

# **1 FROM A MONOLINGUAL SPEAKER TO A MULTILINGUAL ONE**

## **1.1 Approaching a language speaker's identity from different perspectives**

Language use is to a great degree interconnected with all different forms and ways of social behavior. Psychology-related language studies have favored constitutive sociocultural approaches in treating a language speaker's identity; in other words, one's specific interpersonal and social placement derives from sociocultural structures and phenomena, including cognition, emotions, memory, identity, personality, and other psychological constructs as relational entities formed in interaction with other entities in the sociocultural context. In order to unveil principles of the usage of a language as a culture artifact, it is necessary to consider the view of cultural anthropology. Lévi-Strauss (1998) holds a view that the observable and conscious levels of cultural reality simply represent a departure point for any study on the principles governing the functioning and organization of that society. The understanding of personal identity necessitates the examination of the linguistic construction of 'I'. This line of research can be observed in Charles Taylor's work; he views language not only as a means of interaction among humans, but as something that enables people to create and express meaning. The following discussion treats these perspectives piecemeal to examine the significance of the respective field; even so, we argue for their synergic effect in constructing a multilingual's identity.

The first perspective to be discussed is socio-psychological. Numerous Anglo-American and European psychologists (such as Wundt, Baldwin, Werner, Janet, Vygotsky, Mead, Dewey and Cooley), modern era philosophers (Wittgenstein, Gadamer and Taylor), poststructuralist theoreticians (Derrida and Foucault), and Bachtin, a philosopher and literary critic, are of the view that our social relations with other individuals are of primary importance to our psychological being; this makes them a resource for knowing the world and ourselves. In fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century, when psychology gained the status of an independent field, several prominent psychologists favored a sociocultural and relational way of thinking. Vygotsky (Vygotskii & Cole, 1978) argued for the concept of a being as a social construct resulting from a person's interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions with others. For Vygotsky and Cole (1978), the most important phase in a socially constructed identity

is achieving the capacity for self-expression and self-reference. Vygotsky (1986, p. 218) asserts: “Thought is not merely expressed through words; it comes into existence through them. Every thought tends to connect with something else, to establish a relation between things. Every thought moves, grows and develops, fulfils a function, solves a problem”.

Psychologists approving of social constructivism are interested in the ways in which identity is constructed through cultural symbols and traditions, as well as power relations in a society. For instance, Magnuson and Marecek (2010) maintain that the discursive construction of an individual includes pragmatic interactions on the one hand and epistemic institutionalized symbols and narrations on the other. A discourse creates systems of knowledge that at once form and delimit an individual’s dispositions to act in a certain way. Psychologists who draw on ontological hermeneutics, like Richardson, Fowers, and Freeman (resorting to Heidegger, Gadamer, Taylor, and Ricoeur) explain the concept of a human being as a creator of meaning, as a self-interpretive being that is present in the incessant interpretation of the world and of the self, and the interpretation of these are always evaluative in nature. In addition to the way in which this delimits human knowledge, social constructivists are interested in how human experience is created through discourse. Based on this, the sociocultural construction of human “I” and a human sense of personal identity are formed by means of a language, cultural narrations, symbols, and routines. Consistent with social constructivism in psychology, the distinctive feature of a human being is the capability to self-interpret and conceptualize experience in a language; it has to be borne in mind that specific relational contexts give rise to psychological qualities and personality traits of a human as a self-interpretive being.

Human verbal/non-verbal behavior and acts have a performative quality. No two identical relational contexts exist; social meanings constructed in a particular context are specific in nature (Shotter, 2010). Shotter (ibid), drawing on Wittgenstein, highlights the fact that the concept of consciousness and of “I” is discursive entities occurring and interacting within the relational field. He stresses that we use words so that we can act. Vygotsky (1986, p. 251) stressed the relationship between words, thought, and meaning claiming that “[p]recisely because thought does not have its

automatic counterpart in words, the transition of thought to word leads through meaning. In our speech there is always the hidden thought, the subtext.” Vygotsky and Cole (1978) differentiate human beings from other living beings in that they use tools that have substantially altered the conditions of humans’ existence. The implication is that these tools are not physical instruments but social practice and language. They act as mediators between their users, the tasks, and the goals to be achieved. In this sense, culture comprises all artefacts and practices that have been accumulated by a particular community throughout its historical development.

The second perspective necessary to tackle is anthropological. In the field of cultural anthropology, Lévi-Strauss (1998) chose to analyze the elements of cultural systems as signs forming the structure in which a particular meaning originates. By doing so, he favored a structuralist analysis over a mere account of the history of a particular culture and over relating it to an external universal meaning. In his approach, Lévi-Strauss (2000a, 2000b) draws on the assumption that non-conscious rules attainable through mind are prerequisite to human social activity. The basis of any social phenomenon is communication at every single level of social reality. This can be supported by Hall’s (2012, pp. 6-7) idea:

A sociocultural perspective on human action locates the essence of social life in communication. Through our use of linguistic symbols with others, we establish goals, negotiate the means to reach them, and reconceptualize those we have set. At the same time, we articulate and manage our individual identities, our interpersonal relationships, and memberships in our social groups and communities.

Lévi-Strauss (*ibid.*) uses structural linguistics to study individual social levels because all the levels correspond with communication and form a system that is analogical to the language system. Communication, in fact, involves a deep-rooted plan of non-conscious norms and structures of thinking. In addition to looking into how a human being acknowledges their biological existence/presence, the anthropological aspect also accounts for the “life”/presence of (language and culture) signs in the life of society. Lévi-Strauss’ work contributed the notion of a cultural sign as a representation of an unconscious thought structure of a cultural phenomenon. He emphasized that cultural signs cannot be studied as autonomous entities; they fall into a set of

syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, and through their presence in these relations they obtain a specific meaning.

The notion of structure has a rich history. Lévi-Strauss's contribution was to emphasize a linguistic (structuralist) reading of the notion. He defines structure in the same way as a language in that it configures the sense data and turns them into a code for the transition of meaning by means of phonic oppositions (Lévi-Strauss, 2000a). The structure introduces interconnections into the sensory part which is in fact a system of symbols; as such, it is a means of communication and knowability. The structure, configuration, or the relationship between/among interactants shapes and manages the social system of a particular culture and its meanings. Thus, a structural analysis proceeds from conscious structures to the subconscious structure of a system, and to the formation of general principles. A language is a means of configuring meaning. The process of configuring meaning can take place because of the relationship through which internal interconnections between elements of a system can be formed.

Thirdly, from a philosophical perspective, the identity of 'I' needs to be considered within the domain of self-interpretation since 'I' cannot exist on its own. It is worth adopting Taylor's view (1985) that a language is not a mere cluster of discrete tools; rather, it is a network, and in each part of the network a whole is represented. Language is not a mere sum of words; it is a structure that cannot be reduced to single components. Indivisibility is a feature of a language as a structure and this explains why a single word can mirror the entirety of a language. Both Taylor (1985) and Lévi-Strauss (2000a) characterize a language as a net, and anytime a word is used, the whole net starts to vibrate; the specific position of a word in a net affects the meaning of that word.

Taylor (1985) maintains that it is thanks to people's ability to use language that they are responsible for sharing meaning and experience in the incessant creation of language. This process is constant, which leads us to believe that people can never capture language in all its complexity: "Men are constantly shaping language, straining the limits of expression, minting new terms, displacing old ones, giving language a changed gamut of meanings" (Taylor, 1985, p. 232). Language makes it possible for people to interpret themselves and to express their own intentions and aims. Taylor (1985) argues that people share emotions and affection, and are capable of self-

understanding through speech. People experience themselves indirectly through the perspectives of others and of the community of which they are members.

The synergic effect of the three perspectives on identity (socio-psychological, anthropological, and philosophical) becomes unveiled in the discourse as a language event by putting into mutual relationship a speaker, text, and socio-cultural context. In our discussion, we draw on Ricoeur's (1974, 1976) understanding of discourse in that even though a language is a prerequisite for communication, it is in discourse that the exchange of messages actually happens. Discourse always carries its author's intentions and is always directed toward somebody. In line with Ricoeur's theory, it can be argued that a language does not entail a world; however, a discourse always revolves around a subject-matter. This leads Ricoeur (ibid) to believe that a language is a mediator between meaning (as the outcome of an activity) and discourse (as an event). In other words, discourse as an event is linked with a person (the speaker); thus, discourse illustrates the dialectical relationship between an event and meaning.

## **1.2 The role of lingua-culture in the process of identity formation**

Discourse and language are distinct from each other on account of several features. Discourse always takes place at a particular time; it is self-referential—by means of deixis (e.g. personal pronouns)—it refers to its producer; it is always related to the world at large, to extralinguistic entities, not necessarily literally, but also metaphorically. When discourse refers to the external world, it is inevitably linked to a language in that it materializes it. The addressee (the receiver of the message) is essential to discourse. Language is a timeless entity, i.e. it is located outside of a time span; it refers to signs situated within the same system. Ricoeur (1974) asserts that a language cannot be reduced to unambiguous meanings for a language as such provides space for an abundance of meanings and interpretation. Ricoeur (1978) defines interpretation as a way of thinking that involves decoding hidden meaning projected through putative meaning and unveiling layers of the meaning lurking in the literal meaning of the word. Symbols necessitate our involvement; this is because they call for interpretation since they reveal more than they say and never cease to speak to us (Ricoeur, 1974).

Discourse itself involves processes of interpretation that make meanings available. Interpretation is a dynamic process consisting of the non-methodical aspect of comprehension and the methodical aspect of explanation. Ricoeur (1991) describes this relationship as follows: comprehension precedes, accompanies, completes, hence, surrounds the explanation, while explanation improves analytical comprehension. The two processes are in a dialectical relationship: on one hand, they are different from each other; on the other hand, they are interconnected. They cannot stand by themselves since the interpretation cannot be reduced to either of them. Just as a language is realized in discourse, discourse enters into the process of comprehension and becomes an event and a meaning (Ricoeur, 1991). Extralinguistic reality can be understood on account of the interpretation and conceptualization of a person's experience; the person's experience being the outcome of the configuration process of creating meaning.

Since a language does not represent a sum of words but an internally structured system within which unique combinations conceptualizing a person's experience originate, discourse is an event in a language that evolves during configuration. The process of configuration (in the sense of encoding) (Ricoeur, 2000) involves prefiguration, configuration, and reconfiguration. Prefiguration implies the implicit understanding of a person's experience, the ability to master a certain conceptual network as a whole and each of its components as part of that whole. Configuration conveys the composition of discourse in which single events make up a whole. Reconfiguration represents delivery of the message, and comprehending and interpreting discourse. Gadamer (1999) regards speech to be a manifestation of variability and of a person's freedom, as well as a means of grasping the world. Through a language and through speech, we can understand the world in general and also another person's world. Gadamer (In Malpas, 2015) sees understanding

... as always linguistically mediated. Since both conversation and understanding involve coming to an agreement, so Gadamer argues that all understanding involves something like a common language, albeit a common language that is itself formed in the process of understanding itself. In this sense, all understanding is, according to Gadamer, interpretative, and, insofar as all interpretation involves the exchange between the familiar and the alien, so all interpretation is also translative.

Heidegger (in Grodin 1994, pp. 93-94; author's emphasis) takes the view that

understanding means less a ‘kind of knowledge’ than a ‘knowing one’s way around’ ... This everyday understanding almost always remains implicit. As a ‘mode of being’ it is not consciously thematized. We live too much within it for it to need to be made explicit. Nevertheless, all the ‘things’ and events that we deal with in our life-world are pre-interpreted by this anticipatory understanding.

In the interactions we engage in, it is often the case that the person who is talking is not as important as the discourse they produce. The person is the mere carrier of a discourse that might have existed before, and may exist in the future. It is often the case that a speaker only represents and endorses discourses passed on to him/her from previous generations of speakers, or discourse occasions. In this way, speakers may adopt somebody else’s stance and in so doing construct and/or reconstruct their own identity. Identity is thus created through discourse, which implies that discourse has a role in shaping human history (Gee 1999 qt in Holliday, Hyde, Kullman, 2004, p. 77). Gee (ibid.) provides examples by comparing the discourses of five pairs of ‘identities’: the Discourses of ‘being an Indian’ and ‘being an Anglo’ (in the U.S. and Canada), those of ‘being a Maori’ and ‘being an Anglo’ (in New Zealand), those of ‘being a British Anglo’ and ‘being an American Anglo’ (worldwide discussion), those of creationists and biologists, (worldwide discussion), and those of African-American teenage gang members and the L.A. police (in Los Angeles). Discourse is capitalized above following Gee’s usage (ibid. p. 75); he opts to capitalize the term to distinguish it as standing for “different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language ‘stuff.’” Adopting somebody’s discourse may contribute to constructing an identity that is, in its nature, false; this happens when a speaker is willing to conform to the discourse of a certain cultural group, yet is not fully aware of the entire social context in which these discourses were created and what their purpose was.

Linguistic meanings cannot be separated from their linguistic contexts. If we want to understand what is being talked about, we need to know the cultural environment and the speaker’s way of life. Language and culture cannot be separated: culture is a system of a wide array of symbols, and language is one of these symbols; moreover, language usage is always associated with a cultural context. As Kramsch (1998) asserts, language is an essential means for a social life to happen. When it is used in the context of communication, it is linked to culture in myriad ways. Duranti (1997)

asserts that languages are part of culture since they interlink inner thoughts and outward behavior; we speak of languages ‘in’ culture, rather than languages ‘and’ cultures. Functional linguists refer to (a) language as a social phenomenon; functional linguistics explains the current form of a language derived from a culture-specific need to express social functions. It follows that “[w]e can thus no longer assume that language and culture are co-extensive and shared understandings cannot be taken for granted. The one to one relationship between language and cultural variability must now be seen as an oversimplification;” this is because “[c]ultures are no longer homogenous and language divisions have become more and more permeable ... speakers of the same language may find themselves separated by deep cultural gaps, while others who speak distinct languages share the same culture” (Holliday, Hyde, Kullman, 2004, p. 75).

The interrelation between language and culture necessarily influences the construction of identity. Gee (1999, qt. in Holliday, Hyde, Kullman, 2004) considers the tools that can be used to (collaboratively with others) recognize and build identities, and recognize the identities that are being built around us. Gee (ibid. pp. 75-76) proposes the following four tools: a) ‘situated identities,’ i.e. identities in the sense of social roles undertaken by the speaker, occurring and being recognized in different communicative events; b) ‘social languages,’ i.e. language styles occurring and being recognized in different communicative events, and that allow the speaker to participate in conversation; c) ‘discourses’ with a capital ‘D,’ i.e. different ways of relating linguistic to paralinguistic and extralinguistic means (that is, how and what words, intonation, body language, symbols, etc., we use, how we prioritize cultural values, share experience, make sense of the world, etc.); d) ‘conversations’ with a capital ‘C,’ topics and themes of communicative events (spoken or written) taking place in a variety of settings and over time.

Gee (ibid p. 76) simplifies this saying that “[b]ig D’ Discourses are always language plus ‘other stuff.’ They are innumerable.” He (ibid) adds that big D Discourses can range from very general to very specific, and provides examples like African-American or Anglo-Australian and a modern, young affluent second-generation British Sikh woman; further examples include, “a middle-class American factory worker or executive, a doctor or hospital patient, a teacher, an administrator, or a student, a student

of physics or of literature, a member of a club or street gang, a regular at the local bar,” etc. For Gee (ibid p. 76), conversation means “the range of things that count as ‘appropriately’ ‘sayable’ and ‘meaning-able’, in terms of (oral or written) words, symbols, images, and things, at a given time and place, or within a given institution, set of institutions, or society, in regard to a given topic or theme (e.g. schools, women’s health, smoking, children, prisons, etc.).”

A central term that relates to the above mentioned tools is recognition. For Gee (ibid p. 76) recognition is the key to Discourses:

If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places together in such a way that others recognize you as a particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity) here and now, then you have pulled off a Discourse (and thereby continued it through history, if only for a while longer). Whatever you have done must be similar enough to other performances to be recognizable. However, if it is different enough from what has gone before, but still recognizable, it can simultaneously change and transform Discourses. If it is not recognizable, then you’re not ‘in’ the Discourse.

Recognition has to be present in all that the discourse comprises, in relation to variable and invariable entities. A particular pattern should be present within a discourse produced by a speaker; moreover, that pattern should be recognizable if the conversation is to be successful and if the speaker’s affiliation to the group is to be granted. At the same time, however, the discourse should comprise a personal voice so that the speaker’s personal identity can be revealed and acknowledged. Hence, in a discourse, one’s identity should be at once individual and social in nature. If language users can communicate their unique experiences via symbols of a foreign language, they are granted the symbolic power to enter another culture community and even to be accepted as one of its members, and, at the same time, are given a new sense of self, another identity (Kramsch, 2010).

### **1.3 Summary**

As individuals transform from monolingual to multilingual, their minds undergo many changes. When we live in an environment where we understand other people’s linguistic and non-linguistic behavior, and where we ourselves are understood, there is no reason to closely contemplate and reason the verbal and social behavior or cultural norms. We automatically abide by conventionalized routines, and understand cultural

signs. We are forced to learn a new social reality for the sake of successful interaction. Bauman (1990, pp. 15-16) claims that the process of ‘defamiliarization’ (transition from monolingual to bi-/multilingual)

[t]akes us away from our comfortable, limited, commonly accepted and often unconsidered opinions about what everybody and everything is like and makes us more sensitive to the way that those opinions are formed and maintained. It alerts us to the ways that things which at first sight appear obvious and ‘natural’ are actually the result of social action, social power or social tradition.

The identity of a foreign language speaker can be built; yet, it will be mapped on the personal identity of the speaker as an L1 speaker (native speaker). On one hand, we can keep our personal value system, our personal history, yet at the same time it is necessary to acquire the social dimension underlying the L2 (foreign language) culture. As Vygotsky (1979, p. 30) maintains, “[t]he social dimension of consciousness [i.e. of all mental processes] is primary in time and fact. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and secondary”. A multilingual speaker’s mind will never retrieve the qualities of a monolingual mind. The mind of a multilingual speaker has been modified. The ego is permeable, it can adopt as many or as few impulses as the exposure makes available or the individual is willing and/or ready to adopt, as Lantolf and Pavlenko (1995 qt in Zuengler, Miller 2006, pp. 38-39) claim,

... even though Vygotskian sociocultural theory does not deny a role for biological constraints [...] these means are the socioculturally meaningful artifacts and symbolic systems of a society, the most important of which is language. Of significance for SLA research [Note: second language acquisition] is the understanding that when learners appropriate mediational means, such as language, made available as they interact in socioculturally meaningful activities, these learners gain control over their own mental activity and can begin to function independently.

It follows that a language user’s development depends on the impulses from the outside world and implies both cognitive and sociocultural growth. Both Vygotsky (1979) and Bakhtin (1981) foreground the social aspect, as this is where meaning originates. A language that a speaker comes to learn does not happen outside society; it embodies individual and cultural elements. Bakhtin (1981, p. 293) calls attention to the social nature of intellectual processes: “language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the border between oneself and the other”. The sociality activates the individual in

that the individual is derived from the social. From all that has been said it follows that “language invents rather than defines a person” (Holliday, Hyde, Kullman, 2004, p. 85).