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Identity Online:
**Multilingual English language learners'
textual identities in and out of class**

Research report

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Executive summary

Contemporary global society is characterised by international movements of people, many of whom come to a new country with a need to learn a new language. Life in a new language and a new culture inevitably entails new ways of constructing identity in discourse. This project concerns the electronically-mediated textual identity construction of adult migrants to the UK who are learners of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

The participants' electronic literacy practices are conceptualised as occurring in two domains: with teachers and classmates within the centres where learning takes place; and with peers, colleagues, friends and families in everyday sites of electronic literacy practice. Permeating these 'real life' settings are the virtual spaces where online interaction happens. Findings, with implications for ESOL practice and policy, thus focus on two domains: multilingual students' electronic literacy practices both in classroom settings and in their outside lives.

Participants' electronic literacy practices outside the classroom are chiefly interpersonal ones: ICTs are used to maintain relationships with friends and family, especially across long distances, a task for which the tools employed are eminently suited. The spaces where people use ICTs and electronic communication outside their places of learning are predominantly: the home, the classroom, the library, and the internet café. Particular practices are more associated with some places than with others: for example, people are more likely to be in touch with family 'back home' when they are in their own homes. Questions of access also emerge: the economic position of many on the project preclude the purchase of expensive computer equipment. In terms of language use in online written communication, language alternation is prevalent, as well as emergent hybrid varieties and vernacular transliterations (e.g. 'Urdu in English').

Inside the classroom, the uses of ICTs are quite distinct from those out of class. Pedagogical framing is understandably prominent, restricting the range of identity positions which students can claim. For example, the role of assessment dominates, which can manifest itself with an overriding concern with accuracy and error correction. Three case studies of classroom practice suggest that classroom issues tend to reproduce themselves in the ICT environment. At times the ICT environment seems colonized by the pedagogical traits of the classroom, which can be very resilient. The recontextualization of new media can happen, therefore, in ways that are reductive. The challenge for teachers is to resist the temptation to pedagogize it. An implication – as well as a direction for further research – is that students might be able to appropriate the tools and spaces of new technology in ways which benefit their learning and which afford them a full range of identity positions.

1. Introduction: ESOL, identity and identity online

1.1 Aims of the project

Life for migrants to a new country entails new ways of doing – or constructing – identity in ongoing interaction. In their daily lives and on courses of study, migrant learners of English may increasingly encounter electronic communication. The Identity Online project is an investigation of identity as it relates to the electronically-mediated literacy practices of adult migrant learners of English, in and out of class.

Identity is a crucial issue for language learners who are migrants to a new country, living and working as they are in a new language and a new culture. The overall aim of the research was to establish how adult migrant learners of ESOL construct textual identities in their electronic literacy practices using networked computer media both within and outside their places of learning.

There were three specific objectives:

- To identify the scope and nature of ESOL learners' electronic literacy practices outside their formal places of learning;
- To ascertain the range of opportunities which ESOL learners have for developing electronic literacy skills within their places of learning;
- To discern and describe the salient identity-performing features of ESOL learners' online and ICT-related linguistic behaviour within their formal places of learning.

Work on the project ran from October 2007 to March 2010. This involved:

- Repeat observations, recordings of three ESOL classrooms (at around Entry 3 to Level 1 – Intermediate/Upper Intermediate level – on the National Qualifications Framework) in three centres in West Yorkshire (total 20 observations); repeat in-depth interviews with students and teachers in these classes; informal interviews during lesson observations.
- Collection and analysis of electronically-mediated classroom interaction in three classes.
- Repeat interviews with three focal learners (one from each class) for the phase of project concerned with out-of-class practices.
- Thematic analysis of entire student interview data set.
- Analysis of observation, interview and electronically-mediated textual data from three focal classes; development of the following case studies:
 - 1: Identity negotiation and alignment on an ESOL class blog
 - 2: New technology, ESOL and the National Literacy Test
 - 3: Bringing the outside in with the www

This report is structured as follows: the remainder of this introduction comprises an outline of the analytical approach taken in the project, and a sketching out of the key theoretical and contextual areas which have informed the work. Section 2 is a thematic overview of students' electronic literacy practices in and out of class, expanding on each of the major themes generated from a content analysis of the group and individual interviews with students on the project. Sections 3 to 5 comprise three case studies of classrooms and students, integrating discussion of multilingual migrants' identity construction/identity positions indexed during interview events. Section 6 contains conclusions and a summary. A number of publications and dissemination activities are associated with this project. Appendix 1 has details of these. Appendix 2 contains transcription conventions.

1.2 Analytical approach

The data from interviews with learners was analysed using a grounded approach, generating the thematic overview of Section 2: categories were defined through an analysis of a first set of interviews, then expanded in analysis of subsequent interview data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This approach to interview data allows categories to emerge from the data itself, rather than be pre-defined by the analyst; hence the analysis is more accountable to the data.

The framework for analysing textual identity in the case studies follows a linguistic ethnographic approach (Maybin and Tusting forthcoming; Rampton *et al* 2004). It includes two key components: firstly an examination of *what is written*; and secondly a parallel analysis of *what is said about what is written*. An analysis of *what is written* and *what is said about what is written* is adopted by others investigating the textual identities of migrant language learners (Kramsch 2000; Lam 2000, 2004) and of writers of academic English (Ivanič 1998). More generally, linguistic ethnography advocates attention to language in interaction examined in combination with more reflective accounts gained through interviews.

The analysis as a whole was informed by positioning theory (Davies and Harré 1990) and sociolinguistic notions of indexicality. An assumption in the project is that every utterance – written or spoken – indexes an aspect of identity, is an ‘act of identity’ (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985). As defined by Davies and Harré, positioning is ‘the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines’ (1990:48). Positioning can be reflexive (you position yourself by what you say) or interactive (what another says positions you) and can be intentional or not. The various ways in which participants position themselves, in spoken, written, conversational and narrative interaction, both face-to-face and online, and intentionally or not, links the here and now to the socio-historical body of past experience. The connection between speaker position in discourse and identity is quite tangible: Blommaert calls the shifting perspectives of speaker position ‘the clearest empirical clue for identity’ (2005:209). Speaker (and writer) position reflects the dynamic nature of identity in discourse. Social positioning is thus an apposite theoretical tool for the study of online identity.

1.3 Theoretical background

Migration and identity

Adult migrants who find themselves in English language classes in the UK come from a hugely diverse range of geographical, social and economic backgrounds, and include refugees seeking asylum, people from well-established communities, so-called economic migrants escaping poverty in their home countries, and people joining their spouses and family members. For adult migrants who are language learners, identity is far from being a banal matter. For identity – who and what you are – is constructed both *by* and *in* language, and in migration contexts, identity construction happens in a new culture and a new language. Identity, daily life and language learning are thus inextricably intertwined.

When attempting to understand the identities of people whose lives are in flux, it is appropriate to view identity itself as flexible, fluid and non-permanent, as something that is constructed in discourse. The broadly constructivist approach to identity and its continual remaking outlined above is taken by many sociolinguists and applied linguists currently studying migration and identity, and follows a well-established constructivist understanding of identity in social sciences generally. A post-structuralist take on the study of identity also views it as an interactional accomplishment, produced and negotiated in discourse, yet extends it by incorporating a concern with power relations. The work of post-structuralists, say Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004:13) ‘illuminates ways in which particular identities are legitimized or devalued in the context of global and local political economies.’

A post-structuralist conception of identity accords well with the nature of contemporary migration itself. In ‘classic immigration’ it was at least assumed that migration would be ‘for ever.’ In contrast, *transnationalism* is now commonplace. Relative ease of movement, coupled with the possibilities of connectivity afforded by relatively cheap travel and of electronic communication, ensures that maintaining the links and networks that extend between the host country and the homeland is feasible for many migrants. Moreover, migration is increasingly seen as something that is not necessarily permanent. Thus transnationals have a stake in retaining connections at a distance with their place of origin. Some people of course become well-established in a new country, as is the case with many participants in this study, and on a superficial level resemble the ‘classic migrants’ of the past (though even this notion has long been contested: see Cerese 1967 on the mass return to Italy of US migrants). Even so, such people in this study travel to their country of origin fairly frequently, and make extensive use of internet-based tools of electronically-mediated communication such as *Skype* and messenger programs to maintain links with their families and friends back home and in other parts of the world. Moreover, Britain’s towns and cities, rather than being host to stable settled communities, increasingly display what Vertovec (2007) describes as ‘super-diversity’ or the ‘diversification of diversity’ characteristic of contemporary urban life. Daily interaction using electronic communication is the focus of the first objective of the project: *to identify the scope and nature of ESOL learners’ electronic literacy practices outside their formal places of learning.*

Identity and language learning

Linguistic signs, as with any other signs, have an indicative function (Peirce 1902/1955). That is to say, meaning emerges through the way linguistic and other semiotic signs *index* something. Thus, when someone makes an utterance in interaction they enable interpretations to be drawn, they allow their interlocutors to invoke ‘social norms, roles, identities’ (Blommaert 2005:252). The question then arises of how this semiotic *doing* of identity works in the language learning contexts of this study, when people are interacting with their peers and – importantly – with their teacher. In such contexts, identity is accomplished in languages in which users are at best non-experts, hence the semiotic repertoire which is to hand may not be extensive; attention might indeed focus on interesting ways with which learners draw on their own relatively limited linguistic resources and those of their fellow learners, as well as those of their teachers. How these ways are enabled with the use of new technologies in class is the focus of the second objective of the project: *to ascertain the range of opportunities which ESOL learners have for developing electronic literacy skills within their places of learning.*

Inevitably, relations of power are an issue for identity as constructed locally in language learning interaction (Norton 2000). As Bourdieu (1991:37) says: ‘the relations of communication par excellence – linguistic exchanges – are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualised.’ In language learning, choices students and teachers make about language use – even move-by-move choices – are inseparable from issues of power in relation to the positioning that ensues when these choices are made. Power relations are particularly salient when considering interaction between learners of a dominant language and expert users of that language, as is the case when individuals are interacting with their teacher. Identity construction in classroom contexts – in and around classroom electronic literacy practices – is the focus of the third objective of the project: *to discern and describe the salient identity-performing features of ESOL learners’ online and ICT-related linguistic behaviour within their formal places of learning.*

This objective is addressed through three classroom case studies, each taking up an aspect of identity and electronic literacy in ESOL settings: 1) the extent to which an online space can become ‘pedagogized’, and the implications of this for ESOL students’ identity construction; 2) how policy-driven testing regimes come to dominate ESOL practice, and how this affects the positioning of ESOL students; and 3) the way in which the www can be used as an enabler of opportunities for students to ‘bring in’ identity positions that go beyond those offered them by policy and institutional discourse

Textual identity online

Case study 1 focuses on *Textual identity*, a shorthand phrase for an individual’s identity as constructed in their writing. *Online* textual identities are constructed when individuals engage in electronic literacy practices: plural social practices involving the use of ICTs such as email, text chat, social networking, blogging, and mobile phone messaging. Communication using new literacy technologies has profound implications for the notion of authorship and the construction of identity: by its nature, electronic communication offers the opportunity to develop and emphasise different aspects of identity with new sorts of writing, and in new, multimodal, multilingual and globally-spread social spaces. Thus online textual identity is of a different order from other aspects of identity. Electronically-mediated written interaction is often produced in real time, with only a minimum of reflection and editing before posts are sent. This is particularly the case in synchronous electronically-mediated forums such as internet chat rooms and messenger programs like MSN and *Yahoo*, known for their interaction ‘on the fly.’ It can also be the case with supposedly more reflective asynchronous forums, for example communication using email or blogs, the focus of case study 1.

Positioning of ESOL students in policy

Case studies 2 and 3 engage with the issue of ESOL in policy. Just over a decade ago, when ESOL in England was brought under the policy umbrella of *Skills for Life*, it became situated along with literacy and numeracy as an adult basic skill (DfEE 2000). *Skills for Life* entailed: a statutory national curriculum (DfES 2001), a qualifications framework, an inspection regime and a strengthening of links between adult education and business. The intervening decade has also seen a strengthening of the links between English language learning and notions of ‘community cohesion’ and national security. As a result, ESOL has come to be dominated by a culture of testing and assessment; by a ‘human capital’ understanding at policy level of ‘language skills’ being for employability, and by the process of naturalisation and citizenship. Moreover, the Further Education sector, where most ESOL provision is situated, operates with a funding regime which requires that most provision leads to qualifications. Hence, funding drives practice, as institutions are under pressure to ensure students – including ESOL students at all levels – both take and pass exams: continued funding for courses is dependent on this. The implication for pedagogy of a funding regime tied to achievement of qualifications is that what is legitimised as knowledge at policy and institutional level becomes limited to that which is relevant for passing exams. Likewise, a hegemonic understanding of ESOL as a skill in service to employability and the citizenship agenda presents a narrowing of available identity options. Case study 2 looks at how the testing regime can dominate practice, even when teachers and students contest the identity positions imposed upon them. Case study 3 illustrates the challenge for ESOL practice, to attend to other outside concerns, and to develop aspects of students’ identities that are not related to test-taking, ‘employability’ and ‘citizenship’, while working within the constraints of a policy that privileges such agendas.

2. Emergent themes: Electronic literacy practices inside and outside class

2.1 Introduction

This section identifies and discusses some of the major themes to emerge from the *Identities Online* data set. It does so by drawing upon data from interviews with 26 adult ESOL students, multilingual learners of English, conducted over the course of the project. These included group interviews and more in-depth individual interviews. It begins with a brief description of the participants, before discussing the main electronic literacy practices they engage in. The principal focus in this section is on students' out-of-class practices, as the case studies later in the report centre on in-class practices.

Student participants

Of the 26 interviewed student participants, 15 are female and 11 are male. All are aged between 18 and 45. 18 of them come from Asia, with eight coming from Iran, Iraq or Kurdistan, four from Pakistan, and others from India, China and Japan. Six come from Africa, with students from the Congo, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Ethiopia. There is only one European student, from Slovakia. The students also vary in terms of their immigration status in the UK. For example, almost half the participants are refugees. Some are on their own but the majority are in the UK with partners and, often, young children. The group includes women who are separated from their partners and living in the UK as single parents. A number of the students are married to British citizens and some are actively seeking British citizenship. The participants are bilingual and, in many cases, multilingual. Common languages include: Farsi, Arabic, Kurdish and Urdu. Most have a reasonably good level of English and are at Level 1, or Upper-Intermediate level on the National Qualifications Framework.

Cross-cutting issues

Some issues cross-cut the data set. Firstly, there is the question of access to technology. This is connected to practical matters such as time, money and opportunity, and is thus related to factors like employment status and educational access in the UK. It is concerned with aspects of what is known as the *digital divide*. In Graddol's terms (1997: 39): 'unequal access to information technologies will create new distinctions between the information poor and the information rich.' (See Warschauer 2003 for a nuanced account of this notion.)

Gender issues also emerge as a significant factor. For example, being the primary care-giver in a young family often restricts access to ICTs, if only in terms of time available. Women, often with young children in the UK education system, constitute the majority of the participants, which corresponds with the general pattern of the ESOL student body: Baynham *et al.* (2007) found in a survey of over 500 ESOL students that around 63% were female.

Then there is the question of language, which runs through the dataset and is tightly connected to the theme of identity. The ways in which language was used whilst engaging with ICTs was a noteworthy strand of the study. There is evidence that English was, perhaps not surprisingly, used as a *lingua franca*, but there was also evidence that some students used English, or a blend of English and mother tongue, when communicating with friends who shared the same expert language. This multilingualism might be the result of factors like a long period of residence in an English-dominant country or an identification of English as the language of new technologies (see Cooke & Simpson 2008: 123).

Finally, there is the question of age and the life course. A good number have children in the UK education system and some explicitly refer to the ICT practices of their children. Age is an interesting factor to consider in relation to electronic literacy as many of the ICT practices evident from the data, e.g. the use of messenger programmes, are relatively new. Age is also closely connected to education, and indeed to access, with the school-age children of multilingual migrants having regular access to, and education in, new technologies through the UK education system.

Spaces of use

There are a number of physical spaces where migrants engage with ICTs. The most common are the classroom and the home. Beyond this, other spaces include public libraries and internet cafes. The use to which ICTs are put differs markedly inside and outside the classroom space; this matter will be taken-up later in the report.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, one of the most common places where individuals engage with ICTs is the home. For the multilingual migrants in the study, the most common purpose for engaging in electronic literacy practices is undoubtedly to maintain contact with family and friends in the students' countries of origin and, where other family migration has occurred, elsewhere. This contact takes place when people are at home.

In their places of learning, the other main site where participants engage with ICTs, this sometimes takes the form of accessing computers in college libraries but, more often than not, centre on the classroom. The nature and purposes of these practices are discussed later but in sum the teachers of the students in the project actively incorporate ICTs into their classroom practices. For a number of the women with young families, attendance at college provides an opportunity to use computers that they do not get time for at home, and to use the internet to seek information that is not related to their English language learning. So practices may bleed across domains of use: college computer use may have characteristics of non-college use, and the ICT facilities in college present simply an opportunity to get onto a computer.

Beyond the home and the classroom, there are more public spaces: the public library and the internet café, for instance. Discussion here turned on questions of money, guidance and privacy. On the question of money, one student says:

now I use not cyber cafe but if I want to go internet I want to use internet I go library because is free and cyber-cafe you have to pay

So internet use is free in the public library but internet cafés charge. This is clearly an important economic consideration and a potential barrier to access. Another student noted that help and advice in searching for web-based material was available from library staff. However, a lack of privacy was highlighted as a potential drawback of computer use in the library. For example, one student points out that *'in library everybody sit and know what you are doing.'* Another picks up this thread, pointing to the advantages offered by the cyber-café in this regard:

if you go to cyber café and you need a computer and you need also privacy so and the cyber café manager he give you a separate room or separate equipment where you can go and doing your own work

There is also a point to make about the people the students are communicating with, in terms of where they are accessing computers. For example, a student from Japan says of her interlocutors:

back home they don't have a computer at home just in the internet café things these type of things places

Finally, in the course of a discussion of ICTs in public domains, a young female participant originally from Pakistan makes an interesting point about domains of use, saying:

I don't like to go to a café or somewhere or in the library I just use my phone

There is clearly an issue about feeling safe or comfortable using computers in public domains. This is not elaborated upon in the interview but, for a young Pakistani woman, there is a way in which issues around both gender and culture are implicated here. The home is a safe, secure and private space but public spaces less so and perhaps especially so for young ethnic minority women.

Tools and frequency of their use

The main ICT-tools and programmes used are:

- Synchronous text-based chat using *MSN Messenger*, *Paltalk* and other messenger programmes.
- Audio/video text-supported chat using *Skype*
- Social Networking (web 2.0) sites such as *Facebook*
- Email
- Mobile phone text messaging

As far as the use of text-based chat is concerned, some participants are heavy users. One young man, for example, says that he goes online *'maybe three or four times a week'* and chats for *'maybe three hours.'* More common were those who use it regularly but less frequently (perhaps weekly) and for a shorter duration to keep in touch with family.

Email use varies from those who use email every day, through those who, perhaps most commonly, use it two or three times a week, to those who don't use it at all. Similarly, with mobile phone text-messaging, there is a cluster around those who say they use it *'not every day sometimes.'* Some are heavy users, one student sending *'more than 10 every day.'*

2.2 Out of class electronic literacy practices

Maintaining links with family and friends

Perhaps the most common electronic literacy practices visible in the data set is the use of text-based messenger programmes. The primary function here is to keep in touch with family and friends in the students' countries of origin. Many of the students use ICTs for just this purpose:

if you go to the messenger yeah and you want to talk with somebody for example [...] I am at home and you are at your own home yeah and so we chat on internet with each other and if we want to know how are you how you are looking or something then we use webcam so we saw the pictures live and then we use the headphone for talking also [...] like mobile

The affordances of this practice in terms of its interpersonal function are elucidated clearly here, using a web camera and a headset to see, as well as talk to, family members across long distances. Some students also use e-mail to stay in touch with family back home but the advantages of programmes such as *Skype* are captured by this student, when she talks about communicating with her husband in Iran:

voice is better you feel closer and you can see each other from webcam it's better

When using *Skype* or *MSN Messenger* the students engage in a variety of different practices. Some use the webcam and speak without necessarily typing, while others type too. Many of the students prefer to make use of headsets and webcams, even though they use email to keep in touch. A South American student says:

I need to hear the voice [...] email for me it's just sometimes I don't think email you know you can tell everything I think when you listen the voice you feel emotionally

The question of typing raises also raises the issue of literacy, including electronic literacy. Of text-based chat, one student says:

chatting is difficult because it have a different alphabet and it's difficult to chat writing

Thus, for those students who have a different alphabet, the process is potentially problematic in terms of the literacy burden it imposes.

Other decisions on whether to speak or write are made for practical reasons connected to the technology. For example, one female participant from Iraq says that she writes if the audio connection is not good or if she is sending a photograph. The selection of a particular ICT practice is not just dependent upon language; it is dependent upon the skills people have in manipulating the technology itself. For instance, another Iraqi student says that she talks to her parents back home using *Skype* and a webcam but doesn't type, as they lack the necessary keyboard skills. This clearly implicates factors like age and access to education in the new digital technologies. The strategy adopted by this student to use voice-based electronic communication is analogous to the pre-digital age use of cassette tapes to communicate with family and friends with restricted literacy.

Creating new links and making new friends

For a small number of the participants, the use of text-based chat programmes and social networking sites like *Facebook* fulfil another function: that of forging new links as well as maintaining old ones. Kaya puts it memorably when he says that ICT offers a 'window to new world.' He talks about being able to move beyond the constraints of making friends within his class. When asked who he is in contact with he says:

not at all in classroom [...] people around the world [...] some of them in UK some of them in my country [...] some of them all over the world

He relates how he has just been to visit a contact made on the internet in Switzerland, attesting to the potential of new technology to make new links across distance. For another of the students, these new links extend to finding potential romantic partners online: he has established links across the UK.

It is interesting that the two students who engage most extensively in this type of ICT practice are young, male, and unattached in the UK. Both are refugees seeking asylum and both have had difficulties making friends with immediate classmates and housemates. Saddique, who we meet later in the second case study, arrived in the UK unaccompanied from Kurdish Iran aged 15. Now 18, he is still awaiting the outcome of his claim for asylum. In the meantime he is aware that if he falls foul of the law or runs into trouble with the police, his claim will be jeopardised. Hence he tries not to leave his flat after dark, and his 'face to face' socialising is minimal. The internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC) offer an opportunity to forge a social life and friendship ties that are not available in daily life for this isolated youngster.

Programmes used to communicate with new friends include *Paltalk*, *MSN Messenger* and *Facebook*. However, a number of the female students in the sample also revealed that friends, male and female had used chat-rooms to find potential partners. One female student says, of the affordances and outcomes of social networking:

it give you more chance to meet new friends [...] I know I have two friends [...] they are get married my friend he used chat room he met a girlfriend many years ago they get married they are very happy and I have a friend she study in the university next week she come she are going to China to get married

Another student related a more cautionary tale about how a female friend had been deceived by the online identity adopted by a potential partner, which raises the question of online security. This issue is thrown into particularly sharp focus when children go online. In the following discussion on social networking sites and web-chat, the need to control and monitor internet access for children is highlighted as a concern for students with younger children.

Shari: my children [...] not much allowed (.) going and talking and typing the same time as the other person

Researcher: you say not much allowed (.) do you mean you don't let them

Shari: yes for children (.) but [...] sometimes I don't know who is their friend so for safety reasons [...] we check them first and then they go for the computer

Here, the difficulty of knowing who children are chatting to online is a major concern for Shari, as for a number of other mothers interviewed for the project.

Reading on the web

Staying with the idea of keeping in touch, some students use the internet to access news from back home, in their expert language as well as in English. For example, Javed says :

I went to BBC News I like reading news about everything [...] sometimes in English sometimes translation for Arabic because I speak Arabic [...] sometimes I don't understand in English very well I go to Arabic translation and I read all this

Some of the students used the internet to check information pertinent to their status in the UK on the Home Office website. Javed explains

yes always Iraq and about the Home Office site yes because I have no any definite (.) I like read about what happens in Home Office what decided in future I read this for some information about this

In many respects the participants' use of ICTs is quite mainstream: they are after all consumers online. As one student says: 'if you have internet websites you can find anything' and other uses the internet identified included shopping for plane tickets and cameras. One participant makes extensive of the internet to work from home as it allows him to spend more time with his young family. He says:

it's better than that going to work for 10 or 12 hours for somebody who say oh do that oh do that [...] my job is if I need I'm going to do it but if I don't need I stay home chill out with the family or visit somewhere or go to holiday [...] better yeah I think its better

Although this blurs the domains of work and home a little, it is interesting that he separates these by using two different computers: a desk-top for his personal and recreational ICT use, and a laptop for work.

2.3 In-class electronic literacy practices

The participants have varied experiences of using ICTs in the UK education system. Some students have accessed ICTs at a basic level, including CLAIT (Computer Literacy and Information Technology) classes. All the ESOL teachers on the project were consciously striving to incorporate ICTs into their classroom practices. The case studies in the following sections pick up salient issues around ICT practices in the context of English Language learning in more detail. They focus on the use of a class blog (case study 1) and on web-based activities (case studies 2 and 3).

The electronic literacy practices relating to English Language learning included:

- doing grammar quizzes
- completing practice National Literacy Tests
- participating on a class blog
- the use of off-the-peg CALL language learning materials, e.g. Heinemann Sure Skills
- web-searching for folk-tales from student country of origin
- using materials posted by teachers onto the Blackboard virtual learning environment to develop reading and writing skills.

2.4 Constraints on ICT use

Access to ICTs is an issue which implicates the socio-economic realities of students' lives: time and money are commonly invoked as barriers. A less obvious but still salient issue is that in classroom settings, and in many out-of-class areas of use, students are faced with the linguistic and socio-cultural demands of engaging in online practices in a non-expert language.

Time

A number of constraints on ICT use emerge from the data. To begin with, there is the constraint of time, especially for some of the female students with children to look after. The question of time impacts upon the question of when, where how often ICTs are accessed: often later in the evenings, when children are in bed. One female parent, when asked if she used computers outside class, says simply: *'no I have no time (.) in holidays maybe.'* Another is similarly constrained by time: *'I don't have time to go back in the library and use the computer now I'm with two children.'* The issue of gender emerges here, and childcare commitments limit the time they have to access ICTs and also impacts upon the way they engage with them. One mother chooses speaking over writing for practical reasons as well, saying *'I don't have time to write'* and *'it's difficult to write with small children.'* The heaviest users of ICTs in the data are young, single men.

It is worth noting that even those students who have no home-access to computers manage to make use of them elsewhere, either at friends' houses, or at college. So questions of access impact upon domains of use. A few of the female students commented upon the fact that they only use ICTs in any significant way in college.

Money

There is also the question of physical access to a computer. A number of students did not have access to a computer at home. Still others had computers but no internet connection. The question of a 'digital divide' is an important in the context of students who are generally living on below-average incomes or existing on benefits. The student quoted above, for example, is a non-working refugee and the single mother of two small children.

Cost is related not just to the buying of a computer but also to the ongoing engagement with ICTs, a factor which emerged from the interviews. Luisa, who we meet in the third case study below, says that once computers are purchased, computer-mediated communication is cheaper than telephone contact:

I use email just to email in my country in Angola in Brazil you know because you know to phone them is very expensive

This perhaps explains the significant use of *Skype* among the participants, as it is free to access if you have an internet-connected computer. Text messaging is also a common practice in connecting cheaply with friends and family.

2.5 Language and identity online

if I need to write a message to my friend from Slovakia [...] I write in my own language in Slovakia but if I need to tell something to my friend for the job (.) he's from Italia then I have to speak with him in English (Milo, from Slovakia)

The interviews reveal interesting things around the language choices ESOL students make when engaging in ICT practices. To begin with, English has currency as a lingua franca both in the context of the multilingual workplace, as the quotation above reveals, and in the context of the multilingual classroom, where students are expected to communicate with each other, and their teacher, in English.

It is also, crucially for this project, the international language of technology. Access to English gives access to all the resources of the worldwide web, access to capital, in fact. In talking of his education, one of the students says:

in secondary school we used Word and Powerpoint it was in lessons in my own language but access was in English because if I go on internet the website are in English

English is less a lingua franca here than a necessity to participate in practices on the worldwide web. Thus, English is not the end, only a means to an end. It is interesting to consider this in the light of debates on whether English is the dominant online language. Graddol (2006) points to the increasingly multilingual flavour of online communication whereas Warschauer has a slightly different take, characterising the relationship between English as a global language and the world-wide internet as a mutually reinforcing one. He says:

A mutually reinforcing cycle takes place, by which the existence of English as a global language motivates (or forces) people to use it on the internet, and the expansion of the internet (and online English communication) thus reinforces English's role as a global language.

(Warschauer 2003: 98)

The language behaviour of students who have multiple transnational contacts is a particularly interesting feature. For example, a student from Pakistan, who is married to a British citizen, says she prefers to use English because she likes it. She uses English when talking to her children, who were born and are in education in the UK. However, when talking to her in-laws she needs to use mother tongue because they don't have English.

Multilingualism online adds to an understanding of the role of computer-mediated communication in processes of globalisation. Because CMC is not associated with one particular fixed geographical place or – in the case of English at least – one particular population, it seems to be contributing to the destabilisation of linguistic and cultural boundaries. CMC in multilingual online spaces often involves code-switching and language alternation.

Users of languages with non-Roman writing systems transliterate them using an emergent vernacular, where elements of the expert and non-expert languages are used when engaging in ICT practices (see Palfreyman and Al Khalil, 2003, for a description of 'Arabic in English'; papers in Danet and Herring 2007; Warschauer *et al* 2002). Thus, for example, when Shahedah emails her Indian friend in Florida, she uses an emergent variety which includes aspects of Gujarati, Hindi and English. She describes it thus:

sometime I'm using many words in English but in between our language like Hindi or in translated English

Luisa also talks about a friend who blends elements of her expert and non-expert languages:

I got a friend she writes me like this [...] she came here she came with eight years old and she mixed the Portuguese and she doesn't know the right word you know and then she mix all the phrase with she's start in Portuguese then she use English then she abbreviate things yeah

Vernacular transliterations of the type described here are particularly predominant in sites where users are globally spread or where they are part of a diaspora (see Lam 2004). Research in this area suggests that using such vernaculars better enables individuals to navigate between their native language and culture and those of their adopted home. Warschauer (2009: 126) notes that 'They allow those who cross physical and societal boundaries to experience transculturation rather than acculturation.' That is to say, rather than having to reject a previous culture when adopting a new one, electronic communication using emergent vernaculars makes it possible for people to better cross between cultures.

2.6 Summary

Computers are part of us (Indian woman)

The student interviews reveal that ICTs suffuse the daily practices of many and the quote above suggests that ICT use is intimately bound up with questions of personal and social identities. The distinction between 'inside-outside' has been a useful heuristic for viewing current practices in ESOL classroom-based research; as we have seen, there is a noticeable disjuncture between the ICT practices inside and outside the classroom. However, there is also a sense in which practices bleed across domains of use.

It is worth asking why students' outside class ICT practices differ so markedly from inside-class ones. It is also worth asking why this matters. Such questions have been the mainstay of much literature on literacy since the inception of the New Literacy Studies (Heath 1983, Street 1984, Barton 2006); it is pertinent that the disjunctures noted between more traditional home and school literacy practices have parallels in electronic literacy practices. In addition to their purpose of conveying information, the main function of ICTs outside the classroom is interpersonal. Students use computer-mediated communication in particular to maintain relationships within friends and family, especially across long distances, a task for which new technologies are eminently suited. Inside the classroom, however, the pedagogical framing is prominent, leading to a narrower range of possibilities for exploitation and a narrower range of identity positions the students can claim. For example, the role of assessment is significant; this can manifest itself with an overriding concern with accuracy and error correction as opposed to communicative fluency. As we see in the case studies below, this also conforms to students' expectations. Furthermore, when the students' expectations align so closely with dominant policy-driven requirements, conditions are quite ripe for the reproduction of particular discourses – e.g. a discourse about the importance of accuracy or a deficit notion of literacy – in classroom practice.

3. Case study 1: Identity negotiation and identity alignment on an ESOL class blog

3.1 Introduction

The class observed for this case study is an Entry Level 3 (i.e. intermediate) ESOL class – henceforth the E3 class – which takes place at the main site of a College of Further Education in a medium-sized (population 53 000) northern industrial town in England. Ten students regularly attend the E3 class: seven women and three men. The students are aged between 25 and 50, and most are married with children. The majority of students categorise themselves as members of Kashmiri and Gujarati communities, which make up the largest proportion of the migrant population of the town, though there are increasing numbers of people from other parts of the world, notably Eastern Europe. One student is a refugee from Kurdistan, and another is a Japanese woman married to a local-born man. The teacher, Carol, is an experienced and well-qualified ESOL teacher and manager. The class meets three mornings a week, for a total of nine hours.

The purpose of this case study is to enquire about and to critically examine the pedagogical use of a class blog, with particular reference to the electronic literacy practices and textual identity construction of one student, Shahedah.

Data set

Lessons were observed and audio-recorded once a month over the period September 2007 to March 2008. In addition to the field notes and recordings from lesson observations, the overall data set for this class comprises:

- Interviews and informal conversations with the teacher (recorded; transcribed)
- Posts on E3 Class blog, September 2007 – March 2008
- Interviews with students
 - Informal chats during lesson observations
 - Group interviews with students using visual prompts
 - Individual interview with one student, Shahedah (transcribed and translated from Gujarati)
- Reflective account of individual interview by interviewer/translator

Research questions

Two broad questions guide the case study:

- How do the linguistic and discourse features of one individual learner's electronically-mediated discourse index aspects of her identity?
- How does the recontextualization of the blog for pedagogic purposes serve to shape the interaction and identity construction of students and their teacher?

The section that follows is an account of interaction in the class blog. Subsequently there is a summary of how Shahedah presents her socio-history in the course of an in-depth interview. Finally, we analyse the blog posts of Shahedah, her teacher and other students.

3.2 Interaction and participation on a class blog

Blogs (from *web log*) are 'frequently modified webpages containing individual entries displayed in reverse chronological sequence' (Herring, Kouper *et al* 2004). The purposes of blogs are varied: early blogs were online diaries, or 'vehicles for self-expression and self-empowerment' (Herring, Scheidt *et al* 2004), and their uses encompass information-sharing sites, and mouthpieces for corporations, pressure groups and politicians. Blogs are also employed in language learning and teaching: they are 'a potentially useful tool for creating a space to discuss issues that may not be the focus of the traditional classroom' (Bloch 2007: 129). A consensus in pedagogic descriptions of blogs in use is that they lend themselves to easily accessible publication and dissemination of student writing, information-sharing, the collaborative construction of meaning, and, significantly, learner control. This latter assumption should not, however, go unquestioned. It can indeed be the case that the recontextualization of a blog into a pedagogic frame can entail the reproduction online of classroom hegemonies and traditional relations of power.

The teacher, Carol, has used a blog with her students at the college since 2006. The E3 class blog contains many of the structural features of blogs in some form, at least in part because it was created using a template provided on the Blogger.com site. Carol has integrated the blog into the E3 course as a tool for her to post homework and classroom tasks and activities, as well as a space for students to post classroom and homework writing.

Interactional architecture of the blog

Interaction on the class blog can be described in terms of its *interactional architecture* (Seedhouse 2004) over its life cycle, and of its patterns of participation. Entries to the blog can be considered turns in an exchange: as such they can be labelled (following Sinclair and Coulthard 1975) either I or R. I (initiation or opening) posts are the main blog entries, sent straight to the blog by teacher or students without responding to a previous entry. R (response or answering) posts, conversely, are sent in response to I posts, and appear as 'comments' on the blog. Figure 1 summarises the entries to the class blog:

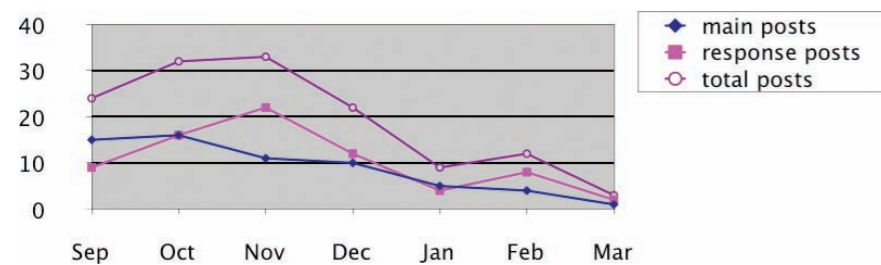


Figure 1 Summary of interaction on the class blog

Interaction levels on the blog varied over the seven-months, petering out towards the end. The overall number of entries peaked in November (33 posts), the monthly number of I posts peaked in October (16 posts), and that the monthly number of R posts peaked in November (22 posts). By March the monthly number of posts had dwindled to three.

Patterns of participation are more equal in electronically-mediated contexts compared with oral classroom discussion: levels of learner participation online are greater than in equivalent oral classrooms (Chun 1994; Warschauer 1996; Sullivan and Pratt 1996). In the case of the E3 class blog, 53 of the 135 entries are sent by the teacher, accounting for 39% of the total. 29 (47%) of the I posts are sent by the teacher, as are 24 (33%) of the R posts. The balance of participation is thus in the students' favour on the blog, bearing out the findings from these earlier studies: their entries account for over half of the total number of posts and of the I posts, and for two thirds of the R posts.

However, students do not use the blog unprompted. Many of the students' I posts are actually sent in response to a spoken request or prompting from the teacher in class that they send their posts to the blog. Therefore in terms of learner agency, this particular blog is not a site where control of learning is in the hands of learners themselves. A more equal balance of participation between teachers and students, compared to prototypical classroom discourse, should not be conflated with an equalisation of relations in terms of control of topic or turn-taking.

Carol's use of the blog

Here Carol gives her rationale for using the blog with her students.

Obviously I like the writing thing [...] I don't really use it for error correction or anything like that it's just getting them to write because I don't think they ever really write unless you've given them a purpose other than class work and improve your English just kind of communicative function (.) it's a nice way for them to record what they've been doing to go back and see all the different things that they've been doing (.) I like the communicative thing the fact that I can write something or comment on it or they can comment on each other's [...] you can put pictures up so they can do something pictorial and write something about that

(informal interview, November 2007)

According to Carol, she has not created the blog as a forum for the production of 'correct' language; rather, it provides an opportunity for students to write in a communicative and interactive way, as well as a space for recording their work and progress and an environment for posting and commenting on multimodal artefacts such as pictures. Carol adopts the position of the enabler of opportunities to write purposefully in a communicative environment, one free from the pressures of producing accurate language. However, many of her own blog entries display her attention to accuracy in surface form and orthography in blog discourse.

Carol's blog posts

Here, from the first posting of the academic year, students are invited to use the blog posting itself as the basis for an error correction activity.

(1)

Hello everyone and welcome to our class blog. this is a place to practice your writing. we will use this throughout the year.

first, click the comment icon. write the most important thing you learned last week. Say why this is important to you.

second, look at this post. there are some mistakes. what are they?

Carol thus establishes an expectation that the blog is a space where students will practice writing, and that part of that practice will include attention to formal features of writing. That is, contrary to much online writing, but in common with more traditional and academic classroom writing, contributions to this blog are expected to conform to certain conventions, specifically of capitalisation rules.

In subsequent entries, Carol typically concentrates on the textual conventions that are familiar in more traditional written academic discourse. Here she reviews the writing activity the students have carried out on the blog in the lesson.

(2)

I know it is difficult to write on the computer sometimes. Everyone needs to practice making paragraphs and explaining things in writing.

And in this entry Carol is responding to Somia. The classroom focus on accuracy in writing, which has been the content of a face-to-face discussion with Somia, carries over to the blog interaction.

(3)

Your writing is getting much better Somia, we just corrected a few things together. I think it helped you to have 3 different sections to write about. What book will you borrow next?

There is, of course, no reason why the teacher should not attend to accuracy in her lessons, for there is a strong rationale for a focus on accuracy in language pedagogy. This is not least because many of the students in the class aspire to further study beyond ESOL. If they are to progress, they will need to develop surface accuracy in their writing. Yet the teacher instigated the blog, as she says, in an attempt to provide a space for practice and communication free of the traditional pedagogic concerns of a typical classroom. This certainly conforms to the purpose of blogs as they were originally conceived, as participatory arenas for the airing of personal writing. The issue arises here of how non-standard and inaccurate spelling, grammar, punctuation and so on are judged in particular contexts. An appropriate register for one context (formal classroom writing, perhaps) might not be for another (a blog). However, from the outset Carol frames interaction in the class blog in a way that maps closely onto teacher-centred face-to-face classroom interaction. A consequence is the continuity of the traditional teacher/student power relations of classroom interaction in the online space. Moreover, by adopting this particular pedagogic stance – by *recontextualizing* the blog as a pedagogic space – opportunities are closed down for students to claim identity positions that vary, differ or deviate from the traditional ones they adopt in face-to-face classroom discourse, with potential implications for language development. These might include more extensive writing, on a greater range of topics, and ones which have been chosen by the students rather than the teacher.

3.3 Established identity positions: Interview with Shahedah

We turn now to an interview with Shahedah, and subsequently, to an analysis and discussion of her interaction on the blog with her teacher and fellow students. Later we relate Shahedah's interactive and reflexive positioning on the blog to her identity positions as claimed explicitly or implicitly in the course of the interview. How closely aligned is her textual identity with the identity positions claimed in an interview about herself.

Shahedah's education and language background

Shahedah comes from a small town in the state of Gujarat, in western India. Education is of central importance in Shahedah's life story. She grew up in a family environment where education was valued, and one where there was 'an educational atmosphere.' Most members of her family are well-educated and many siblings and close relatives have high status jobs. From an early age she had an interest in education. Her older siblings were her role models, and she positions herself as a good and successful student: 'when I started school at six years old what we're going to learn that year I already learned before I started [...] always I was first and got A grade.' She did her B.Ed. degree at the district college in the regional capital. Returning home, she founded and managed a before- and after-school private 'coaching class' where local children could supplement their schooling: 'I had three staff in the coaching class so before my job, tuition 8 till 10 and then 11 in school 11 to 5 and then from 6 tuition again until 8 o'clock.' Thus Shahedah claims identities as both a good student in an educated family, and as a teacher.

Current learning life

Shahedah enjoys her ESOL classes, and says she finds studying easy. Her current study, like other aspects of her migration history, is strongly inflected by gender. As she says, 'They say when there [in class] our brain works but when you become a housewife its half.' When talking about her current studies she again identifies herself explicitly as a teacher as well as a student. In this respect she notes that she is similar to her own teacher, Carol. 'We are both teacher student we do that and it's good.' Carol is currently working towards an MA, Shahedah is an ESOL student, and both are trained teachers. She has a firm idea of the characteristics of a good teacher: she likes her teachers to be strict, because unless they are, she will not progress.

Current ICT practices

In class, Shahedah uses the class blog when prompted by her teacher. She views the blog in a positive light, as pedagogically useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is public: work can be read by other students and the teacher:

the blog's main thing is that if we have our own comments and work then we are able to publish it for other students to see and the teacher is also able to see our work and what it needs, what we need to do to it

Secondly the teacher and students can comment on her work:

the teacher gives us tips and if she publishes those they come direct to our computer and then we can read them and give an answer and other students can also give us comments

Thirdly it allows her to read her peers' posts to the blog and to use them as a model for her own writing.

other students' work we are also able to see so we are able to see it and from experience we can think other students write like this, and we should write more like this, and think where our mistakes are, because ourselves we don't see our own mistakes too quickly [...] so then from all those comments we definitely learn something

Shahedah does not post to the blog unless prompted, and she regards teacher feedback as important ('the teacher gives us tips').

Imagined future

Six months after she came to the UK she found a job as a coordinator of an after-school club. After a year of this, and with her husband's encouragement, she gave up the job to study English. Her ambition is to move on to a higher level course at university, which she would use as a springboard to a better job: 'I should improve my English first and then if I want I can go for higher study and then I will get a job no problem.' She will buy a new computer soon, with an internet connection. She plans to use video and voice chat when she goes online, and when the internet comes to her home area of India: 'all my family is there and everyone wants to see my son so they also want to see him playing here and growing directly there.'

3.4 Student blog posts

With reference to the questions posed earlier, what can be said of Shahedah's identity as developed dynamically and discursively in her online communication on the 'pedagogies' class blog? To what extent does her online textual identity on the blog accord with the identities claimed during the course of her interview and in other spoken interaction? To address these issues, we examine a selection of Shahedah's blog exchanges with her teacher and other students, together with informal spoken interaction which took place while some of these blog entries were being written.

Compared with other students

Shahedah herself posted 13 entries onto the blog during its lifespan; many displayed both a close concern with accuracy and a tight coherence with the teacher's preceding initiation (I) post. In comparison with the entries of other students, the entries Shahedah posted for homework were notably accurate. Here, for instance, is her response to a homework task, to take a photograph of the workspace at home, and to post it onto the blog with a short description.

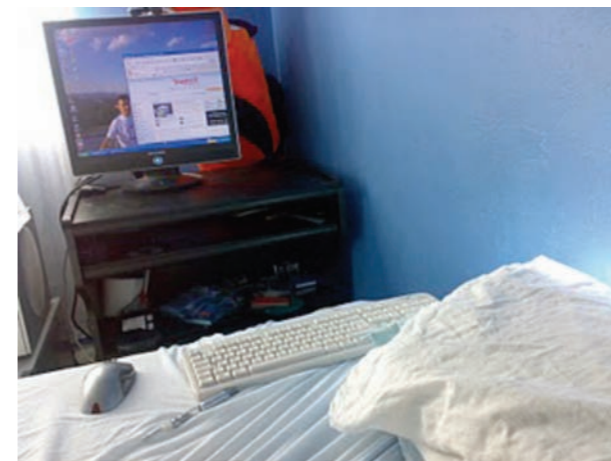
(4)



This is my office. This is where I do work for my college. There is fax, computer and filing cabinet. There are also my important papers. My son sleeps when I do my work in the office. My son always makes a mess of my important work that's why I choose that time.

Rojh, Shahedah's classmate, posted this entry on the same day, and in response to the same task:

(5)



This is my badroom, This is my computer. I like to chat with my freands and typig by English.

This brief comparison shows that that Shahedah's entry has been carefully written and corrected before posting. Rojh's entry is quite typical of his other posts, and of those of many of Shahedah's other classmates. Shahedah's careful writing on the blog stands out, in fact.

A shared concern with spelling

The way Shahedah aligns her responses to the teacher's posts is also notable. In the following examples, this alignment is evident in two ways: at the level of topic and of discourse organisation. The students have been asked to respond to teacher's questions in the following post

(6)

[...] Last week you had only 7 spellings to learn. Do you get everything correct? If not, why not? Did you spend enough time studying? Or is there another reason?

We see here the 'doing' of 'being a good student': all Shahedah's spellings are correct. Moreover, there is a tight correspondence between Carol's questions in her I post and Shahedah's responses in the subsequent R post:

(7)

Yes,my all spellings are correct.No,I don't think so enough time spend in study because I have too much housework and my son keep busy to me.

Shahedah's sentences are each in a direct response to the teacher's questions. She characteristically positions herself as a 'good student' both in the content of her responses (*'my all spelling are correct'*), and in the way they match up in order with the teacher's questions.

Doing being a good student

The final set of extracts explores the relationship between identity alignment, identity continuity and positioning in more detail. They allow an examination of Shahedah's blog posts combined with her oral commentary as she is in the process of composing those posts, during an observation in November 2007. Students are in the ICT suite. The field notes from the visit read:

When they arrive, they log onto their computers – one per student, around the room. Some students go to the library to borrow a book – they will be writing book reviews on the class blog today. [...] Carol tells the students they are going to write a book review based on their recent or current class reader. The task is to write a plan of the review on a blank book review form and then to write it in full on the class blog. [...] During the break Shahbaz and Shahedah both submit their reviews, and Carol replies briefly to them – with questions, inviting further comment. In the second half of the lesson, most students are finishing their own book reviews, while others are responding to others' (which Carol encourages).

(field notes, 19 November 2007)

The review that Shahedah posts to the blog reads (in part):

(8)

A PLACE IN THE SUN

TYPE OF BOOK:Romance

The setting of this book is in England and the Greek Island of Santorini (A Place in the Sun).

This books main plot is How people fall in love,what is they expecting to there partner.Some men play with womens heart,they broken there heart and they can't bother.[Victoria and Ben]

During the break the teacher posts her response to Shahedah's review (extract 9), and Shahedah herself responds to the teacher's post (extract 10).

(9)

Very interesting Shahedah. Remember to put a space after a comma and full stop :)

Also, can you say something about your opinion of this book? Did you like the characters? Did you like the story?

(10)

It's my common mistek, I'm always forgotten.Sorry.

I like this book beacause it's gave me infomation about greek Island, riletionship, differant tipes people.

I like victoria's and Kelly's characters.

Intresting story.

As with extract 7, each of Shahedah's moves is in response to one of Carol's questions or comments. Her overall textual position is one where she is responsive to the demands and questions of her teacher: she is positioning herself as a good and attentive student, with an acute sense of accuracy and of her deficiencies in producing accurate writing. Moreover, through the comments she makes and the questions she asks, Carol positions Shahedah interactively as a student, a positioning which Shahedah ratifies and aligns with reflexively. So position is discernible not only in narrative, and not only in speech, as can be seen in Shahedah's blog interaction with her teacher. By presenting her experience and opinions to her teacher in a particular way on the blog, Shahedah positions herself as a hard worker and a diligent, obedient student (see Ivanič 1998 on the performance in academic writing of a 'student' identity). It is also interesting to note, however, that Shahedah's response in extract 10 contains many errors, particularly in spelling, compared to the review itself. Shahedah's response (extract 10) was posted very soon after Carol's comments (extract 9), suggesting a blog entry composed and posted in the heat of the moment.

These observations are borne out with reference to the text of the informal discussion that took place while Shahedah was writing her book review. While Shahedah was completing the first draft of the review, the observer recorded a conversation with her. Here is an extract:

- 1 O: *can you read what you've written (.) can you read it out*
- 2 S: *ah (.) I'm still change here*
- 3 O: *oh OK yeah*
- 4 S: *I will read it then change it*
- 5 O: *please*
- 6 S: *the setting of this book is in England and the Greek island of Santorini this book's main plot is how people fall in love xxx some people broke another peoples heart xxx the main character is Tony and Victoria*
- 7 O: *yeah*
- 8 S: *I'm sorry (.) change here*
- [...]
- 14 O: *your writing on the screen it looks very good when you write on the computer it looks very good I think*
- 15 S: *I am making mistakes*
- 16 O: *well we all make mistakes I I make mistakes all the time (.) it's good that*
- 17 S: *you make mistake and they learn by mistake*

During that conversation she demonstrates an anxiety that her writing is not correct and a concern with accuracy (turn 15). Not only that, she also displays a 'teacher's and learner's view' of mistakes, as something you can learn from (turn 17).

Shahedah, like most adult language students, possesses a notion of correctness (turns 2, 4 and 8 in the extract above; viz her blog posts); moreover, as with most migrants to English-dominant countries she knows very well that judgements and assumptions are made about her based on the language that she uses. The notion of correctness is deeply ingrained in language and literacy learners and educational systems around the world, including in India, and people's beliefs about the importance of standards are equally internalised (Cameron 1995). The idea is clearly evident in the review she posts on the class blog, where she brings established aspects of her identity into her construction of her textual identity; and is confirmed by her discussion during the production of the blog posts.

3.5 Summary: Recontextualization, contextual alignment and identity continuity

The teacher's recontextualization of the blog as a pedagogic tool enables her to present students with a further forum for practising their written English, gaining useful feedback from their teacher and peers. Students are understandably concerned with conventional linguistic behaviour when writing on the blog, and report that they benefit from interacting in that virtual space. However, the pedagogic focus of the blog is on the surface features of academic literacy (orthography, paragraphing etc). Moreover, these matters do not differ markedly from those that are the focus of everyday classroom content for the students. As well as recontextualizing the blog as a pedagogic tool therefore, the teacher is also recontextualizing classroom practices into the blog environment. Hence the identity positions offered to students in their textual practices on the class blog are somewhat limited.

The teacher control of discourse and topic is as evident in the online space as it is in face-to-face classroom discourse: contexts are aligned. There is a further dimension to this contextual alignment: what happens in class and on the blog – in terms of expectations of linguistic behaviour and of established power relations between students and their teacher – matches well with students' established understanding of teacher/learner relations, as developed in their accumulated socio-historical experience – their *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977) going back to childhood.

In the migration process, contends Block, 'one's identity and sense of self are put on the line, not least because most factors that are familiar to the individual ... have disappeared and been replaced by new ones' (2007:5). For Shahedah, however, there is a continuity between the identity positions she claims in the interview that relate to her earlier life and those she brings in to her current practices. She is still very capable of 'doing being a good student' – in her adult ESOL class and on the class blog as a migrant learner of English just as she was as a child in India, albeit with reduced linguistic resources. There is no reason for her to explore other identity positions, because both the content of interaction and the teacher/student relations on the blog match so closely with those with which she is familiar and comfortable. In a sense this points to a missed opportunity, as exploring other identity positions could well be productive for language development (Menard-Warwick 2008; Richards 2006).

4. Case Study 2: New technology and the National Literacy Test

4.1 Introduction

The class observed for this case study is a Level 1 (i.e. Upper-Intermediate) ESOL class which takes place at a site of a large Further Education college in a city in Leeds. There are 17 students on the register, 13 women and four men. The students are from a wide range of social backgrounds, including a number seeking asylum from persecution in their countries of origin. The teacher, Anna, is an experienced, well-qualified ESOL teacher and manager. The class also has a regular teaching assistant, Chantelle. It meets on Monday, Thursday and Friday mornings for a total of 9 hours per week.

The purpose of this case study is to critically examine the ways in which using online materials to prepare students for the National Literacy Test at Level 1 shapes classroom interaction and aspects of both student and teacher identity construction. It draws mainly on data from Visits 3 and 4 to the class, when the principal pedagogic focus was to prepare students for the upcoming National Test.

Data set

Lessons were observed and audio-recorded monthly in a series of 6 visits between October 2007 and January 2009. The overall data set for this class comprises:

- Audio-recordings of each lesson, some transcribed.
- Field notes taken in each lesson.
- Interviews and informal conversations with the class teacher, including electronic communication.
- Informal chats with students during the classes.
- Copies of the materials used in the lesson, including electronic screen-shots of websites accessed.
- Individual student interviews, recorded and transcribed.

Research Question

How does the use of online resources to prepare students for the National Literacy Test at Level 1 shape the interaction and identity constructions of the students and their teacher?

4.2 Test preparation using ICTs

The National Test

In an e-mail sent prior to the lesson observations, the class teacher, Anna, outlined the rationale behind her choice of material:

since most of them are going to have to try the national test this term or next, that's probably what we'll be working on during this term's computer sessions

Thus, it is immediately clear that preparation for the National Literacy Test is to be the major pedagogical aim informing the selection of the materials and the deployment of ICTs. The National Literacy Test is the principal way in which the reading skills of ESOL students are assessed at Levels 1 and 2 and comprises 40 multiple-choice questions. It can be taken and practiced for online, as in one of the focal lessons in this case study. The validity of the test has been criticised for both its narrow conceptualisation of literacy and its suitability for ESOL students (Cooke and Simpson 2009).

The Online materials

In order to help prepare students for the test, Anna, the class teacher, made use of the Heinemann Sure Skills Literacy website and the online practice tests at the Move-On website (www.move-on.org.uk). These materials are also designed to be accessed independently by students. The Heinemann materials are commercially produced; the Move-On practice tests are the authorised practice tests for the National Literacy Test, and are freely available without cost. The college had recently subscribed to the Heinemann resources as part of a drive to integrate ICTs more effectively into its teaching and learning practices. In the same email quoted above, Anna describes the Heinemann online materials thus:

lots of revision exercises around the national test which seem to be ok if somewhat boring

Here, the teacher is positioning herself in relation to the new materials. Whilst conscious of their ‘somewhat boring’ nature, she nonetheless engages with them as they are fit-for-purpose in terms of her stated aims. It is also the case that there is little choice, when it comes to materials in this area.

The classroom

The class took place in the college’s ICT suite, with a workshop-style configuration where students are seated separately, each with a set of headphones, at a computer terminal. This layout positions the students spatially and – it could be said – discursively as ‘individual’ not ‘group’ learners: the expectation is that they will work independently through the materials at their own pace, drawing upon the teacher and assistant, but not each other, as a resource. This arrangement does not encourage collaborative talk among students: they are individual test-takers.

The Teacher and ICTs: Anna

In her interviews, Anna speaks of the importance of classroom configurations around computers, relating her points explicitly to issues of collaborative learning and group cohesion. She identifies what she sees as a particular attitude that can sometimes develop around computer-use:

on the computers there is a bit more like ‘well I’m sitting in front of this one so you keep off’ kind of thing

She elaborates on her preference for collaborative work around ICTs but pinpoints a tension arising when using ICTs collaboratively, particularly in relation to the types of activities her students will be doing to prepare for the National Test. She says:

it’s quite easy for someone to say ‘you’re going too slow for me I want to do it myself’ and people have got this great urge to kind of finish the task or to get on with it

4.3 Classroom interaction and contested identities: Arshad and Saddique

The analysis now focuses on Arshad and, later, Saddique, both young male Kurdish students. Arshad is working with the Heinemann online materials and Saddique is doing a practice test on the Move-On website.

Arshad and online web-literacy

Arshad is a fluent speaker of English with strong ICT skills who makes extensive use of ICTs outside class. However, he is clearly struggling with the Heinemann online materials, which he describes as ‘difficult.’ When asked why, in the course of an informal chat with the researcher on the third visit to the class, he says:

Arshad: because this is the first time we using this (.) in the class we are using this but not in the computer (.) I think this programme is a new one so I don’t know how (.) but it’s ok

Researcher: do you enjoy it

Arshad: [no reply]

So unfamiliarity with the ICT-interface in this type of activity is a challenge, not the activity itself, with which he is familiar from similar paper-based exercises. The multiple pauses and lack of reply here speaks to the challenges it provides. This raises the issue of access in relation to online materials. Anna, too, speaks of the difficulties the students have accessing the materials, attributing these problems to:

the complexity of the interface (.) the dense mode of text (.) the different layers that they are checking on and the answers you’re given

This suggests that the literacy burden placed upon students like Arshad by a dense, complex multimodal interface is often considerable and manifests itself in a number of ways. There may simply be problems with interface design. Anna says, for example, of the Heinemann materials:

sometimes you were told to read a text and the text wasn’t there and you had to find the text by clicking on a button

Moreover, there is often a lack of clarity in both instructions and explanations, something picked-up in the class teacher’s comments (‘the explanations weren’t always as clear as they could have been’) and the field notes, where the instructions are referred to, at one point, as ‘opaque’ and the question posed, of Arshad: ‘does he know what to do here?’

For a student like Arshad the problems are perhaps particularly acute. Anna observes that he ‘finds classroom study writing literacy extremely difficult,’ identifying the challenges that he faces around reading, writing and formal study skills. These challenges are indicative of the fact that his education was disrupted by the difficulties he experienced in his country of origin.

There is also the difficulty, testified to by Anna’s words above, around the answers provided by the so-called ‘self-study’ materials, which, in her view, do not really encourage students to critically reflect upon the reasons why an answer is right or wrong. Indeed, she says that the online materials militate against such considered reflection because:

the aim is to finish not to reflect on what you’re doing (.) and I think that’s a real danger in these ‘pace yourself’ things (.) to be used effectively (.) I would suggest they demand the student capacity to reflect on their errors to have this self-discipline to analyse to some extent what’s going on

This considered, critical reflection is something that Anna identifies as particularly problematic for Arshad:

what he finds really difficult is that discrimination (.) very difficult to say how I’ve got something wrong (.) and I’m going to think about it not sort of necessarily trusting himself to be able to work it out and rushing rushing he’s a rusher

This inclination to rush is something that Anna observes more generally amongst her students when they are working with online materials. She speaks here about a tendency among students to navigate quickly through the pages, not to read the text on-screen:

one of things is the screen (.) they won’t always read it very carefully (.) so it’s got to be really really basic and clear.

This observation seems to correspond with recent research into concentration and reading online: Nicholas *et al.* (2008) note the difficulty online readers have in engaging with long texts.

In an important moment in one of the observed lessons, Arshad strays ‘off-task’, accessing other material out-of-sequence. Anna is monitoring and the following discussion occurs:

Anna: when you have finished here will you tell me because I need you to go to a different part (.)

Arshad: I finished the first part of one now it’s part two

Anna: Can I just see..oh (.) can I just go back (.) you’re on two (.) where are you so are you doing this one

Arshad: yeah

Anna: you’ve done that one ok (.) So what I want you to do is to go on to using verbs correctly (.)

Arshad: ok

Anna: ok is that alright (.) so let’s go there cos that’s really what we’ve done

Anna wants him to move on in a fixed sequence because the task, and ultimately the assessment, requires it. She steers him back ‘on task’ here, to areas that she knows the class has covered. He is navigating the materials in a less structured way, resisting the demands being placed upon him. It is interesting that Anna too resists the demands of the materials, in that she produces her own teacher-authored computer-based materials for revision and practice while the learners are using online materials in the ICT suite. She does this in order to make the materials which her students use on the college computers more accessible to ESOL students, as the commercially available and government-authorised ones are not designed with such students in mind.

Thus, there is a tension between the ways in which the class teacher and Arshad appropriate the materials. This is a point picked up in the field notes on this session:

The emergent theme seems to be the use and appropriation of ‘off the peg’ CALL materials by ESOL students. There is a three-way tension here: the materials (and the materials designers’ aims); the teacher’s aims for the session; and the students’ appropriation of the materials for their own use.

So, what is it that Arshad is learning from the activities, apart from the business of how to pass a test? He describes what he has learned in the following terms:

about verb and subject and how do you use them and how you make sentence

What is gained is knowledge about language, not the ability to use it in meaningful contexts, a point, of course, that applies to the National Test assessment as well as to the Sure Skills materials which are aimed at preparing students for it. The focus is on accuracy at the surface level, e.g. the correct use of connectives, subject-verb agreement, passive formation etc., and not on the more macro discourse level. The extent to which Arshad has internalised this approach is revealed in the metalanguage he uses: 'verb' and 'subject' etc. Little attention is paid to global meaning in either the test or the materials here. This somewhat narrow focus is pronounced in the practice tests for the National Literacy Test, which the students are also working on, and to which we now turn.

Saddique: practicing online for the National Test

In the fourth visit to the class, the students were working with the practice online National Test papers at the Move-On website. The case study now focuses on Saddique, a young male student from Kurdish Iran. It will do so by considering how he is positioned by the National Test itself, before making some observations about how practicing for the test online shapes interaction and identity construction.

The practice test Saddique is engaged in contains a text about highwaymen, entitled 'Gentlemen robbers.' The first paragraph and the first question on the text read as follows:

Gentlemen robbers

I wonder how many people share my mixed feelings when they hear the word "Highwayman"? Highwaymen were robbers mounted on horseback whose heyday was in the 18th century. They were regularly helped by inn-keepers who would tell them when coaches were expected to arrive and help to sell the stolen property. [...]

According to the document, the writer appears to

A *strongly disapprove of highwaymen*
B *quite like the historical picture of highwaymen*
C *want to see highwaymen return to modern times*
D *approve of violent robbery and theft*

(<http://www.move-on.org.uk/>)

Saddique answers 'C – want to see highwaymen return to modern times.' It is clear from a discussion during the lesson that his understanding of the cultural background behind the question is limited:

Researcher: do you know what highwaymen are?

Saddique: actually no but you don't have to know what the highwaymen (.) only you need to know what that highwayman doing (.) that papers explain for you what's doing and what it is

Saddique maintains that he does not have to possess an understanding of a particular key word to be successful in the test, and that the word is explained in the text. This may well be the case, yet despite this, and even after completing the test reasonably successfully, his understanding of the word highwayman remains limited:

Researcher: what is a highwayman then?

Saddique highwayman I think maybe big woman or famous I don't know maybe highwaymen I don't know all maybe the man go with you and goes everywhere I don't know it's a man yeah?

This has implications for the nature of the feedback offered by the practice test he is completing on the computer, and this will be picked up later in the section. Clearly Saddique would have benefited from a prior knowledge of essential vocabulary for this test item – that is, the word highwayman. It is not enough for him that it is glossed in the text. In fact the reading strategy he seems to have employed does not involve making appeal to the definition in the text at all. Instead, he notices the orthographical form of highwayman is similar to high woman ('maybe big woman or famous').

Although the focus of much current literacy instruction is on the 'bottom-up' decoding of individual words (and Saddique has internalised this focus here) much of the skill in the successful completion of a reading comprehension test rests in the ability to draw on background knowledge of a particular area that is being tested. This background knowledge is known as schematic knowledge, referring to the schema or mental representation of a typical concept or idea.

One way in which literacy for ESOL students differs from literacy for local born expert speakers of English lies in the schematic knowledge people need to invoke to interpret a text, and to make meaning from it. Saddique is 19 years old, and arrived in the UK from Kurdish Iran as an unaccompanied minor aged 15. It is unlikely that students like Saddique would have a typical idea of highwayman as part of their schematic knowledge.

Conversely, it is quite probable that local-born students might know enough about highwaymen to reject 'C' as an answer to this question, even without reading the rest of the text. In this case, all they would need to do is decode the word highwayman, thereby triggering all the associations this brings. But Saddique is approaching the literacy test as a language learner with limited background knowledge; to address the question posed in the first lines of the text, Saddique does not share any feelings when he hears or reads the word 'highwayman', because, for him, this is the first time he has encountered it.

Preparing for the National Literacy Test by using online practice tests shapes interaction. To begin with, it is necessary to recall the way students are positioned spatially in the ICT suite, i.e. sitting individually at computer terminals: one might say that this positions them discursively as individual test takers. Secondly, completing practice tests online can place a greater literacy burden on ESOL students, from the simple skills involved in logging on, to the more complex multimodal skills involved in navigating the online resource using online instructions. As Cooke and Simpson (2008) note, how students read the www is a branch of electronic literacy with implications for ESOL practice. Saddique manages this reasonably well, despite the fact that he had no ICT education, and in fact very little formal education at all, in his country of origin. This is perhaps attributable to the fact that he has had access to some ICT education in the UK and is also a regular user of ICTs.

Turning to the question of online feedback, to what extent can the practice tests be regarded as self-study? The online feedback offered dismisses answer 'C' (the writer *wants to see highwaymen return to modern times*) rather unhelpfully by providing the response: 'There is no mention of this in this text' while justifying the correct answer, 'B' (*the writer quite likes the historical picture of highwaymen*), partly on the grounds that '*The title "Gentlemen Robbers" suggests that the writer approves of highwaymen.*' The concept of a '*gentlemen*' appealed to here is arguably just as dependent upon socio-cultural framing and culturally-bound schemas as the concept of a 'highwayman,' although a word-level strategy that picks up on the positive connotations of *gentle* might conceivably help.

The example above suggests that the practice tests are at the very least problematic for self-study. Online feedback is often premised upon the notion of a shared socio-cultural frame, as of course is the test that stands behind it. Such feedback is unlikely to help a student like Saddique move forward with a full understanding of where he went wrong and it is arguable that a teacher's explanation of some of the socio-cultural dimensions of the test item would be more helpful in a case like this.

4.4 Summary: ESOL policy, testing and positioning

This case study reveals that that the classroom interaction around ICTs is shaped to a considerable extent by the nature of the computer-based materials and the assessment that stands behind them. The range of identity positions that the students can claim here is narrow and they are positioned as test-sitters by the materials: scope for resisting this positioning is likewise limited. Both the students in this case study made extensive use of ICTs outside the classroom, claiming various identity positions as members of online communities, as well as extensively using computers in work, in Arshad's case. Both, too, were motivated by ICTs and to attend classes into which they are integrated in some way.

As the class teacher observes of Arshad, ESOL students are, in effect, 'trapped by policy' and need the National Test qualification as currency in the workplace, even though it positions them peripherally. Many teachers are well-aware of this. Anna describes how her students want to do more practice tests and the tensions this leads to:

we were sort of discussing about practising for exams and some of them were saying ooh can we have more practise tests and I said to them well look you know I give you practise for reading exam so (.) that's one hour gone which I can't talk with you and I can't discuss questions with you and I'd much rather that you went home and did it at home and we spend some time talking about it in the class

The dominant policy hegemonies are reproduced in the ICT classroom and this is even visible, as we have seen, in the metalanguage the students use when describing what they are learning from the activities. They have internalised the policy discourses with regard to literacy and align themselves with the tests to be taken. There is thus a washback effect from policy that influences teachers, students and materials writers.

5. Case study 3: Bringing the outside in with the www

5.1 Introduction

The class observed for this case study is a Level 1 (intermediate) ESOL class which takes place on three afternoons a week (six hours in total) in a local centre of a large FE college in Leeds. There are six regular attendees and a number of students who appear irregularly. The teacher, Martin, has been teaching English for 15 years and ESOL for six.

This case study focuses on the way a web literacy activity in an ESOL lesson can afford the 'bringing of the outside in'. It is an example of the way adult migrant ESOL students are positioned by policy and by their institutions as potential employees, as prospective citizens, and as test-takers. It considers ways in which ESOL teachers might use new technology in a fairly straightforward way to provide conditions for students to negotiate and perhaps resist the identity positions offered to them in policy and institutional discourse.

Data set

Lessons were observed and audio-recorded six times from October 2007 to March 2008. The overall data set for this class comprises:

- Interviews and informal conversations with the teacher (recorded; transcribed)
- A survey of students' out of class ICT practices
- Interviews with students
 - Informal chats during lesson observations
 - Group interviews with students using visual prompts
 - Individual interview with 6 students

This case study looks at the topic of folk tales, which spans a series of lessons (some of which were observed). It examines in detail one lesson, including interaction between the teacher, one student and the observer, as well as web pages.

Research question

How does the integration of a web-based reading activity with a series of speaking and writing activities afford opportunities for students to 'bring the outside in'?

5.2 Resisting deficit positioning of ESOL

Adult migrants to English-dominant countries want and need to learn English for all sorts of reasons: at the forefront may well be concerns about employment, housing, their children's education, and simply getting by in a new country. Teachers of ESOL address these broad concerns in class in a range of ways: some focus on the immediate problems that students bring into class, while others prefer to avoid incorporating into lessons the challenges which migrants face in their everyday lives. Whatever their chosen approach, ESOL teachers are working in contexts in which the policy and institutional understandings of ESOL are increasingly narrow. ESOL is largely viewed by policy-makers worldwide as being in service to the economy or as the provider of a means for students to fulfil a citizenship or naturalisation requirement. In contemporary ESOL in England over the past decade or so, students have also become subject to excesses of the bureaucratisation of practice, in particular to a rigid qualifications framework. In combination, ESOL students are positioned in policy and institutional discourse, if not by teachers and students themselves, in a limited, deficit way as potential employees, citizenship applicants and test-takers. How might they negotiate and perhaps resist the identity positions offered to them by policy and by their institutions? One way is for students to be encouraged or facilitated to 'bring the outside in'. This case study describes two perspectives on how the outside is 'brought in' to one lesson. Firstly, the teacher, Martin, introduces content from students' lives into the lesson, and secondly a student, Luisa, claims agency in classroom discourse to develop an autobiographical narrative, to 'speak from within'.

In a three year study of teaching and learning in 40 adult ESOL classrooms, Baynham and colleagues (2007) found that when students are encouraged to claim control of classroom discourse and 'speak from within', they produce longer utterances and express more complex ideas than in the types of classrooms which rely mainly on invented dialogues or teacher prescribed topics. This finding is reinforced in other related work in adult ESOL: Baynham (2006) and Roberts and Cooke (2009) have demonstrated that encouraging students to claim control of classroom discourse gives them an opportunity to generate language themselves and produce more fluent and extended turns in talk. In the example below, the turns that emerge take the form of an autobiographical migration narrative, one of dislocation and relocation (Baynham and De Fina 2005): it is a telling of a life history, in the distant and more recent past, of migration and its current and future implications; and as such it entails the work of identity construction.

5.3 'Bringing the outside in' using the www in ESOL classrooms

There is a tradition of research in language and migration contexts which examines the benefits or otherwise of relating classroom content to students' lives outside class. For Condelli *et al* (2003), investigating adult ESL pedagogy in the US, teaching strategies which in some way connected classrooms with students' outside lives had a statistically significant positive correlation with students' progress. As it concerns ESOL classes in the UK, the notion of bringing the outside in was first illustrated in a study by Cooke and Wallace, who note that students who bring the outside in 'draw on the linguistic, cultural and intellectual resources they bring both from their immediate context in urban Britain and their worlds as immigrants to Britain' (2004: 94). Baynham *et al* (2007) found that ESOL teachers vary widely in the extent to which they allow or enable the 'outside to be brought in' in their lessons. For example, while one teacher may utilise students' outside experiences as a major classroom resource, others insist that, given the difficulties experienced by many ESOL students in their lives, the classroom should be a safe haven, a space insulated from the outside other than at a superficial level (see also Hodge 2004). Baynham (2006), however, argues for the incorporation of outside world concerns in classroom interaction. In situations where discursive space is claimed by students, agency and contingency are:

realized both in the ways that students make their place and take their place in the classroom and the ways that teachers are challenged contingently and responsively to open up spaces where this becomes possible, responding interactively to demands for space. Momentarily the students are engaged in finding solutions to a real problem, not a manufactured hypothetical example: the outside has been brought in.

(Baynham 2006: 31)

Baynham concludes that the 'apprenticeship in "speaking out" ' which is enabled when students develop strategies for claiming space in ongoing talk 'may prove of use in other contexts as well as for bringing into classroom discussion ... precisely those challenging encounters which have the potential to block their life chances' (2006: 38). By claiming discursive space, ESOL students afford the incorporation of narrative talk about their current and earlier lives, as well as urgent ongoing concerns, into unfolding classroom discourse. In the details of narrative talk, identities can be 'inflected, reworked, and more or less variably and subtly invoked' (Georgakopoulou 2006: 125). This affords the negotiation of students' identities that would remain under-constructed if the classroom talk were restricted to the instrumental demands of the syllabus and the requirements of examinations.

Bringing the outside in I: Using the internet to tell folk tales

In the focal lesson in this case study, which takes place in the centre's computer suite, Martin has devised an activity that engages the interest of students, by making the pedagogic focus folk tales from their own countries. One set of aims for the lesson relates to an everyday conception of computer literacy: Martin wants to provide students with opportunities to practice logging on to the college's computers, to gain access to the internet, to use the search engine Google. A further aim is to provide practice for the forthcoming speaking and listening exam.

He describes in an informal interview before the lesson that he will be asking students to locate, using Google, folk stories from their country of origin. They will read and re-tell these stories to other students, focusing on narrative sequencing: 'looking at beginnings, middles and ends.' In a later lesson they will re-write their folk stories which they find, but the speaking and listening exam is prominent in the rationale: eventually students will have to tell a story ('a past tense narrative') about themselves:

they have to describe a process that involves sequencing you know using the sequencing words so actually it's quite a big skill really the idea of an order or something and using language to put something in order to sequence it it's quite a big part of two out of the three speaking tasks at level 1

Two months previously the students had been introduced to the idea of folk tales and legends, and to reading and re-telling these, and also to finding them using Google. In earlier lessons students have found, read and analysed the sequence of some of Aesop's fables (*The Hare and the Tortoise*, etc). So the procedure is now quite established: students are used to finding a short tale on the internet, reading and telling it together, and then re-telling it to a larger group. Later, after the episode described below, they are required to re-tell their story in a whole-class plenary session (thus providing practice in the exact exam task). In the subsequent lesson students re-write the story.

This episode takes place towards the beginning of the lesson. To quote from the worksheet they have been given, students are asked to ‘Use the internet to look for a folk tale from your country of origin’ and then to ‘Tell the story to another person.’ In this respect, the teacher is already ‘bringing the outside in’: that is, students are requested to ‘bring in’ content originating in their homelands, using the internet as a resource. Moreover, they are given the opportunity to work collaboratively with each other and in relation to the computers: discussing and reading in the light of their own cultural experiences.

Martin and Luisa are talking together about the story she has found by doing a key word search on the internet, a story from Brazil. They are sitting at her computer and looking at the screen, which shows the story. The text on the screen reads as follows:

Kuat

Kuat is the sun god for the Mamaiurans, an Amazon Indian tribe that lives in Brazil. According to legend, at the beginning of time there were so many birds in the sky that their wings prevented daylight from being seen. It was always night and people were forced to live in fear of attack from wild animals.

Tired of the darkness, two Mamaiuran heroes, Iae and his brother Kuat decided to force the king of the birds, Urubutsin, to give back some of the daylight. The two brothers hid themselves inside a dead animal and waited until the birds approached. As soon as Urubutsin landed, Kuat grabbed Urubutsin’s leg.

Unable to get away, Urubutsin was forced to make an agreement with the two brothers. The birds would share daylight with the Mamaiurans, and one day would alternate with night. Kuat represented the Sun and Iae represented the Moon.

(<http://www.windows.ucar.edu/tour/link=/mythology/kuat.html>)

The observer sits down with Martin and Luisa, and enters the conversation. His opening comment (highlighted below) explicitly invites Luisa to tell the story she has found. She may also be responding to the teacher’s instruction to ‘tell the story to another person.’ In any case, and as Martin himself moves on to talk to another student, she positions the observer interactively (Davies and Harré 1990) in a teacher-like role, or as she might another student, or indeed as a participant observer, as she re-tells the story on the webpage without further prompting:

J: yeah + so what are you doing what are you doing what have you found what’s the what’s what’s the story

L: I’ve found I’ve found xxx (.) erm of the sun (.) from from Brazil Amazon the big forest yeh so these are tribe of Indian is an Indian tribe yeh and they have um got a lot of birds in the sky so the birds don’t um (.) they were so much that they couldn’t see the light of the day (.) so daylight in they were afraid of the animals that they could come from the forest so um a hero from from them amamaowi [approx pronunciation] Mamaiuran heroes

To invoke the notion of interactive frame and footing: ‘interactive frame’ (Tannen and Wallat 1993) is the participants’ sense of what is going on at the moment. It is closely related to Goffman’s ‘footing’, those ‘changes in alignment we take up to ourselves and others.’ (1981: 128). Here, the interaction is firmly in a frame of authorised classroom talk, where Luisa is retelling the story to another person, as per the written instructions. She goes on to tell the rest of the story, sometimes paraphrasing using her own words, and sometimes reading a little text from the screen. The observer then shifts footing, signalling a move away from the story’s telling (now tell me ...), which opens up a discussion of other folk tales and traditional legends of tribes in Brazil.

J: now tell me what you know about this (.) do you know this story

L: no this is this is the first time that I see this story

J: do you know about the a the tribe Mamaiuran

L: no I don’t know about tribes I know about the tribes in the Amazon they you they still have a about nineteen million million tribes or no + nineteen million people people’s tribes

At this point, however, the interaction is still broadly within the frame of engaging in authorised classroom discussion: Luisa has told the observer her story and now they are talking about the topic.

Bringing the outside in II: Luisa’s narrative talk

Turning to the second way that the outside is brought in, this is the point where we see the student claiming agency in an interactive space that emerges. The key part of the interaction comes a little later, as the observer asks Luisa who told her stories when she was a child.

J: did you hear lots of stories when you were young

L: yes

J: who told you stories

L: yeah my mum (.) [voice pitch falls and voice becomes quieter] you know I’ve got a sort of kind of family erm my father is from Angola my Mum is from Brazil

J: that’s right

L: and after that actually my father and my mother they split up quickly and I had to stay you know all the time travelling

J: so did you travel between Angola and Brazil when you were younger as a child

L: as a child because I became you know I remember that when I was xxx they xxx together you know I think because of the the cultural culture cultural things you know I think is different to the culture from Angola and Brazil they are totally different

J: so where did they meet your parents

L: yeh they meet in Brazil yes my father went there and they had a relationship and my mother went to Angola to see if she could settle down there but she couldn’t anyway because a lot of you know um cultural things is very difficult to live you know and actually my Mum decided to to leave yeah and when she had me she left again you know because she already my my father was with her the husband of my Mum

Luisa’s narrative talk begins with the observer’s prompts in his first two turns in the extract above, and in particular when he asks Luisa who told her the stories. Her response *yeah my mum* is followed by a pause, and in the rest of the turn her voice quality changes noticeably (the pitch falls; she becomes quieter). This moment, the pause followed by the change in voice quality, and possibly the hedge *you know I’ve got a sort of kind of family erm* constitutes a change of footing for Luisa, a move to a closer alignment towards the observer, as if she is taking him into her confidence. And the frame shifts: it is no longer carrying out the authorised classroom activity of re-telling the folk tales; Luisa now begins, with a certain amount of self-disclosure, some of the tales of her life history. She has negotiated in interaction the space to do this: she claims the space to present an un-reflected upon and un-rehearsed self. She is a little hesitant to begin with: there is the hedge in this turn (*a sort of kind of family*), as if she is reluctant to embark on the telling of what turns out to be a complicated story. But quite soon key themes that are later fleshed out in her narrative talk begin to emerge: the complexities of family life with parents from different continents (her mother is from Brazil and her father from Angola); the cultural differences between the two countries where she grew up; her parents marriage split and its possible reasons, the fact of having to travel back and forth between Brazil and Angola as a child, and hints at more of an affinity with Brazil than with Angola, echoed in her choice of a folk tale from one place rather than another.

So what of the talk that ensues at the point where the interactive space opens up, and where Luisa claims agency? Luisa’s talk both before and after the shift of frames described above is fluent; when the outside comes in, it comes in the form of a life history and migration story, and also one of family difficulties, cultural difference, and gender issues. In summary she describes how she frequently travelled between Brazil to Angola as a child, and has siblings in Angola. Her attitude towards Angola is complex, and she refers repeatedly to cultural difficulties in Angola: these include matters associated with gender, in particular the lack of freedom for women, as well as a recognition of the difficulty of the political situation. At quite a young age she decided she would not live in Angola. This contrasts with the affinity she shows towards Brazil, which she compares favourably with Angola, especially in terms of women’s rights and freedom of speech. It also emerges that her husband is Angolan: she met him on an aeroplane when she was 18. He moved to the UK from Brazil to study, and Luisa joined him there soon after. He claimed asylum in the UK, as he and his relatives were involved in opposition politics. He is now studying for a masters degree in international relations, and wants to return to Angola. She, however, does not want to go, and is resistant. She is currently in the process of applying for British citizenship; she has three children, aged eight months, three years and ten years, the oldest of whom is settled in primary school. Eventually however she plans to return to Brazil.

5.4 Narrative and language development

This case study has described two ways in which the outside comes in. Through the use of new technology the classroom activity explicitly indexes students' earlier life experiences (... *look for a folk tale from your country of origin*). And Luisa herself brings the outside in, in the narrative event. She uses the emergent discursive space to present and identify herself as an individual with agency and as someone who is resistant to the dominant ideology of male hegemony in one of her countries of origin. So the analysis of the narrative adds to our understanding of how opening up the interactional space allows one student to construct and present a range of identity positions.

There are clear benefits for language pedagogy of allowing and enabling the type of interaction we see in Luisa's narrative event. We know from classroom-based research into second language acquisition that referential questions elicit more complex responses from learners than display questions (Long and Sato 1983); and that open questions elicit longer responses than closed questions (Tsui 1995). It is not enough to provide input for language learning to take place; producing language output is also essential (Swain 1995, 2005). The issue of beneficial student talk is similarly addressed, though with an explicit focus on identity, by Richards (2006). Arguably, says Richards, 'the defining characteristic of the classroom is an asymmetry of knowledge, at least in so far as it is the foundation of its most basic relationship, that between teacher and learner.' At points, however, this asymmetry can reverse. This is the case with Luisa: she is the knower of the story, not the observer. In such instances, if the student is allowed to take control of the discourse (rather than having the opportunity closed down) there is potential for language development.

It is striking that the narratives that are required and expected in the speaking and listening exam that these students are to undergo are very different from the real-world narratives like Luisa's. In the L1 Speaking and Listening exam the emphasis is on relating a sequence of past tense events. Narratives like Naira's show that those that emerge more naturally, even when told by 'Level 1' students, are far more complex in terms of their structure and the language forms employed.

5.5 Summary: Web literacy and 'bringing the outside in'

This case study has demonstrated that in his pedagogic use of electronic literacy an ESOL teacher has provided conditions for classroom talk about content that is likely to engage students and hence set up the type of social organisation that warrants the emergence of narratives in interaction. In the case of the focal student in this case study, Luisa is afforded the opportunity to claim agency in a discursive space in classroom interaction, and to 'speak from within'. It would seem that the identity options which are presented to students in the course of the narrative interaction are somewhat more extensive than those offered by adult migrant English language educational policy and by examinations- and funding-led institutional practice.

Narrative talk arises in interaction between ESOL students and their teachers, often on the periphery of lessons, at topic boundaries, in the break and after class. This raises questions about how such talk can become more central in classroom discourse. Student stories and experiences are often very much part of ESOL pedagogy and lesson planning, but frequently 'don't work'. Thus for teachers, allowing interactional spaces to open up, rather than incorporating them a priori into planning, is difficult. It requires intervention at the level of approach, possibly by orienting towards a pedagogy which builds in these possibilities without forcing them. An example of such a pedagogy might be found in Action Aid's Reflect for ESOL project (Moon and Sunderland 2008), run on Freirean principles, which involves teachers working together with students on strategies to counter the excesses of inequality that they meet daily. Cooke and Roberts (2007) illustrate and exemplify an approach to ESOL pedagogy developed by teachers researching their own classrooms, which aims to provide conditions whereby students can 'speak from within'.

6 Summary and conclusion

The electronic literacy practices of multilingual adult migrants

ICT use and electronic communication suffuse the daily practice of the adult migrants on the project, as is common in contemporary life generally. Their electronic literacy practices outside the classroom are chiefly interpersonal ones: ICTs are used to maintain relationships with friends and family, especially across long distances, a task for which the tools employed (email, text and voice chat, social networking sites and media) are eminently suited. A section of the participants use the tools of computer-mediated communication to make new friends. Web sites are widely read to keep in touch with news from countries of origin, and to keep up with developments in UK immigration policy.

The spaces where people use ICTs and electronic communication outside their places of learning are predominantly: the home, the classroom, the library, and the internet café. Particular practices are more associated with some places than with others: for example, people are more likely to be in touch with family 'back home' when they are in their own homes, and will use other spaces for less personal practices, for instance, reading the web. Questions of access also emerge: the economic position of many on the project preclude the purchase of expensive computer equipment, and they are obliged to use the library or their college's computers for web access, for instance.

In terms of languages used in online written communication, language alternation is prevalent, as well as emergent hybrid varieties and vernacular transliterations (e.g. 'Urdu in English'). This is particularly the case when people are communicating with others from their own countries of origin but who themselves are migrants (i.e. communication in diasporas).

Inside the classroom, the uses of ICTs are quite distinct from those out of class. Pedagogical framing is understandably prominent, restricting the range of identity positions which students can claim. For example, the role of assessment dominates, which can manifest itself with an overriding concern with accuracy and error correction.

Learner identity in classes: Summary of case studies

The three case studies of classroom practice allowed in-depth study of three aspects of textual identity in ESOL settings: 1) the extent to which an online space can become 'pedagogised', and the implications of this for ESOL students' identity construction; 2) how policy-driven testing regimes come to dominate ESOL practice, and how this affects the positioning of ESOL students; and 3) the way in which the www can be used as an enabler of opportunities for students to 'bring in' identity positions that go beyond those offered them by policy and institutional discourse.

Case study 1 examined the pedagogic use of a 'class blog' with a group of lower-intermediate ESOL students. The teacher's recontextualization of the blog as a pedagogic tool enabled her to present students with an interactive forum for practicing their written English. Students reported that they benefitted from interaction in that virtual space. However, the pedagogic focus of the blog – as with face to face classroom interaction – was overwhelmingly on the surface features of academic literacy (orthography, paragraphing etc). Hence students' opportunities for exploring and taking up alternative identity positions in their textual practices on the class blog were limited. Moreover, the expectations of linguistic behaviour and of established power relations between students and their teacher aligned with students' established understanding of teacher/learner relations, as developed in earlier stages of their socio-history. In interaction on the blog there was no reason for them to explore other identity positions, because both the topics of discussion and the teacher/student relations on the blog matched so closely with those with which they were familiar. This points to a missed opportunity for language development, which can be enabled by exploring other identity positions beyond 'the good student' and 'the provider of the accurate response.'

Case study 2 looked at the use of online practice test material with a group of intermediate students. ESOL students coming to the end of their courses are obliged – because of policy-driven funding regimes and other institutional pressures – to undergo a series of national tests. At Level 1 on the National Qualifications Framework the reading test used is the National Literacy Test, rather than a test specifically designed for multilingual learners of English. The ICT sessions in this class were given over to helping students prepare for this test. The study investigated how the online materials provided by policy and available via the institution serve to position the students as 'takers of the National Test.' It considered the narrowness of scope of the test (and associated practice materials). It also dwelt on the inappropriacy of the test for multilingual learners of English. These factors combined to present an identity position for students in this class that was at odds with more fruitful ones that the teacher wished to promote. The case study examined how the students are not only positioned in a certain way by policy and institutionally (as 'literacy test taker'), but position themselves reflexively in a similar way, subject as they are to the hegemony of policy and the testing regime.

Case study 3 investigated the use of online resources as a stimulus for spoken interaction, also in the context of a series of exam preparation activities. In his pedagogic use of the internet, the teacher provided conditions for classroom talk about content that is likely to engage students: talk which related to earlier periods in their lives, specifically in the form of folk tales. In this sense he enabled the 'outside' to be 'brought in' to the ESOL classroom. It was notable that the teacher was skilled at allowing the outside to be brought in, even in a situation where there was institutional pressure to focus on exam preparation. A second type of 'bringing the outside in' was evident in this class. The activities set up by the teacher through his use of web resources were found to warrant the emergence of narratives in interaction. For the focal student in this case study, the opportunity was afforded to claim agency in a discursive space in classroom interaction, and to 'speak from within'. The case study concluded that the identity options available to students in the course of narrative-in-interaction are more extensive than those offered by adult migrant English language educational policy and by examinations- and funding-led institutional practice.

Generally, the case studies suggest that classroom issues tend to reproduce themselves in the ICT environment, as we saw with a teacher's focus on form in writing, with the washback effect of a literacy test, and with the effect of 'bringing the outside in'. At times the ICT environment seems somewhat colonized by the pedagogical traits of the classroom, which can be very resilient. The recontextualization of new media can happen, therefore, in ways that can be reductive. The challenge for teachers, we suggest, is to resist the temptation to pedagogize it. A direction for further research is to investigate ways in which students can appropriate the tools and spaces of new technology in ways which benefit their learning and which afford them a full range of identity positions.

Conclusion

The project has pushed the boundaries of our understanding of identity in relation to adult migrants' electronic literacy practices. We have taken a broadly constructivist approach to the study of identity, according with an understanding of identity as an interactional accomplishment (and one which incorporates a concern with power relations). The project has extended knowledge about the range, scope and nature of multilingual migrants' online literacy practices in out-of-class ('daily life') settings, and about learner identity and new technology in English language learning contexts.

In classroom settings, students bring in identity positions both to the interactional spaces of their online communication, and in spoken interaction around their online practices, with two broad consequences. Where students' established identity positions align closely with those offered to them in their online interaction and their talk 'around' new technology, and where these result in a pedagogizing of the web space, there can be limited opportunities for language and identity development. Conversely, where students are afforded the opportunity to bring in identity positions that differ from the dominant discourses of policy and institutions, conditions can be created whereby students can 'speak from within', generating long turns of meaningful talk, with attendant benefits for language development.

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Appendix 1: Dissemination activities

Written outputs

Cooke, M. and J. Simpson. 2008. *ESOL: A critical guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (Handbooks for Language Teachers series). (Ch 7 contains data and discussion from this project).

Cooke, M. and J. Simpson. 2009. 'Challenging agendas in ESOL: Skills, employability and social cohesion.' *Language Issues* 20/1, 19-30.

Simpson, J. 2009. 'Language appropriation and online textual identity.' In M. Edwards (ed) *Proceedings of the BAAL Annual Conference 2008*. London: Scitsiugnil Press (DVD). (p. 109-110)

Simpson, J. Forthcoming, 2010. Telling Tales: Discursive space and narratives in ESOL classrooms *Linguistics and Education*.

Simpson, J. In preparation. 'Learner identity on an ESOL class blog.' To be submitted to *Applied Linguistics*.

Simpson, J. and M. Hepworth. In preparation. 'Contested identities: Policy discourse, ESOL students and the national literacy test' (working title)

Website: http://www.personal.leeds.ac.uk/~edujsi/research_projects.htm

Talks, presentations, lectures

'Identities Online.' Seminar presentation at ESOL Research Seminar, University of Leeds. February 2008.

'Online textual identities and language learning: The case of an adult ESOL class blog.' Presentation at TESOL Forum, University of Leeds. April 2008.

'Identity online: Adult ESOL language learner identity and electronic communication.' Presentation delivered as guest speaker at the Department of Educational Studies Lecture Series, University of York. June 2008.

'Identities online: Adult ESOL language learner identity and electronic communication.' Workshop at NATECLA national conference, University of Warwick. July 2008.

'Challenging agendas: Skills, employability, community cohesion and ESOL.' Workshop at NATECLA national conference, University of Warwick, 12 July 2008. (With Melanie Cooke.) July 2008.

'Identities Online' Paper presented at the 41st Annual Meeting of the British Association for Applied Linguistics, Swansea University. September 2008.

'Promises and challenges for ELT in the new communicative world.' Plenary presentation at the 4th Annual International Conference of TEFL, Tonghua, China (section of presentation drew on project data). November 2008.

'Power and identity online: Adult migrant language learner interaction on a class blog.' AILA Language and Migration Research Network, 3rd international seminar on language and migration, Barcelona. February 2009.

'Telling tales: Life history and electronic communication in an ESOL classroom.' International Symposium on Bilingualism 7, Utrecht. July 2009.

'ELT and the English language in the new communicative age.' Plenary presentation at International conference on interactive media in pedagogy, HM Patel Institute of English training and research, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat, India (section of presentation drew on project data). January 2010.

'Policy discourse and identity negotiation online: ESOL students and the national literacy test' (working title) AILA conference, Beijing. August 2011.

Appendix 2: Transcription conventions

(.)	short pause
[...]	omitted text
xxx	untranscribable speech
[commentary]	commentary and explanatory text in square brackets



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