



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

McEntee-Atalianis, Lisa (2022) Language and identity: past concerns, future directions. *Sociolinguistica* 36 (1-2), pp. 137-150. ISSN 1865-939X.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/47996/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>
contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

or alternatively

Author: Lisa McEntee-Atalianis

Affiliation: Birkbeck, University of London, 26, Russell Square, Bloomsbury, London.
WC1B 5DT.

Contact e-mail address: l.mcentee-atalianis@bbk.ac.uk

ORCID (Lisa McEntee-Atalianis): <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0939-4953>

Language and Identity: Past concerns, future directions

Abstract: “Identity” as an operating variable and/or explanatory concept continues to pervade sociolinguistic scholarship. This article reflects on and discusses the continuing dominance of post-structural and social constructionist accounts of identity and debates whether recent work has led to an “unrestrained embracing of speaker agency” (Bell 2017: 592) with a comparative neglect of social structure, or whether this work is contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between local meaning-making practices and macro-socio(linguistic) processes, and thereby challenging extant binaries in sociolinguistics, in particular: the treatment of stability versus fluidity, agency versus structure and the traditional dichotomy between micro- and macro-sociolinguistics. Reflecting on historical developments and recent trends, it outlines the significant contribution of theoretical models and empirical studies to sociolinguistics, whilst noting obvious gaps, e.g. insufficient studies of the Global South. It is argued that recent work is contributing to a sociolinguistics which foregrounds and problematises the concept of “context” and the contingency of difference and belonging. The paper also argues that recent identity scholarship opens up opportunities for cross-disciplinary projects, drawing on the combined expertise of sociolinguistics, cognitive sociologists and psycholinguists to explain *inter alia* such phenomena as fluidity and variation in speaker/community attitudes and practices.

Keywords: identity, agency versus structure, micro versus macro-sociolinguistics, post-structuralism

“Sociolinguistics is about the profusion of voices in society. It is about language as a social fact and as an identity bearer... Each voice has its time and place...” (Bell 2017: 588).

1 Introduction

It is a truism to state that the topic of “identity” is ubiquitous within sociolinguistic scholarship. “[S]elf-preoccupation, and the common human tendency to define one’s identity in opposition to some adversary or group” (Taylor 2006: 398) makes language and the “voice” of the “identity bearer” a subject of persistent scrutiny. Recent accounts, informed by post-modern perspectives, have convincingly rejected earlier descriptions of the subject as consistent, self-determining and unhindered by the social world, rather conceiving of individual and group identity(ies) as complex, fluid and multiple – an outcome of macro influences (historical, political, socio-cultural, economic), processual states of formation and negotiation, and relational encounters (Rummins 2003). Identity and identities, are therefore defined and understood as always in process, as context-dependent and creating, emerging through networks of contact, momentary interactions and patterns of socialisation. We have witnessed a proliferation of theories, data sources, methods and empirical studies, especially those exploring the intersubjective, discursive and semiotic realisation of individuals, collectives and places. Conceiving of them as socially produced and ideologically marked, the role of languages, varieties, stances, styles and discourses in identity creation and representation has been intensively scrutinised (e.g. see Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Benwell and Stokoe 2006; McEntee-Atalianis 2019).

Drawing on a previous extensive review of recent literature (McEntee-Atalianis 2019) and more recent accounts, in this article I attempt to proffer ideas for future (cross-disciplinary)

research on identity and its contribution to the field of sociolinguistics. I glean insight from recent trends and note gaps in the field. I focus on and critique the continuing dominance of post-structuralist and social constructionist inquiry, which has led to an inexorable rise in (discursive) studies. I question whether this has led to an “unreflecting adoption of new orthodoxies... [and an] unrestrained embracing of speaker agency [which] has triggered scholarly amnesia over the place of structure in society and language” (Bell 2017: 592), or whether such work has determined the importance of investigating and understanding the relationship between local meaning-making practices and considerations of macro-socio(linguistic) processes. In this regard, I discuss the important contribution of identity scholarship to broader (theoretical) sociolinguistic concerns, in particular, a critical engagement with, and challenging of, certain binaries, i.e. the treatment of stability versus fluidity, the agency-structure debate, and the questioning of the traditional dichotomy between micro and macro-sociolinguistics – since situated interactions (the micro) connect with broader (macro) socio-cultural phenomena, making the local concurrently translocal.

In discussing future work, I consider the promise, evident in recent scholarship, of accounts which detail the complexity and challenges of identity/ies within (unequal) social practices and spaces, including recent work on mobile and liminal/subaltern (e.g. Piazza 2020). Such studies are contributing to a sociolinguistics which foregrounds and problematises “context” – in particular, time, place (online/offline) – and the contingency of difference, belonging and representation. This work not only opens up new areas of investigation but will help to identify and challenge social forces of hegemony and inequity and also give “voice” to under- and unstudied, individuals and groups (e.g. the deaf, those from the Global South). I further argue that in future, we should not do away with extant theories and insights, arguing for the continued relevance of established (sociological) scholarship (e.g. the work of Bourdieu, Giddens, Goffman), whilst also suggesting other areas worthy of cross-disciplinary focus. In

particular, in light of an ever greater focus on the individual, I suggest that there are opportunities for cross-disciplinary investigations combining the expertise of sociolinguistics, cognitive sociologists and psycholinguists. Such collaborations could serve to explain the online functioning of the dynamic and complex socio-cognitive interface of identity performance in different times and places. The latter have the potential to offer insights into *inter alia* such phenomena as shifting speaker/community attitudes and practices in diverse contexts (and at different times) of language use.

2 Sociolinguistic investigations of identity

Before considering the current state of affairs and the possible future direction of research on identity in the near and more distant future, it is perhaps helpful to first reflect briefly on past and more recent developments, in order to illustrate and remind ourselves of the impact of post-structuralist perspectives on current epistemological and methodological orientations in sociolinguistic investigations of identity. As noted above, this paradigm has moved away from an essentialist view of identity(ies) as (a) static, bounded category(ies), to one of fluidity and emergence within social contexts and linguistic practice. We have seen this reconceptualisation most obviously in the historical development (the three waves/types, Eckert 2012; Mendoza-Denton 2011) of variationist scholarship. For in early work (the first wave), the individual was defined according to researcher-defined categories within prescribed social memberships and hierarchical systems (e.g. age, class, ethnicity, sex). In the second, an emic-centred approach fashioned analytic categories from sites of investigation; language variation was determined as an expression of identity. Moreover, social networks and specific agents and identities (e.g. “innovators”) were understood as influential in language use and change (Milroy 1980). In contrast to the two former paradigms, the third

wave has focussed on individual stylistic practices rather than community-wide patterns and norms of behaviour. Consequently, variation in language use is no longer understood as correlating with pre-determined, stable, “macro” categories, but rather language users are considered to construct and perform (intersecting and potentially selective) social categories through mutable linguistic practices, thereby marking group boundaries and complex identities. Therefore, recent work rejects linguistic variation and change as merely a reflection or outcome of social structures and meanings, in favour of conceiving it as constitutive of social reality. Indeed, “[t]he principle move in the third wave... [is] from a view of variation as a reflection of social identities and categories to the linguistic practice in which speakers place themselves in the social landscape through stylistic practice” (Eckert 2012: 93). The “voice” (including the stance and style) of the individual has therefore become a focus of analysis, with characteristic features recognised as constituting and accreting to form personae and groups in local contexts of communication. Subjects interpellate, negotiate and counter social systems, ideologies and categories, marking group (dis)affiliation through language use. A key tenet of this approach is that “[v]ariation constitutes a social semiotic system capable of expressing the full range of a community’s social concerns ... variables cannot be consensual markers of fixed meanings; on the contrary, their central property must be indexical mutability” (Eckert 2012: 94).

A plethora of social concerns and indexicalities have been identified, revealing the breadth and fluidity of linguistic performances and identities, often with reference to “bounded” and intersecting social groupings/categories and sociocultural, economic and political influences (e.g. see Kirkham 2015; Jaffe 2016; Levon 2016). We have seen the mobility (physically and virtually) and linguistic heterogeneity of many individuals and groups functioning in local and global networks and contexts. Just as other forms of semiotic expression, variation in

language use is now recognised as fundamental to the construction and operation of complex social realities and systems.

Identity research has engendered the development and application of a range of theoretical frameworks (e.g. crossing; footing; indexicality; positioning; stance; style; superdiversity; translanguaging) and methodological approaches, applied to the study of fluid social practices and performativity. However, most scholars continue to draw usefully on “traditional/essentialised” macro-category labels (e.g. age; ethnicity; gender; sex; nationality) in defining their area of foci and in the positioning of their work within academic communities of scholarship. This will undoubtedly continue, however many would do well to engage more earnestly and comparatively with research outside of their specific “sub-fields”. A range of phenomena, worthy of continued exploration, have been observed, with many issues overlapping. For example, investigations of youth interaction have revealed how local stylistic practices and social meanings are used creatively on- and offline to (re)produce or subvert broader socio-cultural and political ideologies or strictures in order to enact group identity and/or (dis)affiliation. The appropriation of linguistic features, garnered from within or outside of the social group, index local and global spheres of influence. Such findings highlight the limits of agency and the forces of structure, as found in different contexts and other groupings.

Similarly, investigations of workplace and professional identities have explored the agency of workers, whilst also identifying particular individuals or groups who are subject to cultural, professional and structural constraints which limit access to, or progression within, professional settings, e.g. ethnic-minority individuals born and brought up outside of the UK and who are unfamiliar with the genre and expectations of competency-based interviews in the UK and therefore unduly disadvantaged (Campbell and Roberts 2007). Performing professional identity demands acquiring and utilising sophisticated and nuanced socio-

cultural, linguistic and professional knowledge to convey authenticity and authority. A fact no less applicable to individuals in other non-professional settings.

Issues of authenticity, self-definition and collaborative negotiation are also evident in studies of ethnic and religious identities. Ethnic and religious identifications (and stances taken towards them) are significant from both theoretical and practical standpoints. A plethora of contemporary studies reveal how ethnic self- and other-definition involves the collaborative negotiation of personal and social category-bound attributes, characteristics and values which are subject to interactional and socio-structural constraints. An inability to perform an “authentic” ethnic identity can have exclusionary and negative effects. Moreover, changing socio-cultural and socio-political circumstances (e.g. migration and globalisation) can significantly impact on self and group identity and identifications. As in many other areas of space and place analytic focus (e.g. local, national, supra- and trans-national identities), we have seen the continued importance of investigating local beliefs, ideologies and practices, in order to interpret broader social meaning and influences, including the maintenance and construction of bounded (dis)affiliations and how these are understood (and ideologically influenced), conveyed and constructed via social practice.

Indeed, the relationship between national identity and language has been a rich area of investigation in sociolinguistics for fifty years or more (see McEntee-Atalianis 2019: 221–226). In some contexts, the significance of the nation-language link has been considered as foundational to national identity creation and maintenance. Despite the post-structuralist turn one cannot “assume the decline of ‘mattering’ for most people of [the] purportedly stable and essentialised categories” (Heller et al. 2014: 428) of national languages or identities, or indeed the relevance of such concepts in the examination of language attitudes, language choice and language policy and planning. However, language is not necessarily fundamental to the national myth of belonging, especially in nations which support multiple languages, or

in some postcolonial settings (see e.g. Ominiya 2010). Also, whilst some have found that increased mobility and globalisation has led to stronger national linguistic allegiance, others have suggested that this has led to the deterritorialisation and fluidity of languages and identities. Coupland (2014: 15), for example, has argued that “[l]anguage and nation rhetoric...[is] tropic and anachronistic, and at odds with contemporary social realities characterised by mobility and complexity.” In line with the “spatial turn” (Urry 2003; Warf and Arias 2009) in the political and social sciences, a sociolinguistics of space and place understands identity as being built within and via social practice. As such, national identity is revealed as a complex, dynamic, social phenomena marked discursively and interactionally through linguistic and semiotic processes and practices.

Further, as in other work on identity, the influence of power, regulatory structures and ideology on linguistic practice and subject/group positioning continues to dominate research on gender and sexuality. The influential work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993) has spawned numerous studies investigating gender and sex performativity, the latter leaking into other areas of investigation. Despite demonstrations of fluidity and variability in the identity performance of individuals and groups, research also points to the importance of maintaining and examining – theoretically and analytically – the role of strategic essentialism (Spivak 1996). The latter is important to protecting and recognising the rights of particular gender and sex groups; to understanding and explaining the discursive and linguistic processes underlying discriminatory practices; in addition to understanding (perhaps less threatening) phenomena, such as targeted consumer marketing.

Along with other “subaltern” groups (including certain sex and gender identities), the Deaf offer a unique and still untapped (visual) epistemological perspective to sociolinguistic scholarship (see McEntee-Atalianis 2019: 191–208). Current work points to the importance of understanding the Deaf perspective (“Deafhood”, Ladd 2003), in particular, the impact of

historical and contemporary social influences and (hegemonic) institutions and structures (educational; political/policy; sociocultural) on d/Deaf¹ identity/ies. Also, the importance of story-telling and peer-interaction in the transmission and maintenance of Deaf culture and tradition, which differs markedly from intergenerational patterns of socialisation and identification in hearing communities. Here we may find potentially fruitful parallels in the experiences of other groups (e.g. LGBTQ+; migrant groups).

3 Future directions

Crucially, therefore, recent discursive² and sociocultural studies of identity across a range of sociolinguistic subfields (including those listed above) have pointed to intersecting and influential levels or scales³ worthy of continued analytic scrutiny – macro (historical, socio-cultural/political/economic); meso (genre framing) and micro (interpersonal context). Indeed, as patterns and fora of physical and virtual contact have proliferated and changed, a greater awareness and sensitivity towards multi-scalarity and the importance of appreciating the interaction between micro, meso and macro contexts in investigations of personal and group identification have emerged.⁴ It is recognised that through language (as social practice), cultural ideologies are able to circulate. Individuals and groups are subject to social norms

¹ The term ‘d’eaf (spelt with lower case ‘d’) is understood to refer to the audiological condition of being without hearing and used in reference to those who identify with the hearing world. ‘D’eaf (with upper case ‘D’) is used to refer to those who use sign language as their first/preferred language, and who mix socially and identify culturally with the Deaf community. It is acknowledged that these terms have recently been challenged (see e.g. Woodward and Horejes 2016).

² The term “discursive” here incorporates “macro” and “micro” analytic frames of analysis – the former incorporating Foucauldian-inspired approaches to the analysis of identity which interprets identity work within broader ideologies and socio-cultural/political frames (e.g. critical discourse analysis; narrative analysis) and the latter incorporating such approaches as conversation analysis. See Benwell and Stokoe (2010) for an excellent overview.

³ Adopting an anthropological perspective, Blommaert (2007:2) suggested that scales are fixed to certain “centers of authority” (e.g. nation; professional or friendship groups; family). These authorise specific practices and ways of being according to their sets of norms. Scales are not discrete, nor are they stable, but they are mutually influencing and discursively negotiated and enacted.

⁴ Although it is recognised that discursive approaches differ with regard to the extent to which they draw on and exclude considerations of broader historical, socio-cultural and socio-political influences (see McEntee-Atalianis 2021).

and regulations (including systems of power) and draw on (not always consciously) the linguistic and discursive symbols available to them in their sociocultural milieu⁵ to perform acts which constitute personae. How identities carry social meaning and are culturally-encoded, and how this affects individual/group perception and behaviour, including the development of stereotypes, frames of “normativity”, alignment or resistance to social or powerful forces (depending on positions and roles) or groups, has to be of continued academic and practical significance.

However, much recent scholarship on identity has focused on determining who people are or how they are brought into being via local discursive and linguistic practice – especially in Western societies. Do we now need to move beyond the “who” and “how”, and a predominantly Western-centric focus, to investigate and test theories and analytic frameworks in relation to non-Western individuals and groups? For example, do we find the same struggles for symbolic power (Bourdieu 1991), for legitimisation and recognition in communities in the Global South (for an interesting example, see Borba 2017)? What are the roles of institutions, social structures and circulating ideologies in authorising and legitimising identity/ies? How do these differ from those reported in Western contexts? What are the limits of agency and the constraints of structure?

Indeed, identity scholarship will continue to be relevant to the ongoing agency-structure debate (e.g. see Benwell and Stokoe 2006; Bourdieu 1977, 1991; Butler 1990; Foucault 1980; Giddens 1991; Marx 1971) – the questions remain, to what extent are individuals and collectives free to think and act, and how are they delimited by structural forces in different circumstances? Existing theories, e.g. Giddens’s sociological theory of “structuration”,

⁵ Including linguistic landscapes, see Blackwood et al. (2017).

continue to hold explanatory value, defining agency as a *process*, as “something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual” (Giddens 1991: 52) within locally-managed social (inter)action. Such theories align with a post-structural understanding of agency as “socioculturally mediated and dialectically enacted” (Lantolf and Thorne 2006: 238), influenced by the rules and resource constraints of environments, but also facilitated by their emancipatory opportunities. Moreover Mu (2015) has suggested that a way to reconcile the differences between more essentialist views (e.g. those proposed in social-psychological accounts of identity⁶) and post-structuralist work – and by extension in dealing with the agency versus structure dualism – is to appeal to the concept of “habitus” (Bourdieu 1977, 1991), since this encapsulates the historically grounded, socially influenced and constituted attitudes, beliefs and behaviours which inflect our multiple social identities and which predispose individuals and collectives to think and act in particular ways.

Sociolinguistic scholarship to date has illustrated that ecological settings are imbued with historical, socio-cultural and political texts, discourses and ideologies, which are variably invoked by agents and/or re-negotiated or rejected. As such, investigations of individual and collective acts and (re-)action need to continue but would benefit from comparison (via “meta-analysis”) in order to explore the effect and limits of agentive and structural acts or regulatory boundaries across time and diverse contexts, thereby moving beyond persistent explorations of who people are or how they are brought into being via local linguistic practice in isolated contexts. The latter has implications for addressing extant structural inequities and for informing macro-sociolinguistic and “real world” problems, such as negotiating the linguistic rights of particular collectives, improving the status and experiences of subaltern individuals or groups in institutional or social settings (including language policy changes), etc.

⁶ See McEntee-Atalianis (2019: 18–19) for a review of this perspective.

Whilst acknowledging the enduring relevance of sociological concepts, theories and frameworks for identity research, there is a need to move beyond some of these to consider others. I argued in McEntee-Atalianis (2019) that it is now time to marry sociological thinking with other frameworks and disciplines in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between society, identity (the individual) and linguistic performance and competence. Without doing so we cannot account for:

habitual patterns of use which influence perception...and cannot offer a balanced or detailed account of the dynamic psychosocial interface or the psycholinguistic processes involved in the perception, processing and production of identity discourses, categories, features or linguistic indices (e.g. markers of in- and out-group identification). Nor can [we] account for the acquisition, alternation, activation or suppression of particular (un)marked linguistic features within and across different contexts of interaction, depending on such factors as interactional goals; roles and responsibilities; setting...etc. (McEntee-Atalianis 2019: 245–246)

The understanding, and oft-cited mantra, that identity is not something we “have” but is constructed outside of ourselves, in discourse, has somewhat led us away from considerations of the psycho-social dynamic⁷ – we are, after all, engaged in a constant praxis of internal and external dialogue. Assuming that linguistic indices and ideologies of personae and social types have both psychological and social representation and influence, it is important to understand the form they take, how they operate, or are enacted as resources in different contexts and times; as well as how they evolve and change. What is the dynamic between the psychological and the social? What are their limits and constraints? As noted by Johnstone

⁷ Not ignoring the continuing relevance and applicability of earlier social-psychological models and perspectives e.g. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

and Kiesling (2008: 29), for indexical markers to be recognised cognitively, there has to be “a correlation available in an individual’s environment to which second-order indexical meaning can be attached.” Moreover, sociolinguistic studies focussing on the perception of social groups and types (Campbell-Kibler 2012; Drager 2010; Levon 2007; Squires 2013) have shown the effect of social indices on speaker identification. Studies of performativity have concentrated on momentary encounters highlighting stylistic creativity and the mutability of individuals and collectives across time and space. These performances arise from and undoubtedly impact on (dynamic) cognitive operations. Research has quite convincingly established that identities are constructed within discourse, however, a discursive focus arguably underplays and has the potential to ignore the mediating and constraining role of psychological processing and representation. How does discourse and social interaction influence and shape the perceptions (e.g. cognitive schemata of social types, activation of indexical markers or stereotypes) and performances of individuals and groups?

[T]he nature of this dynamic and complex on-line processual and co-dependent psycho-social (inside-out and outside-in) relationship ... remains under-theorised and under-investigated and may prove productive in moving the debate about stability within instability and agency versus structure forward, for example, accounting for how listeners recognise/categorise individuals in real-time based upon perceptions of individual’s or groups’ linguistic practices, and how and why speakers adjust their performances to different contexts of use. (McEntee-Atalianis 2019: 242).

In illustrating this interface, I presented the following model (Figure 1 below), arguing that future studies could work towards developing an understanding of the functioning of this complex and dynamic socio-cognitive interface:

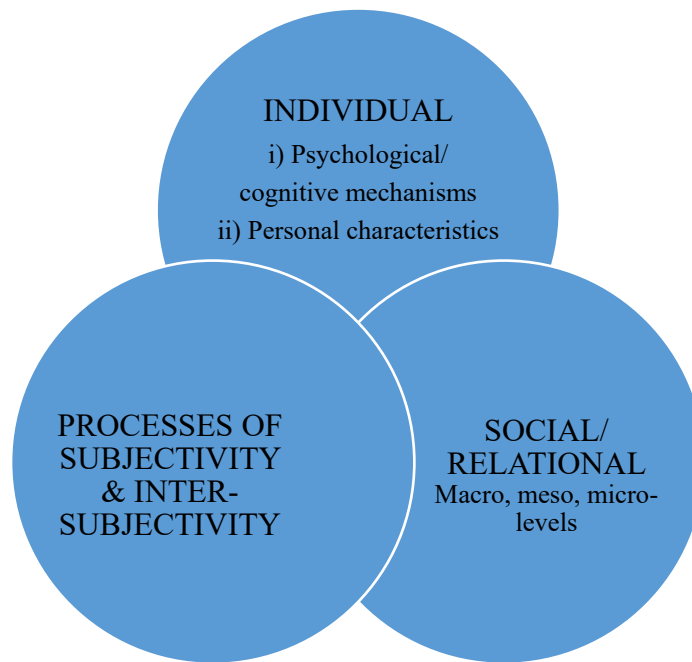


Figure 1: Dynamic Integrated Systems Model (McEntee-Atalianis 2019: 243)

The three interconnected spheres depict the internal (psychological) and external (social/discursive) processes underlying and informing identity work. They intersect and interact in real-time (synchronically) and over extended periods of time (diachronically) to enact mutable and stable representations and performances.

Represented in the sphere entitled 'Individual' are psychological/cognitive structures and mechanisms, responsible for the perception and production of stable and dynamic phenomena (e.g. an individual draws on past experience and hearings in order to recognise or ascribe category membership to others). 'Personal characteristics' refers to indices which can be recognised by self and others (e.g. accent or style).

The sphere entitled 'Social/relational' depicts the latter's influence on individual perception and performance. This includes macro-cultural, economic, social and political influences, ideologies and categories and social types (e.g. class, gender); meso-personae or local

cultural positions and ascriptions (e.g. group affiliations); and mutable micro social practices, i.e. temporary interactions, including role and style-shifting and stance-taking. It is assumed that changes in context, including changes to location, interlocutors, topic etc., influence individual and group attempts to emphasise, e.g. “adequation or difference”, “(de)authentication and/or (il)legitimation”, etc. (e.g. see Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) description of “tactics of subjectivity”).

Finally, the third circle encapsulates discursive and linguistic features and processes of identity marking and relations, e.g. pronunciation, category labels and categorisations, stance-taking, code-choice, etc. (McEntee-Atalianis 2019: 245).

I argue that moving research towards a consideration of this significant psycho-social interface, opens up new avenues of exploration, facilitating investigations of how psychological and social processes dynamically interact in identity perception and performance across and within specific and different contexts. This begs new research questions, demands new research teams investigating the conditions and constraints of identity perception and performance – psychological and social (agency and structure).

Relatedly, assuming we maintain an orientation to demographic and sociological labels, a still unresolved problem is the nature of the relationship between intersecting identities and how these are perceived and performed (see McEntee-Atalianis 2019: 240). Do they function as “vectors of influence” whereby one category (e.g. class) influences another (e.g. age) “in a discrete way”, or are they “inextricable and interdependent...such that [they] represent an indivisible unit?” (Levon 2011: 70). Indeed, what psychological and social conditions and structures influence and impact on the construction and salience of categories, category features and the ideologies associated with them? A psycho-socio perspective may help to resolve this. Sociolinguists and discourse analysts have begun to provide some answers

through their development and appropriation of concepts and frameworks, such as chronotopes,⁸ indexicality, stance and style. These have helped to explain the mutability of individual and collective performance across time and space, whilst pointing to the salience of stable culturally-coded renderings and readings of identity/ies (e.g. as explained via stance accretion, Rauniomaa 2003). However, one of the many unresolved issues is how to account for multiplicity within subjectivity. Identity arises from “complex, intersecting and sometimes contradictory networks of social experiences and relations” (McEntee-Atalianis 2019: 240). Investigating the complexities and variability within these categories and experiences, and how these experiences and relations interact and conflict with one another (including consideration of hierarchies and allegiances), and impact on individuals and groups, psychologically and socially, will help to provide more detailed accounts of how individuals conceptualise, navigate, negotiate and move between and syncretise multiple subjectivities.

4 Conclusion

Whether or not such interdisciplinary endeavours are explored, the pervasiveness of identity and its relevance to current and future sociolinguistic work cannot be denied. Identity continues to be a salient topic of our time, demanding close examination of social influences, linguistic forms and practices – no less so for those adjusting to changed or new realities brought about by such acts as migration, or changes brought about by new legal or social protections and recognitions, and most recently the global health crisis.

⁸ See e.g. the work in Kroon and Swanenberg (2020).

I end with a cautionary note however, as I did in my book. There is often an impulse in sociolinguistic scholarship to reference, pay lip service to, or automatically assume the relevance of “identity”, and yet, as poignantly noted by Jenkins (2008: 15), “if we use ‘identity’ to talk about everything, we are likely to end up talking about very little of any significance”. Rather, in considering the relationship between language, society and identity, the “relevance [of identity] needs to be asked and evaluated in each context rather than theoretically and methodologically foreclosed” (Alcoff 2010: 158). Moreover, whilst acknowledging the value of recent scholarship in identifying the importance of ethnographic approaches to the study of the local construction of meaning, and identifying the indexical value of linguistic variables for individuals and groups occupying different contextual and ideological spaces in the formation and maintenance of social groups and identities, we must question this persistent preoccupation – in particular studies that favour description and anti-theoretical tendencies. Future work will benefit from past and current scholarship which has so clearly demonstrated the fluidity and complexity of identity in different contexts. But, as noted above, there is now a need to move beyond the endless studies of the “discursive construction of X/Y/Z” to ask new questions and explore new communities and contexts (particularly beyond the West/Global North) and to engage in interdisciplinary endeavours. Further, scholars must reflect on their own positions (attitudes, values and training) and how these bear on their research design and interpretations. Moreover, we should consider how our research agendas complement and support the groups we work with, sometimes with a view to alleviating or improving “real world” problems. There is still much work to be done and this journal will undoubtedly provide a space to continue in this endeavour and to engage in continued debate.

References

- Alcoff, Linda, M. 2010. New epistemologies: Post-positivist accounts of identity. In Margaret Wetherell and Chandra T. Moharty (eds.), *The Sage handbook of identities*, 114–162. London: Sage Publications.
- Bell, Allan. 2017. Giving voice: A personal essay on the shape of sociolinguistics. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 21(5). 587–602.
- Benwell, Bethan & Elizabeth Stokoe. 2006. *Discourse and identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Benwell, Bethan & Elizabeth Stokoe. 2010. Analysing identity in interaction: Contrasting discourse, genealogical, narrative and conversation analysis. In Margaret Wetherell and Chandra T. Moharty (eds.), *The Sage handbook of identities*, 82–103. London: Sage Publications.
- Blackwood, Robert, Elizabeth Lanza & Hirut Woldemariam. 2017. *Negotiating and contesting identities in linguistic landscapes*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Blommaert, Jan. 2007. Sociolinguistic scales. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 4(1). 1–19.
- Borba, Rodrigo. 2017. Ex-centric textualities and rehearsed narratives at a gender identity clinic in Brazil: Challenging discursive colonization. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 21(3). 320–347.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bucholtz, Mary & Kira Hall. 2005. Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse Studies* 7(4-5). 585–614.

- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that matter*. New York: Routledge.
- Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn. 2012. The implicit association test and sociolinguistic meaning. *Lingua* 122(7). 753–763.
- Campbell, Sarah & Celia Roberts. 2007. Migration, ethnicity and competing discourses in the job interview: synthesizing the institutional and personal. *Discourse and Society* 18(3). 243–271.
- Coupland, Nikolas. 2014. Wales and Welsh: Boundedness and peripherality. In Dominic Watt & Carmen Llamas (eds.), *Language, borders and identity*, 137–153. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Drager, Katie. 2010. Sociophonetic variation in speech perception. *Language and Linguistic Compass* 4(7). 473–480.
- Eckert, Penelope. 2012. Three waves of variation study: The emergence of meaning in the study of sociolinguistic variation. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41. 87–100.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972–1977*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and self identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Heller, Monica, Adam Jaworski & Crispin Thurlow. 2014. Introduction: Sociolinguistics and tourism – mobilities, markets and multilingualism. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 18(4). 425–458.

- Jaffe, Alexandra. 2016. Indexicality, stance and fields in sociolinguistics. In Nikolas Coupland (ed.), *Sociolinguistics: Theoretical debates*, 86–112. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jenkins, Richard. (2008) *Social identity*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Johnstone, Barbara & Scott F. Kiesling. 2008. Indexicality and experience: Exploring the meanings of /aw/-monophthongization in Pittsburgh. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12(1). 5–13.
- Kirkham, Sam. 2015. Intersectionality and the social meanings of variation: Class, ethnicity and social practice. *Language in Society* 44(5). 629-652.
- Kroon, Sjaak & Jos Swanenberg. 2020. *Chronotopic identity work: Sociolinguistic analyses of cultural and linguistic phenomena in time and space*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Lantolf, James P. & Steven L. Thorne. 2006. *Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Levon, Erez. 2007. Sexuality in context: Variation and the sociolinguistic perception of identity. *Language in Society* 36(4). 533–54.
- Levon, Erez. 2011. Teasing apart to bring together: Gender and sexuality in variationist research. *American Speech* 86(1). 69–84.
- Levon, Erez. 2016. Conflicted selves: Language, religion, and same-sex desire in Israel. In Erez Levon & Ronald B. Mendes (eds.), *Language, sexuality, and power*, 215–239. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Marx, Karl. 1971. *A contribution to the critique of political economy*. London: Lawrence Wishart.

- Mendoza-Denton, Norma. 2011. Individuals and communities. In Ruth Wodak, Barbara Johnstone & Paul Kerswill (eds.), *The Sage handbook of sociolinguistics*, 181–189. London: Sage Publications.
- McEntee-Atalianis, Lisa J. 2019. *Identity in applied linguistics research*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- McEntee-Atalianis, Lisa J. 2021. Discourse and identity. In Ken Hyland, Brian Paltridge & Lillian Wong (eds.), *The Bloomsbury handbook of discourse analysis*, 311–322. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Milroy, Lesley. 1980. *Language and social networks*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Mu, Guanglun M. 2015. A meta-analysis of the correlation between heritage language and ethnic identity. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 36(3). 239–254.
- Ominiya, Tope. 2010. Language and postcolonial Identities: An African perspective. In Carmen Llamas & Dominic Watt (eds.), *Language and identities*, 237-246. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Piazza, Roberta (ed.). 2020. *Discourses of identity in liminal places and spaces*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Rauniomaa, Mirka. 2003. Stance accretion. Paper presented at the Language, Interaction and Social Organization Research Focus Group, University of California, Santa Barbara, February.
- Rummins, Joanna A. 2003. Conceptualising identity and diversity: overlaps, intersections, and processes. *Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal* 35(3). 10–25.

- Silverstein, Michael. 1985. Language and the culture of gender: At the intersection of structure, usage and ideology. In Elizabeth Mertz & Richard Parmentier (eds.), *Semiotic mediation: Sociocultural and psychological perspectives*, 219–59. New York: Academic Press.
- Silverstein, Michael. 2003. Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life. *Language and Communication* 23. 193–229.
- Snell, Julia. 2018. Solidarity, stance and class identities. *Language in Society* 47. 665–691.
- Spivak, Gayatri. 1996. Subaltern studies: Deconstructing historiography. In Donna Landry & Gerald MacLean (eds.), *Selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, 203–236. New York: Routledge.
- Squires, Lauren. 2013. It don't go both ways: Limited bidirectionality in sociolinguistic perception. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 17(2). 200–237.
- Tajfel, Henri & John C. Turner. 1979. An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In Stephen Worchel & William G. Austin (eds.), *The psychology of intergroup relations*, 33–47. Monterey: Brooks-Cole.
- Taylor, Charles. 2006 [1989]. *Sources of the self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Urry, John. 2003. Social networks, travel and talk. *The British Journal of Sociology* 54(2). 155–175.
- Warf, Barney & Santa Arias. (eds.). 2009. *The spatial turn: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.
- Woodward, James & Thomas P. Horejes. 2016. d/Deaf: Origins and usage. In Genie Gertz, & Patrick Boudreault (eds.), *The SAGE Deaf studies encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, 284–287. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.