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## **Chapter 12 Language, Identity and Interculturality: a Paradigm-shifting Question**

*“Where are you from?”*

As someone who was born and grew up in China, who has spent the last 15 years working in British higher education and lived in Newcastle and London, I often found it difficult to answer the above question in small talk. I can never get it right. If I say that I’m from London, I can guarantee that the next question would be ‘But where are you really from?’. People expect to hear that I am from China or somewhere in Asia. But I feel that I am misleading them if I just give them what they want to hear. I am Chinese, but that is not all. I am a Chinese living in London, a professor in a British university and have two children of school age who were born and grew up in England. I have a good idea of who I am, but I need to do a lot of work to explain it to other people, or be selective in presenting myself with some element of audience design. This is because I am an ‘outliner’, living away from my ethnic place of origin.

Identity is multiple and complex. As my own case shows, who you think you are is not necessarily the same as how other people think of you. It is perhaps not surprising to many that identity is a heavily researched concept in a number of disciplines and fields including applied linguistics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, social psychology, politics, anthropology, cultural studies, to name but a few. In this chapter, we start with a brief overview of the multiplicity of the concept of identity and then focus on the relationship between cultural identity and ethnicity. In the third section, we explore interculturality, a line of enquiry that investigates how people employ interactional resources in identification.

### **12.1 Identity: Multiplicity and Types**

Identity is a difficult term to define, since it is rich with (contradictory) meanings and implicatures both in its ordinary sense and in academic discourse. The paradoxical nature of the term is well demonstrated in Karen Tracey’s attempt to define it as a unitary yet contradictory concept. For her, identities

*Are best thought of as stable features of persons that exist prior to any particular situation, and are dynamic and situated accomplishments, enacted through talk, changing from one occasion to the next. Similarly, identities are social categories and are personal and unique.* (Tracey, 2002, pp.17-8, emphasis original)

#### Task 12.1 Who am I

Complete the following 'I am' sentence up to 20 times, each time using a different word or phrase to describe yourself. After you have completed, please read the task commentary to analyse your description.

I am: \_\_\_\_\_

As an alternative way of interpreting the depth and scope that come with the term, some scholars have looked into different types of identity. A selection of different varieties of identity is given below.

*Master, interactional, relational and personal identities.* These four types of identity proposed by Tracey (2002) differ from each other on two dimensions: stable vs. situated and social vs. personal.

- Master identities refer to those aspects of personhood (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age, nationality) which are relatively stable and do not change from situation to situation.
- Interactional identities refer to specific and situational roles people enact in a communicative context. A person can be a college student, a volunteer for Oxfam, a passenger, and a mother.
- Relational identities refer to interpersonal relationships such as power difference or social distance between people involved in a given situation. They are negotiable and context-specific. For example, in an appraisal meeting, there is power difference between a manager and an employee whose work-related performance is assessed. If they meet in a lift, however, the power difference is less an issue.
- Personal identities refer to personality, attitudes and character which are relatively stable and unique.

*Discourse, situated, and transportable identities.* This classification by Zimmerman (1998) differentiates contexts created and invoked by different types of identity in interaction.

- Discourse identities are those that people assume and project in the various sequentially organised activities of talk, e.g. speaker, listener, story teller, story recipient, questioner, answerer, etc. They can shift turn by turn. For example, a person who asks a question may need to answer some questions first and a story recipient may become a story teller in subsequent turns.
- Situated identities are those that come into play in a particular situation. As an interviewee, where you find yourself, e.g. in a news interview, police interview, or job interview, makes a difference to your expectations. Compared with discourse identities which change constantly, situated identities remain relatively stable.
- Transportable identities are latent identities that ‘tag along’ with individuals as they move through their daily routines and may or may not be relevant to interactions. Examples include ‘male’, ‘young’ or ‘white’. Participants may be aware of these identities, but they may not orient to identities in interactions.

*Imposed, assumed, and negotiable identities.* This classification by Pavlenko & Blackledge (2003) differentiates identities in terms of acceptance and negotiability.

- Imposed identities are those which one cannot contest or resist at a particular time and place. Pavlenko & Blackledge gave two examples of imposed identities. One was the identification of Jews in Nazi Germany and the other was citizenship-related language testing required from immigrants who apply for a British passport.
- Assumed identities are those accepted and not negotiated by many at a given time. Examples of assumed identities include heterosexual white middle-class males or monolingual speakers of the majority language.
- Negotiable identities are those contested by groups and individuals through their agency and choice. A wide range of negotiable identities were included in the collection edited by Pavlenko & Blackledge, e.g. ethnicity and nationality, gender, race, class and social status, able-bodiedness, sexuality, religious affiliation, linguistic competence and ability.

The multiplicity of identity as highlighted in these classifications is a reflection of three broad paradigms in theorisation of identities in scholars’ quest (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). These paradigms are:

- identity as a project of the self;
- identity as a product of the social and

- identity as constituted in discourse.

Historically, identity was regarded as a project of the self (a concept equally difficult to define) and as something to do with ‘the mind/body/soul/brain’ and therefore, subjective, internal and unique (Riley, 2007). It has roots in philosophy and flourished in the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis. The recognition by scholars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Hegel, 1807/1977) that self cannot exist without the other paved the way for the second paradigm, which emphasises the social and collective nature of identities as embodied in a range of social variables and group labels such as middle class, elderly, northerners. Examples of scholarly approaches that build on the social nature of identities include variationist sociolinguistic theory which explores the link between linguistic variables and social factors such as gender, age or social class. The third paradigm, identity as constituted in discourse, has two parallel lines of enquiry. One focuses on the process of identification and treats identity as a discursive performance, constructed and negotiated through interactions. This line of enquiry provides a backdrop to the Interculturality approach which will be explored in Section 12.3. The other is to examine dominant discourse and ideology that impact and reproduce identity. A fairly detailed review of these three paradigms can be found in Benwell & Stokoe (2006).

In the next section, we shall look at a specific case of identity, i.e., ‘cultural identity’, which people often refer to in intercultural communication.

## **12.2 Cultural Identity**

Cultural identity is very often described as a collection of multiple identities, consisting of predominantly ethnic identities along with other intersecting identities such as race, nationality, gender, class and religious affiliation. One possible take on the relationship between cultural identity and other types of identities can be found in Orbe & Harris (2001) who took a more dynamic view of the multi-faceted nature of cultural identity. They proposed that while race and ethnicity are a part of cultural identity, other variables such as abilities, age, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, spirituality and socioeconomic status interact with these two and act as cultural identity ‘markers’. Some markers can become more salient and intense than others in the process of communication.

Although cultural identity is not only about ethnicity and race, ethnicity and race are central to cultural identities to the extent that ethnic or racial identities are often conflated with cultural identity in practice. This raises the question, why do ethnicity and race play such a

prominent role in cultural identity? The answer partly lies in habit and the need to categorise others' ethnicity and race as observed by Omi & Winant (1994, p.59)

*One of the first things we notice about people when we meet them (along with their sex) is their race ... This fact is made painfully obvious when we encounter someone whom we cannot conveniently racially categorize – someone who is, for example, racially 'mixed.'*

There are plenty of examples in everyday life when a person has been assigned ethnic or racial identity that either conforms to or differs from what the person considers him or herself to be. One of the interesting anecdotes I have heard was a colleague's experience as a visiting teacher on an exchange programme in Australia. When she was introduced to the children in an Australian primary school, they asked her where she came from. She duly confessed that that she was from Germany. However, one child was quick to point out that it could not be true, since she was not wearing a scarf like all the other previous visiting teachers from Germany!

The fact is that when we categorise others' ethnicity and race, we use a range of *audible*, *visible* and *readable* cues and rely on our prior experience and knowledge the salient features of a species, in other words, schemata, the idea we discussed earlier in Chapter 6.

*You are how you sound.* An example of audible cues is the way we speak language(s), in particular, accent and fluency. There have been some interesting and fruitful studies linking perception of dialectal accent and identification of ethnicity. Linguistic profiling studies by John Baugh and other scholars (Baugh, 1999, Purnell, William & Baugh, 1999) are such an example. In these studies, the researcher called the same landlord for an appointment but used three different varieties of English: Standard English, AAVE (African American Vernacular English) and Chicano English. The results were that in areas where the population was predominantly white, a much higher percentage of the requests made with the Standard English were successful, while those with non-standard varieties achieved a lower success rate. Other studies (e.g. Anisfeld, Bogo & Lambert, 1962; Fayer & Krasinski, 1987) have shown that, similar to dialectal variations, 'foreign' accents or accents of second language users were often judged to be less educated, less intelligent or poorer.

Fluency in a heritage language is often used as a marker of the strength of one's orientation towards ethnicity of the community. According to Fought (2006), speaking the language of the community may be a way of asserting ethnic identity amongst members of the community;

those members who do not speak the language of the community may find their ethnicity called into question.

*You are how you look.* The visible cues we use in categorisation of ethnicity include one's appearance. Much anecdotal evidence can be found in the literature documenting how people ascribe ethnicity according to one's appearance. Ien Ang, the author of *On Not speaking Chinese* (2001), was born into a family of Chinese descent in Indonesia and grew up in the Netherlands. She wrote about her predicaments of Chineseness: 'In Taiwan I was different because I couldn't speak Chinese; in the West I was different because I looked Chinese' (p.vii). Fought (2006, p.6) also reported a Panamanian girl of African descent who was told by her teacher to check 'black' on the form because, in the teacher's words, 'that is what people see when they look at you'.

Some studies (e.g. Rubin, 1992, reported by Lippi-Green, 1997/2012; Williams, F., 1983) identified the link between visual and audio cues, in particular, how we hear and 'imagine' accent through someone's appearance (e.g. whiteness, blackness, Asianess, etc.). In Williams' study (1983), a group of European-American students were shown three videos which used the same audio file, but with three speakers of different ethnicity: European-American, African-American and Mexican-American. Despite using the same audio file, the last two videos were rated significantly less standard than the first. These studies revealed how one's prior knowledge of ethnicity and categorisation of ethnicity through racial phenotype (e.g. skin colour, hair, facial features, etc.) can lead to bias in perception and result in 'linguistic discrimination'.

*You are what you are on paper.* Categorisation of ethnicity also takes place through written, hence, readable cues. One such cue is name. Those who carry 'foreign' names may find themselves at disadvantage when it comes to applying for jobs. Shahid Iqbal, as reported by Sangita Myska (2012) in BBC News Magazine, adopted a British name, Richard Brown, when he realised at the age of 18 that his name proved problematic in getting a job. He then found the vacancies for which he had previously applied but which, allegedly, were 'filled', were now available. He is now the owner of an engineering company in Birmingham and has decided to keep the name of Richard Brown.

Apart from names, how you write tells others about yourself. Studies have shown that second language speakers' texts differ from native speakers' in a variety of linguistic and rhetorical aspects (e.g. Hinkel, 2002) and in the degree of flexibility (e.g. Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007,

discussed previously in connection with email request in Chapter 1). My study on presentation of self in application letters (Zhu, 2007) also found that when it comes to presenting themselves as desirable, there were salient differences in several aspects between British students and those ‘international’ students from China in a postgraduate course in a UK university.

### *Crossing and passing*

Some studies in sociolinguistics have identified a phenomena described as *crossing*, in which speakers use the language varieties of social and ethnic groups to which they do not normally belong. Classical studies on crossing have examined the use of an English-based Caribbean Creole among white teenagers in South London (Hewitt, 1986) and the use of Panjabi, stylised Asian English and Creole among three groups of white, Afro-Caribbean and Panjabi teenagers in the southern Midlands of England (Rampton, 1995, 1999). In the following example, Asif and Salim switched from Panjabi to Stylised Asian English in their response to Miss Jameson’s first use of ‘after you’.

#### **Example 12.1**

Asif and Alan were in detention under the supervision of a teacher, Mr Chambers. Miss Jameson, who came to swap with Mr Chambers, arrived at the room at the same time as Kazim and Salim, two of Asif’s friends. SAE: Stylised Asian English in Italics.

Kazim & Salim arrive at the door.

1. Asif: Kaz [in Panjabi] stay here stay here.
2. Mr Chambers: ( see you messing around)
3. Alan: ( )
4. Asif: [chants, in Panjabi] your [obscenity] nonsense
5. Miss Jameson: after you
6. Asif: [in SAE] after you::
7. Salim: [higher pitch, in SAE] after you::

(Rampton, 1995, p.72, transcription slightly altered. [ ]: notes on language)

Crossing occurs very often among adolescents who borrow phonology, syntax or lexicon from another language variety for a variety of reasons. In a review by Fought (2006), she identified some common themes. For example, crossing can be used to undermine parents or teachers’ authority as a form of rebellion, to disguise the use of taboo and offensive language, to achieve humorous effect in verbal play, and to signal a desire to affiliate with the values of



the borrowed code, such as ‘tough, cool and good to use’, which may or may not be directly attributed to ethnicity. In the above example, Asif and Salim’s dramatised switch to SAE in replying to Miss Jameson’s ‘polite’ formulaic expression in Lines 6 & 7 could be interpreted as a part of ‘verbal duelling’, and a way of marking their resistance and undermining the teacher’s authority.

In contrast to crossing, passing refers to ‘the ability to be taken for a member of a social category other than one’s own’ (Bucholtz, 1995, p.351). Riley (2007, p. 233) cited a case of a call centre in India where young people were trained to ‘pass’ for Americans. Part of the call centre training course was designed to erase all traces of their Indian accent in English and to acquire a ‘pleasant middle American (not educated American) accent’. They were given names such as Nancy, Sally Jane, Bill, Jim, etc. and biographies of their American identities: place and date of birth, parents’ occupation, etc., while few of them had ever been to America. In Bucholtz’s study (1995), she documented several cases in which people affiliated with ethnicity that was not a part of their biological origins. In the following extract, a light-skinned Black woman described how she found ‘a kind of psychological shelter’ in being a Spaniard.

*Due to a complex combination of socio-economic circumstances, I happened to find a kind of psychological shelter in Latino heritage and even grew to identify more with it than with my own culture(s) ... It wasn’t until years later I realised why I had such an obsessive drive to learn Spanish and why I felt so at ease, relaxed and at home in Spain, a country whose people had the exact same skin color I did. I had simply been searching for a kind of psychic shelter, wherever I could find it. (Zook, 1990, cited in Bucholtz, 1995, p.357, emphasis original)*

To sum up, in this section, we have looked at some possible definitions of cultural identities. Through the discussion of audible, visible and readable cues of cultural identities, I hope to illustrate that the categorisation of cultural identities is subject to both self-selection and ascription-by-others. In the next section, we explore the role of self-orientation and discuss how the battle of self-orientation and ascription-by-others play out in interactional practices.

### **12.3 Interculturality: From Being to Doing Cultural Identities**

Recent years have seen growing use of the term ‘Interculturality’ in public discourse, intercultural learning and education and other related fields. In public discourse, interculturality, derived from the adjective, intercultural, is used largely to refer to interaction

and active engagement between different cultural groups and communities, in contrast to multiculturalism, which concerns organic co-existence of cultural groups and communities. In the field of intercultural learning and education, interculturality represents a language and culture learning pedagogy which believes that the goal of language learning is to become intercultural speakers, mediating between different perspectives and cultures, rather than to replace one's native language and culture with 'target' ones (see Chapter 1 for further discussion of the intercultural approach).

As an emerging research paradigm, interculturality represents a line of investigation that departs from traditions of seeing cultural memberships or cultural differences, largely, if not always, as something 'given', 'static', or as something 'one either has or does not have'. Instead, it problematises the notion of cultural identities and emphasises the *emergent*, *discursive* and *inter* nature of interactions. By examining interactional practices, in particular, sequences of talk, interculturality seeks to interpret how participants make (aspects of) cultural identities relevant or irrelevant to interactions through *interplay* of self-orientation and ascription-by-others and interplay of language use and identities. This theoretical perspective originates in Nishizaka's seminal work (1995), extended by Mori's work on Japanese and American students' talk (2003). Two journal special issues (Higgins, 2007; Sercombe & Young, 2010) present some recent, concerted efforts by scholars to develop the approach theoretically and methodologically. The main agenda and contributions can be summarised through the following six questions.

1. Are cultural memberships always relevant to intercultural interactions?
2. What do participants do with cultural memberships?
3. How do participants do cultural identities?
4. What interactional resources are available for doing cultural identities?
5. Why do people bother with interculturality?
6. How far can participants go when doing cultural identities?

We shall look at each question in turn.

*Are cultural memberships always relevant to intercultural interactions?*

This is the starting point for the interculturality approach. Echoing the arguments of many scholars who advocate multiplicity of social identities (e.g. Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998), the interculturality perspective argues that an individual has a number of identities and belongs to

many membership categories, but not all identities are equally salient or relevant at a given point in differing social interactions. Cultural memberships such as ‘being Japanese, American, Jamaican, Spanish, etc.’ cannot be taken for granted. Instead, they are contingent on participants’ self-orientation and ascription-by-others, and brought about in interactions as a situated, practical accomplishment (Higgins, 2007). Example 12.2 is an extract from an interview about foreigners’ experience in Japan on a radio programme from Nishizaka (1995, p.304). Read the extract first. What could you say about A’s cultural membership? Is he a non-Japanese just like B?

### Example 12.2

A: interviewer; B: interviewee

The interview was conducted in Japanese, transcribed broadly and then translated into English.

1. A: One thing I want to ask you is: when Japanese people talk in
- 2 Japanese, they are sometimes only diplomatic,
- 3 B: Yes.
- 4 A: [they] are just apparently sociable,
- 5 B: Yes.
- 6 A: [they] are sometimes so, aren’t [they]?
- 7 B: Yes.
- 8 A: For example, “Well, Shiri-san, come to my home uh next holiday,”
- 9 say [they] very easily.
- 10 B: Yes.
- 11 A: If you actually go there on the next holiday, [they] will say, “Oh?
- 12 For what have you come here,” may be. hhhh
- 13 B: hhhhhhhhhhhh
- 13a Yes.
- 14 A: I mean, what [they] say and
- 15 B: Yes.
- 16 A: what [they] mean seem different,
- 17 B: Yes
- 18 A: this way Japanese often
- 19 B: Yes.
- 20 A: talk,don’t [they]. [they] often talk so.

- 21 B: Yes.  
 21a Yes.  
 22 A: How about this.  
 23 B: This is a little troublesome to foreigners, [they]  
 24 A: It's troublesome, isn't it.  
 25 B: Yes, wrongly, [they] will take what is said for what is meant,  
 (Nishizaka, 1995, p.304, transcription slightly altered: [ ]: texts added in translation)

In fact, the interviewer A was Japanese and the interviewee B was a Sri Lankan living in Japan. The point Nishizaka was trying to make is that a speaker could make their cultural membership irrelevant through interactive work. During the interview, the interviewer, a Japanese himself, deliberately distanced himself from 'being a Japanese' by repeatedly referring to Japanese as 'Japanese people' or 'they'. In doing so, the interviewer oriented to his interactional role as an interviewer rather than his Japanese-ness. The interviewee accepted his alignment and tried to establish himself as a representative of foreigners living in Japan. He confirmed the interviewer's assertions in almost every turn by saying 'yes' and elaborating occasionally (e.g. Turns 23, 25, etc). In Turn 23, he used the word 'foreigners' as if he was talking about other people, not about himself.

In arguing that cultural memberships of participants are not *a priori*, interculturality studies distance themselves from those approaches to intercultural communication research which assume cultural differences as default, and attribute mis- or non-understandings in interactions to cultural differences. In fact, interculturality studies have demonstrated that cultural memberships may not be the source of breakdown in intercultural interactions in that

- Cultural memberships are not always salient or relevant in interactions; participants can make cultural memberships irrelevant.
- Cultural memberships, when relevant to interactions, do not always lead to problems of talk.

*What do participants do with cultural memberships?*

As Antaki & Widdicombe (1998, p.2) eloquently put it, cultural memberships can be 'ascribed (and rejected), avowed (and disavowed), displayed (and ignored)'. Participants can do a number of things with cultural membership. They can make their cultural membership irrelevant as shown in the above Example 12.2. They can ascribe membership to others in social activities. They can claim memberships of groups to which they do not normally belong (recall the discussion we had earlier on crossing and passing). They can resist cultural

membership assigned by others. Day (1998) identified some ways in which resistance occurs. These include:

- Dismissing the relevance of the category;
- Minimising the supposed ‘difference’ between categories;
- Reconstituting the category;
- Ethnifying the ethnifier, i.e. turning the table by assigning cultural memberships to those who assign memberships in the first place;
- Actively avoiding it.

In Example 12.3, Lars suggested Chinese food for the party they were planning. Rita took the next turn and made a comment about Chinese food. Since it was not clear from the data how the following turn was allocated, we could only speculate that Xi, an ethnic Chinese, felt obliged to take up the floor when her cultural expertise was made relevant. She faced two choices: either dismissing the potential relevance of the category of being a Chinese or continuing the flow of the discussion by commenting on Chinese food as a cultural insider. She opted for the first by suggesting that she was fine with any type of food, thus presenting herself as an individual rather than a cultural expert on Chinese food. Her subtle resistance to making her Chinese background salient in the conversation, however, encountered admonishment from Lars, who was quick to point out that this was not just about Xi herself.

### **Example 12.3**

Participants were workers in a Swedish factory. They were planning a party.

51 Lars:           don’t we have something that, one can eat

52                   that, China or

53 Rita:           Chinese food is really pretty good

54 Xi:             haha (( )) it doesn’t matter, I’ll eat anything

55 Rita:           ah ((that’s       [what I that))

56 Lars:                               [yeah, but this concerns everyone

57                   doesn’t it?

(Day, 1998, p.162; transcription slighted altered)

*How do participants do cultural identities?*

Participants 'do' cultural identities through a range of interactional work and discursive practice. The key mechanism of interculturality can be summarised in the following points.

1. Membership categorisation as a pre-requisite;
2. Whether a person's cultural membership is relevant or operative is achieved locally through moments of identification by participants of interaction;
3. The paradox of identification on the spur of the moment and control;
4. Indexical and symbolic cues of relevant category-bound activities and features;

*Membership categorisation as a pre-requisite.* The prerequisite for a person to 'have an identity' is that the person is cast into a category with associated characteristics or features (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p.3). This principle draws on the concept of the Membership Categorization Device (MCD, Sacks, 1972). Sacks observed that people use language to order objects of the world into categories such as family, Londoner, Mexican, student, etc. There are conventional expectations about what constitutes a category's normative behaviour. If someone displays a certain set of features or carries out particular actions usually associated with a category (category-bound activities, in Sacks' terms), she would be cast as a member of the category. For example, if you take lectures, are registered on a course or have a student ID card, you may be categorised as a student. A person can belong to several categories. For example, a student could also carry the categories of female, mother, stamp collector, Irish, musician, tourist, shopper, etc.

*Making cultural membership relevant locally through moments of identification by participants of interaction.* A person can belong to several categories at the same time, but not all of them will be relevant to a social activity or practice at a given time. Omoniyi (2006) proposed a model of Hierarchy of Identity, arguing that a person's various identities are allocated in a hierarchy based on the degree of salience it claims through 'moment of identification'. Moments of identification are specific points in interactions or social activities for participants to signal their identity work through various means and resources.

*The paradox of identification on the spur of the moment and control.* On one hand, identification appears to occur on the spur of the moment during interactions, on the other hand, it is a controlled decision made by participants. Participants need to pick up 'cues' of identification, assess options of identification available at that particular moment, take into account their prior knowledge about and experience of a membership category, or do a quick

calculation of costs and benefits that may come with each option, e.g. desirability of resistance and ascription of categorisation to them and their interactional partners.

*Indexical and symbolic cues of relevant category-bound activities and features.* Participants in interactions, at moments of identification, rely on the combination of symbolic and indexical cues that evoke the relevance of particular category-bound features and activities associated with cultural identities. This principle draws upon Gumperz's idea of 'contextualisation cues' which refer to 'any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling of contextual presuppositions' (1982, p. 131). Examples of symbolic and indexical cues include accent, code-switching, address terms, cultural-specific terms, among other things. The audible, visible or readable cues of ethnicity as discussed in the previous section are all indexical and symbolic in nature. It is through these indexical and symbolic cues that participants make demonstrably relevant certain aspects of their own cultural identities or those of others, intentionally or inadvertently. Their recipients may choose to align with, avow, resist, or ignore cultural identities evoked by these cues. In some cases they may fail to pick up or misread the cues, which leads to misunderstanding.

*What interactional resources are available for doing cultural identities?*

As our discussion about indexical and symbolic cues shows, participants have a range of linguistic forms and interactional resources at their disposal to do identity work. The following list represents some of the areas and analytical focuses reported in interculturality studies.

- Topical talk related to cultural expertise and practice. In Zimmerman's study (2007), she examined how topics about two traditional cultural foods, *kimuchi* (pickled spicy vegetables in Korea) and *tsukemono* (pickled vegetables in Japan), were used to evoke relevant cultural identities and as a conversation strategy for establishing and demonstrating solidarity among conversation participants. She also found that cultural expertise was often claimed by non-members of the culture and presumed cultural experts did not always enact their cultural memberships. One type of topical talk on cultural practice is comment about the degree of appropriacy of social, cultural and linguistic behaviour in specific contexts which is termed as 'talk about social, cultural and linguistic practices' in my work (Zhu, 2008, 2010, an example can be found in Chapter 9).

- Cultural references by names and address terms. Ryoo (2007) reported a conversation in which a Korean shop owner introduced himself as Jackie Chan, a Hong Kong movie star, in his attempt to avoid the hassle of dealing with a salesperson. In my study of Chinese diasporic families (Zhu, 2008), the choice and avoidance of a particular address term as well as the choice of Chinese or English names were found to function as indexical and symbolic cues of Chinese cultural values and identities.
- Use of the language or a code normally associated with a group. Cutler (2007) examined the practice of a white teenager who marked himself linguistically as White by overemphasising his pronunciation of /r/. Day (1998) gave several examples of how linguistic expertise is often used as an index of cultural identity. In one example, a participant challenged another participant's self-orientation to Swedish by questioning whether a presumably Swedish word spoken by him is Finnish.

#### *Why do people bother with interculturality?*

There are various reasons for and consequences of 'doing cultural identities'. My own study on interculturality (Zhu, 2010) showed that interculturality plays an important part in reinforcing and negotiating social relationships among different generations of diasporic families who, more often than not, face the tension between cultural values of diasporic communities and those of the local communities, and the need to deal with different language ideologies and discrepancies in linguistic abilities. Elsewhere, Higgins argued that interculturality can be used as 'a source for comity, affiliative positioning and mutual understanding (2007, p.3). Interculturality also helps participants to organise their participation in conversations by selecting possible respondents for category-bound activities or features evoked by indexical and symbolic cues (Mori, 2003). References to cultural memberships are frequently employed as a strategy in the context of tandem language learning, a language exchange activity in which each learner is a native speaker in the language which the other learner wants to learn (Woodin, 2010).

#### *How far can participants go when doing interculturality?*

This is perhaps the most challenging question for scholars working on identity. Interculturality studies have argued that cultural identities cannot be taken for granted and therefore, in this sense, they are neither given nor fixed. Few of them, however, have gone further to argue that cultural identities are socially constructed and *entirely* up to participants' orientation and negotiation, a position advocated by many studies following a



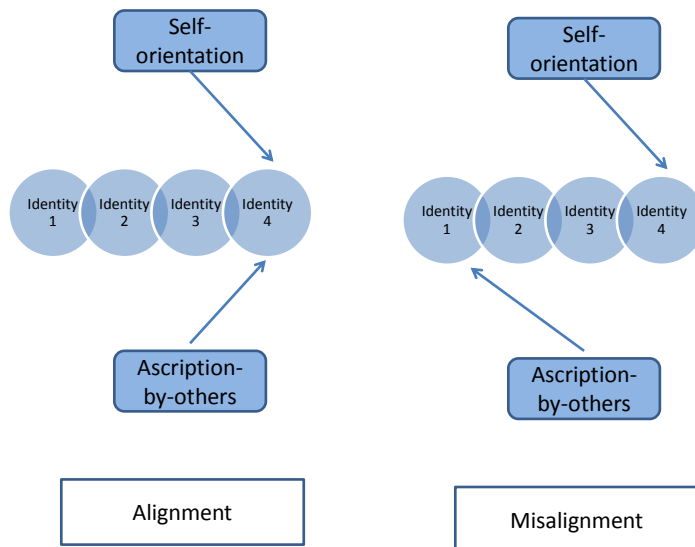
poststructuralist approach in recent years. As Block (2006) commented, the poststructuralist approach, which seeks to frame identity as ‘socially constructed, a self-conscious, ongoing narrative an individual performs, interprets and projects in dress, bodily movements, actions and language’, has become dominant among theorists and researchers interested in how individuals do identity work. In some studies following the poststructuralist approach, agency of participants in doing identity has been taken to an extreme to imply that all choices become possible (cf. May, 2001) and identity has become a ‘free-floating’ concept (Dervin, 2012).

This reluctance on interculturality scholars’ part to adopt a poststructuralist stance on cultural identities, in my opinion, is justifiable. As May (2001) argued, although negotiation is the key to construction of cultural identity, there are limits to it. The limitation partly comes from the fact that for certain parts of cultural identity, such as how we look and how we use language, is visible, audible and readable, and is partly due to the fact that some national and ethnic categories such as Chinese, European American, Jewish, black, etc. are socially and politically defined and reiterated through public discourse and social practices. In what follows, Matthews (2000) used a cultural supermarket metaphor to vividly highlight the limitations of choices as a consequence of social structures and (unequal) power relationship between individuals.

*...just as the modern supermarket offers foods from all over the world, in all shapes and sizes, so the international media and advanced technology together make available to individuals around the world a range of identities to be assumed. However, the cultural supermarket is not a completely free market where any self identity under the sun can be assumed; nor is it a reality in an equal way for all of the inhabitants of this planet. In the former case there are social structures within which individuals exist (be these state governments, peer groups or educational systems) which constrain the amount and scope of choice available to individuals. In the latter case, there are individuals living within social structures that do not allow them to make as many choices (e.g. societies where the role of men and women are circumscribed by tradition.) (Matthews, 2000, cited in Block, 2006, p.36)*

For interculturality studies, what can be negotiated by participants, is the extent of alignment or misalignment between ascription-by-others and self-orientation and the relevance of cultural memberships at a specific time in interactions (see Figure 12.1). Interculturality studies have showed that participants can use a range of interactional resources to

acknowledge, uphold or avow others' ascription on one hand, or to resist, challenge, rebut or ignore others' ascription on the other hand.



**Figure 12.1 Alignment and misalignment between self-oriented and ascribed identities**

In interpreting relevance of cultural memberships and understanding the nature of negotiation between participants, interculturality studies benefit from Conversation Analysis (CA), a theoretical and analytical approach to social interaction with the purpose of understanding how meaning is produced, interpreted and negotiated in conversation through an analysis of linguistic features. Two ideas are of relevance to our current discussion: the role of context and the issue of 'demonstrable' relevance. In CA, no references are made to participants' internal states (e.g. goals, expectancies, motives, etc.). The sociolinguistic variables such as power relations, gender and formality only become relevant when participants themselves publicly display some orientation to them. The issues of demonstrable relevance also help analysts to focus on what is really relevant at a given time rather than what can be *assumed* to be relevant. As Schegloff explained:

*Showing that some orientation to context is demonstrably relevant to the participants is important... in order to ensure that what informs the analysis is what is relevant to the participants in its target event, and not what is relevant in the first instance to its academic analysts by virtue of the set of analytic and theoretical commitments which they bring to their work. (Schegloff, 1992, cited in Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p.37)*

### **Task 12.2 ‘This is for the UK passport holder’**

Read the following conversation that took place at Heathrow airport border control. B was waiting at the head of the queue for UK nationals. She did not realise that a desk was available until A, a ‘Chinese’-looking man standing behind her, alerted her in Line 1. Discuss what happened in Lines 2 and 3.

1 A: Excuse me, would you like to go to the next one over there?

2 B: (turning around) This is for the UK passport holder.

3 A: I know, but do you want to go to the next one?

In sum, interculturality, as a new and emerging research paradigm, provides an analytical stance that focuses on the role of interactions and discursive practice in negotiating relevance of cultural identities. It examines whether and to what extent participants bring about, align with each other, or resist cultural memberships oriented to by themselves or ascribed by others in interactions. It takes cultural identities as a process and outcome of negotiation, rather than something *a priori*. By doing so, it restores the central role of language practice in intercultural communication.

### **12.4 Thinking back and looking forward**

We explored how language and culture are interrelated in Chapter 10 and how the boundaries and scope of the field reflect diverse conceptualisations of culture in Chapter 11. In this chapter, we revisited these issues from another route through a closer look at the link between cultural identities and language practice. The issue of cultural identities and language practices cross-cuts many key issues of intercultural communication. It concerns language learners/users, multilingual speakers, lingua franca speakers, immigrants and transnational populations and people in general in everyday life. Through the discussion about interculturality and the relevant issues in various chapters, we have come to the view that language practices and identity are mutually dependent and inter-connected. Language practices index and symbolise identities, which in turn impact on and feed back into language practices.

Some of the issues which have been discussed in relation to cultural identity and language practice in the previous chapters are:

- The notion of third culture or third place as the goal of culture and language learning (Chapter 1);
- Learner identity as a contributing factor in classroom participation (Chapter 1);
- The use of foreign language or multilingualism in advertising as a strategy of invoking cultural or national images associated with the language (Chapter 3);
- The development of cultural identity among *third culture kids* or transnational populations who are exposed to possibly conflicting sets of cultural values and practices (Chapter 4);
- The issues of identity, language ideologies and language choice of intercultural couples and of children in transnational families (Chapter 4);
- The issue of ‘staged’ cultural identity and the potential risk of reducing culture to commodity at cultural heritage sites (Chapter 5);
- Communication accommodative behaviours motivated by the need to maintain one’s own group identity (Chapter 8);
- The issue of synthesising personal and institutional self in professional and institutional discourse (Chapter 8);
- The notion of symbolic competence as an alternative to the notion of third place (Chapter 9).

The range and diversity of these issues not only demonstrates the centrality of the issue of language and identity in the field of intercultural communication, but also reminds us of the highly multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of the field. Intercultural communication draws insights from a number of different perspectives. Three broad types of intercultural communication studies can be identified as follows, together with their connections with other disciplines or field of studies.

1. Studies that are concerned with the identification and interpretation of cultural differences, applying theories and methods from Sociology, Social Psychology, (Cross-)Cultural Psychology, Education, Race and Ethnic Studies, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Communication Studies and Business management;
2. Studies that focus specifically on interplay between cultural differences and language use. These studies draw insights from disciplines such as Linguistic Anthropology, Sociolinguistics, Discourse and Conversation Analysis, and Language Learning and Teaching, Pragmatics. Some have developed into their own sub-fields such as Interlanguage Pragmatics and Cross-Cultural Pragmatics.
3. Studies that examine the impact of structures of power, socio-economic relations, ideologies on communication among people of different cultural backgrounds. These are the key issues of a newly emerging field of critical intercultural communication. It benefits from many discussions in critical discourse analysis, cultural studies, gender studies and politics.

Following my earlier argument (Zhu, 2011) that *language is key to understanding culture, and culture is an indispensable part of studying language*, the present book explores the role of language in intercultural communication, paying particular attention to interplay between cultural differences and language use. By examining how intercultural communication permeates our everyday life in Part 1, what we can do to achieve effective and appropriate intercultural communication in Part 2, and why we bother to study language, culture and identity together (Part 3), I hope that this book can bring together different, either current or emerging, strands and themes in the field of language and intercultural communication. The book focuses on intercultural interactions in which people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interact with each other, and regards intercultural communication as a process of negotiating meaning, relevance of cultural identities and above all, differences between ourselves and others.

Intercultural communication as a field was founded in the 1950s to address the need among American diplomats to ‘familiarise’ themselves with ‘cultures of their enemies’. It is yet to convince many of its critics of its theoretical coherence and practical value. There are still many misconceptions about the field. Toby Miller wrote in his endorsement for *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication* (Nakayama & Halualani, 2010), ‘for too long intercultural communication was derided as a means of selling things to people who weren’t the same as you’. As we have discussed in this book, intercultural communication issues may have increasingly strong and visible presence in the business world because of the trend of globalization and the international nature of many businesses. There are many other sites in our everyday lives where intercultural communication issues are relevant, such as education, family, travel, study abroad, workplace, politics, the media, law, medical communication, service encounters, some of which this book only touches upon (cf. . . .). Another misconception is the belief that the field aims to pursue and promote ‘communion’ rather than acknowledge difference (Scherle & Nonnenmann, 2011). The truth, I believe, is that intercultural communication provides an analytical lens to differences we see and experience in our interactions with other people who may look different from us, speak a different language, or speak the same language in a different way. I hope this book goes some way to readdress these misconceptions.