and cultural environment.

There were two interview sessions. The first interview was five months after the participant came to the US and focused on the participant's stories of what he experienced since he came to the US. The second interview aimed at a closer look at his agency in language development as a socialization process.

#### **3.1. Narrative Inquiry**

The present study is interested in the narratives of an accompanying spouse to understand the language emergence. It is believed that narratives and language analysis can be the answer to explore the language socialization experiences and identity shifts of an accompanying spouse. Swain and Deters (2007) stated that narratives are ways to understand how we construct our identities. The present study adopted Georgakopoulou (2006)'s "narratives-in-interaction framework" (p. 253) as stories have potential to shed a light on complicated nature of identities when they are studied in their original context of occurrence. Narratives are ways of transforming our identities and they inform us about how narrators define themselves through narrative activity (Pavlenko, 2001).

### **4. Results**

#### **4.1. The Context, the Participant and the Changes in his Capital**

The adult male spouse accompanying his wife is the researcher's husband, whose name is Sinan. He is a 26 year-old male who had worked as a sales person for 12 years in Turkey. Before moving to the US, he had a bag store in Turkey. He had a very active social life due to the nature of his work, which requires strong social and dialogical skills to sell the bags and for customer loyalty. Although he did not earn too much money, his prestige in among the other sellers nearby was evident. Due to his personal features, he was well-known by the other shop owners. He was an extrovert person, who could easily make friends. During his conversations with his friends, he could easily change the ambience of the interaction to an enjoyable one. He could be considered as someone who could easily manipulate the topic of the conversation. Humor was the center in most of his interactions with people around him, including his workplace friends.

He did not continue his formal education after secondary school. He had no formal English language learning experience throughout his school life. Before moving to the US, he had little contacts with people who used English as a medium of communication and these contacts were mainly at his workplace while selling bags.

After moving to the US, many changes occurred in his life in terms of his social and linguistic capital. When compared to his friendship relation in his native country as his social capital, there were a limited number of friends in the US. In his definition, these friendships were 'a must' rather than a choice. His friends in the US were the people whom he had to talk with so as not to be alone. A month later after he moved to the US, the participant started to work in a pizza place. He defined this job experience as a 'must condition' because he had no other choice since his English abilities are limited to find a better job. Although he had owned his own workplace, in his new context, he had to work in a pizza place.

In his identity as a spouse, there are also substantial shifts in his identities as a result of moving to the US. While he was mainly the topic introducer in the conversations in Turkey, he became dependent to his wife to understand the conversations around him. He frequently required spontaneous translations from his wife. Because of the changes in his linguistic capital, he couldn't even participate in the conversations. From being "head of the house", due to the changes in his social, economic and linguistics status, he became "dependent".

## 4.2. The Language Course

After arriving to the US, in the first month, the participant attended a language course. He was not eager to participate but the idea that he would meet new people caused him to approach the course somewhat positively. He was asking some questions to learn some English words to his wife and recounting episodes from the classroom interactions. He was telling that he needs to study more but not investing in studying English at home at all. Family members, friends and people from Turkey kept asking the participant whether he can speak English or not. This was creating a pressure on him. Then, he gave up asking questions related to learning English and stopped recounting what was happening in the class.

After attending the courses for a month, Sinan gave up attending the course. Sinan didn't want to invest in the language course anymore because the course did not meet his expectations. He had wanted to make friends but the atmosphere was not "intimate" for him and there were no "incentives". Although he thought that it was a must to learn English, he didn't want to invest in this type of activity. Rather than a social gathering, the course made him feel like a "little child" and he didn't like this shift in his identity. He didn't want to define himself like "a little child" or to be defined like that. Learning English was completely a social event for him; however, in this course the social elements were ignored. His investment in his classroom experiences could have been more if he could see that classroom interaction is compatible with his imagined community.

There was a long 'silent period' in his life in terms of speaking in English. He avoided any situation that would make him interact with people who spoke English to him. He didn't want to go to a market alone. Whenever he went to a market, he didn't even say 'thank you' to the cashiers. His silence was a resistance to unequal power relations, as Norton (1995) explains saying, "Paradoxically, perhaps, the decision to remain silent or the decision to speak may both constitute forms of resistance to inequitable social forces" (p.20). His first decision to 'resist to be silenced' appeared after Sinan met his Egyptian friends.

## 4.3. Friend Identity

After five months, he had some other friends, an Egyptian family, who were in a similar position in terms of their economic, linguistic and labor status, and other social and cultural capital. For Sinan, there were great similarities between the Turkish language and Egyptian Arabic especially some common words. Besides, his understanding of friendship and theirs were so alike that he felt that the Egyptian man was like his brother. Sinan really wanted to speak in English so that he could communicate with these friends, who were his "real friends".

The participant considered his workfellows as 'friends', too. All the other people in the workplace were Native American. If he had wanted to communicate with the other workers and the customers, he had to use the English language. In the first months, after he started to work in the pizza place, he was not sharing his experiences about the Native American work fellows as he was not communicating with them at all. He told once that "they" were not saying "hello" or "how are you?" which are known as the communication starters. He was regarding them as "very cold people". As the time passes, he started to talk about his interactions with them and he started to use some positive adjectives while describing them like "funny", "intelligent" and "a good person". After developing positive attitudes towards his workfellows, and building better communication with them, he preferred not to share his workplace interactions with his wife, which can be interpreted as his resistance to be identified as "a spouse who can't speak English". This might be because his desire to gain power and feel powerful in his communication in English. It became clear that he was communicating with his workfellows without the need of his wife, as his "translator".

## 4.4. "Pizza Guy" Identity

He defined his workplace identity as someone who made people laugh and someone who could take the initiative of the conversation, even though he was not a fluent speaker of English. He also defined himself as someone who owned a bicycle rather than a car. Many times he talked about wanting to buy a car. Before coming to the US, he was a "man" who had a car. He was not comfortable with his "cyclist identity" and he

wants to earn more to be able to get a car. His boss told him that he could earn more if he learned English but he didn't want to invest in developing his English to earn more money.

#### **4.5. Investment in Pronunciation: Self- Regulation and Self- Talk**

I heard a noise outside. It was like an old American male talking in front of our door in English. When I asked Sinan to check the door, he replied, "There is nobody in front of the door. It was me. I was practicing how to pronounce some words in English". It was the first time that he studied English on his own and it was very positive for him that I supposed that native speaker was talking in front of the door. He was proud of himself that he could pronounce the words like a native speaker.

In two other incidents like this, where he practiced pronunciation privately, he made his own decision to *invest* in his pronunciation because he was getting positive comments. This self-regulation through self-talk is also an indicator of his developing a sense of ownership (Norton, 1997). Sinan saw a potential in investing in his pronunciation to balance unequal power relations (1995).

In terms of the influence of losses in one's capital as a result of moving to another society, Flowerdew and Miller (2008) mention,

This social perspective of language learning can be viewed as an interplay between social structure and individual agency, of how individual learners may be constrained, on the one hand, by the social world in which they find themselves, but at the same time are active participants in creating this social world, on the other. (p.202)

Actively engaging his own learning, Sinan's agency in this activity enabled him to redefine his identity as someone who can pronounce English words better than some other people who can speak more fluently than him.

#### **4.6. Identity as a Spouse**

In the interview, he was asked about his ideas on his wife's role in his learning English, but he was persistent in his answer, saying his wife had no impact on his language learning. Then, he started to talk about his wife's negative influence on his learning process. For him, she was forcing him to learn English and her existence was a reminder for him to learn things. His wife's identity as a graduate student and someone who can speak English, and his identity as someone who cannot speak in English were creating an unequal balance in their relation. He was telling people that she could not speak English well to change this power imbalance.

After starting to work in the pizza place, he gained power as he learned the words related to foods and how to pronounce them. As he learned many words at his workplace, he started to feel more powerful than his wife as she didn't know the names of the foods that he knew. He enjoyed being identified as "better" than his wife in English in this respect. The power he gained at work changed inequality. It also explains why he invested in pronunciation. In this case, Sinan's native like pronunciation is his capital in this power relation as Bourdieu (1977) mentions and his language through the use of native like pronunciation is an instrument of power that enables him to shift his identity as a spouse.

### **5. Discussion**

As Pavlenko (2001) discusses there are multiple identity categories we can investigate in SLA research. However, the current study looked at three identity categories of an accompanying spouse and the shifts in these identity categories. There were some shifts and transformations in his identities and in his investments depending on his capital and his interactions with other people in the socialization process. Sinan's investment in English was largely shaped by an identity as someone who wants to socialize and communicate with his friends. Sometimes he defined himself as someone who does not know anything, but sometimes he liked to be identified as someone who has native-like pronunciation. He never defined himself as an "immigrant" as he wanted to go back to his country.

He started to record his experiences after coming home. This led him to require a digital voice recorder to be able to record immediately after the event. The research process and recording his voice enabled him to speak to an imagined community, which led him to invest more. Such an imagined audience activated his to self-regulation practices through self-talk.

After he took the initiative to record his own interactions in the workplace, his impatience to recount the events to the researcher, became obvious. This self-reflectivity and self-discovery process through narratives (Georgakopoulou, 2005) was accompanied with the healing process, which helped him to be more positive about learning English. This will hopefully lead to a point where he becomes positive about his own learning and sees it as progress. He developed a sense of ownership of English with these recordings that also enhanced his communications in English with his immediate environment. His power is somewhat equalized by this, so he wanted to invest in his own learning of the language as a socialization process. Sinan took the role of becoming “a kind of auto ethnographer”, and he felt that he took the power of investing in his own learning. This empowering activity made him invest in this research study and his English attainment as in the example of practicing pronunciation.

It is important to mention that the great contributions of this research to his identifying himself as someone who ‘can communicate with people in English’ and someone who can manage ‘incomprehensible input’ to some extent by supporting this communication with body ‘language’ and some other strategies that he describes. He still insists on defining himself as “no speak English” with the people whom he does not have friendship relations with, and it seems that it will continue until he feels he can also communicate with other people, such as with cashiers.

## **6. Pedagogical implications**

Although this study is not in the formal language learning environment, the present study provided some pedagogical implications mainly because of the participants’ language course experience even though it was a short one. His non-participation to the language course was because he didn’t find the social interaction that he expected to find in that language course. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that language courses in study abroad contexts need to consider language learning as a social process and foster social interaction among the participants. Unless there is a social interaction, which has the desired interactional qualities, it seems that there is less investment in developing language skills especially when the intended stay in the host community is short. Similarly, as Martens and Grant (2008) concluded in their study, creating social communities for accompanying spouses to interact with the native community is highly important.

As the participant of this study experienced, there are some dynamics when a learner invests in developing language skills and these reasons are socially mediated and shaped by the social environment. For Sinan, how he was defined by the other people and how he defined himself when he can speak English or when he cannot speak was much more important than learning English. Even when he thought he was in the danger of losing his job, he didn’t prefer to invest developing his English. His interaction with the cashier also represents a good example for this. He wishes he had known little English so that he could have answered the cashier and he wouldn’t have been identified as someone “who is rude”. In schooling context, we need to focus on the fact that each student is human and unique rather than absorber of linguistics rules and structures. For a more humanizing pedagogy (Freire, 1985) in our schools, we need to consider how we identify our students and how the learning environment causes them to identify themselves.

As another implication of this study, we can talk about the importance of narratives in learning. As it is discussed earlier that we perceive and live in the world in narrative form (Carr, 1986; MacIntyre, 1981) and it is the process of self-discovery; therefore, that leads to a kind of healing (Rosenthal, 2003). As Narayan and George (2003) also confirm, recounting stories can lead to healing, and it is possible to transform from being marginalized to having identities that can create their own agency in both informal and formal contexts. Creating opportunities for language learners to reveal their voices through their own stories can also give them the chance

to address their imagined communities in the way they want to be. Self-regulation and self-discovery through narratives can increase learners' and educators' awareness of the dynamic of identity construction.

When it comes to language learning experiences both at home and in the host country contexts, using technologies such as Facebook to develop students' intercultural encounters and investments has a great potential. Facebook allows communication through material culture such as videos, pictures and applications, and for the ones who want to extend their communication it requires writing. It is the same for video or picture sharing; it becomes meaningful if the person who sends it writes something to introduce the video. Those introductory comments make the video funnier and make the people who send it popular as it helps the voice of the sender to emerge in their writing. It is about how you construct your identity through the videos you share, and how the others view the sender. Not everyone who uses Facebook uses these communicative functions as I described, but regardless of some characteristics there are a great deal of people who are very active on Facebook like Sinan. Facebook creates social worlds within worlds, and as Wegner (1998) suggests, in discussion of communities of practice, a Facebook user decides his/ her agency to the extent that he/ she wants to be defined as "the legitimate peripheral participator" in one specific group or more.

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