



TELLING TALES: DISCURSIVE NARRATIVES OF ESOL MIGRANT IDENTITIES

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Abstract: This paper concerns migrant identity construction in an ESOL course. Taking a poststructuralist perspective, identity is viewed a fluid process of ongoing struggle between different subject positions that individuals take in a variety of social sites. In this study, five migrant ESOL learners were interviewed to talk about the concept of self to investigate the process of identity construction. The purpose of this study was also to identify the role of learning English for migrant workers in relation to imagined community and self. The study showed how these migrant ESOL learners conceptualize self in relation to two aspects: learning English and investment, gaining social and cultural capitals and access to imagine community, and being transmigrants. This paper highlights the implications in language education.

Keywords: ESOL learners; identity; language learning; migrants; transmigrants

Özet: Bu makale bir ikinci dil olarak İngilizce dersindeki göçmen kimliği oluşturma ile ilgilidir. Post-yapısalcılık açısından ele alındığında, kimlik bireylerin çeşitli sosyal mevkilerde takındıkları farklı özne pozisyonları arasında süregelen çatışmanın canlı bir süreci olarak görülmektedir. Bu çalışmada, kimlik oluşturma sürecini incelemek için beş göçmen diğer dil konuşanları için İngilizce öğrencisi ile benlik kavramı hakkında röportaj yapılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, aynı zamanda, göçmen işçiler için İngilizce öğrenmenin rolünü muhayyel topluluk ve benlik ile bağlantılı olarak tespit etmektir. Bu çalışma bu göçmen diğer dil konuşanları için İngilizce öğrencilerinin benliği iki açıdan nasıl kavramsallaştırdıklarını göstermektedir: İngilizce öğrenme ve yatırım, sosyal ve kültürel sermaye kazanma, hayal edilen camiaya erişim, ve ülkeler arası göçmen olmak. Bu çalışma dil eğitimindeki önerileri vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: İkinci dil olarak İngilizce öğrencileri; kimlik; dil öğrenimi; göçmenler; ülkelerarası göçmenler

Introduction

Identities are who and what we are. From a poststructuralist perspective, it is a fluid process of ongoing struggle between different subject positions the person takes in a variety of social sites, which are structured by rules, values and power (Norton, 1995; 2000). The ongoing struggle in producing subjectivity in various social sites highlights the profound influence of the other (and contexts) on self representations and the nature of identity as diverse, contradictory, dynamic and multiple. Identities are also seen as changeable over time and space in this sense: characteristics such as values and priorities, responsibilities and investment are strongly associated with the context and situations the person is in. In this research, we take this theoretical perspective of identity to understand how immigrant second language learners construct their identities in UK institutions.

The motivation behind this research is closely reflected to labour movement in the EU. In particular, with the accession of Poland, Slovakia and other European countries to the EU in 2004 and thereafter, many EU workers attempted to emigrate to the UK as there was the possibility of fulltime employment. Workers from the accession countries have to register in the UK. In total, there have been 703,620 applications accepted since 2006 (Guardian, April

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2010). Only a very small percentage of this large number of immigrants was able to use English for communication when they came to the country. Therefore, ESOL (English to speakers of other languages) provision has become an important area in education. In Northern Ireland, Belfast has been an attractive location for migration from other European countries since the peace process took root. ESOL provision grew rapidly at Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC), originally Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education. The ESOL courses offered are both part-time and intensive at all levels, and in 2007 and 2008 the college had well over 1,000 such learners enrolled. Many learners take language courses to help them with their working life and with adjustment to a new social environment, some focus on the classes as an opportunity to learn English quickly before returning home to look for employment there, whilst a smaller number of learners study on intensive courses for visa purposes and are generally focused on entering higher education locally or in England. The migration has provoked massive debate at both the social and political level and it has become a relevant research topic for applied linguistics given its intersection with language learning and identity development. However, very little empirical research has been done so far concerning migrant identity construction while the migrant explores opportunities through learning English. Situated in this background, this research aims to explore the identity of ESOL learners.

Theoretical framework

Concept of identity

Identity issues concern self and others (Jenkins, 2008; Burke and Stets, 2009; Citrin and Sears, 2009) and are relational (Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston & McDermott, 2009). Therefore, identities can be researched from different theoretical perspectives. In viewing identity as an interactional and dynamic outcome of a variety of discourses, Planas and Civil (2010) take a socio-political approach to language identity, which is defined and shaped not just by speakers individually and collectively, but also by institutions. For language learners, the choice of language use establishes the shared ground to include or exclude members of other languages. Although it is an important lens to adopt, particularly regarding language learner identity, it is not our intention in this article to explore the construct through a socio-political approach because we are not concerned with the political role of the language. However, we do agree that identity is fluid and dynamic and we view it through post-structural theories. Studies in this tradition emphasize that learners' subjectivities are evidenced in learners' struggle of self in a variety of sites (e.g. Duff, 2002; McKay & Wong, 1996; Miller, 2003; Norton, 1995, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Pavlenko, 2001). In the current study, post-structuralism helps us to understand how ESOL learners understand their self representations and subjectivities in different contexts such as that of a mum, a learner, a worker and so on.

Language learning and identity

In order to understand one's identity, investment must be recognised. Norton (1995, 2000) rejects the idea that a person can be motivated or unmotivated, or can be placed within a category such as an introverted or extroverted learner, and thus draws attention away from the psycholinguistic to the sociological. Drawing on a theoretical concept by Bourdieu (1977), Norton (1995, 2000) proposed the notion of 'investment' in place of that of motivation to encompass the sense of ongoing negotiation between the language learner and the social world. The notion of 'investment' shows how people can invest in the target language or not, in order to acquire a greater range of material and symbolic resources, which may enhance one's 'cultural capital', and as a result one's actual identity. For Norton and researchers in this tradition, identity is how a person understands his/her relationship to the world, how that

identity is constructed across time and space, and how the individual understands possibilities for the future. In the language learning context, a language learner's identity is multiple (rather than unitary), is a site of struggle and can change. Those who are valued in one site may be marginalised in another and it is argued that each time a person interacts in the target language they are engaged in identity construction and negotiation over that identity. We therefore enter the realm of diverse contexts (social, cultural and historical) in which language learning takes place. Learners will negotiate and even resist the positions that these contexts assign them. The concept of investment in the target language in order to accrue cultural and symbolic capital is an enticing one. Drawing on Bourdieu, de Mejia (2002) explains,

Language may be seen as a symbolic resource which can receive different values depending on the market. The possession of symbolic resources, such as certain highly valued type of linguistic skills, cultural knowledge and specialized skills, help to gain access to valuable social, educational and material resources. These resources, which constitute symbolic capital, in turn acquire a value of their own and become sources of power and prestige in their own right (p.36).

Dornyei (2009) argues that the world 'traversed by the L2 learner' has changed remarkably and is now characterised by linguistic and sociocultural diversity. Language use, ethnicity and identity have become 'complex topical issues' (p.1). Raising the question of how applied linguists might theorise the motivation to learn 'global English' for people aspiring to acquire global identity, he discusses a study by Yashima (2009). She extends the notion of integrative motivation by arguing that her Japanese learners had a generalised international outlook which extended their immediate reference group from one based in a geographic and ethnolinguistic community to a non-specific global community of English language users. Motivation for learning English was, for these learners, to belong to such a group or community. In second language learning research, issues surrounding learner identities have been discussed and researched. Much attention has been placed on what identity is and how it relates to the language learning process and motivation, and this research has predominantly taken place in the contexts where language learners have strong motivation to progress to further study by learning English (e.g. Gao & Xu, 2011). However, language is more viewed as a form of self representation which is deeply connected to one's identity (Miller, 2003). For ESOL learners, investment and motivation is part of their self construction and negotiation played out because they are living in a new unfamiliar society in different aspects. In particular, as Block (2007) points out:

It is in this context, more than other contexts, that one's identity and sense of self are put on the line, not least because most factors that are familiar to the individual – sociohistorically, socioculturally, sociolinguistically and linguistically – have disappeared and been replaced by new ones. In this situation individuals must reconstruct and redefine themselves if they are to adapt to their new circumstances (p.5).

ESOL Migrant and identity

Block (2007) in his discussion of migrant identity claims that paralleling other areas of enquiry in social science, migration theorists have moved from static, essentialist models to more dynamic ones. The two competing models of migration for quite some time were the voluntarist push-pull model and the structuralist centre-periphery model. These models, respectively, view the phenomenon as a result of individual agency, whereby people change their country in order to 'improve their lot' (2007, p.32) or as the result of world capitalism's demands, serving the function of providing labour to the developed economies of the world. Faist (2000) and Castles and Miller (2009), draw attention to the multi-level migration systems

theory. Migration through this model can be viewed as a series of overlapping and intersecting systems at three levels – macro, micro and meso. At the macro level, we can examine the global forces such as global politics, markets, ideologies and media discussed by earlier theorists. At the micro level, we can examine individual values and expectations, such as the desire to improve on standards of living or achieve political autonomy. The meso level refers to the networks that ‘intercede’ between both levels, including social ties (family, occupation), symbolic ties (belonging to groups) and transactional ties (reciprocity, solidarity and access to resources). In this research, we are more interested in micro and meso levels.

There are more and more communities that can transcend nation-state boundaries and individuals may feel more connection to these than to the nation states from which they have come. Once migrants have settled in a new country they are forming part of what can be termed ‘transnational social spaces’, in contrast to classical immigrant subject positions. The latter are deemed to be those individuals who have moved to a new country with little or no expectation of returning to their country of origin. Jordan and Duvell (2003) describe transnational spaces in contrast as sites where groups, defined by ethnicity, religion, nationality or geography have settled in new nation states but retained cultural and economic links with their homeland, including in some cases political loyalties. They claim that ‘dual or multiple forms of nationality and citizenship might better reflect the realities of these socio-economic systems’. Block (2007) argues that today migrants can live ‘straddling geographical, social and psychological borders (p.33).

Related to this idea of a non-specific global community is the theoretical concept of imagined communities, drawn on by Wenger (1998), and Kanno and Norton (2003). These refer to groups of people not immediately tangible and accessible with whom we connect through the power of the imagination. In contrast other communities can be felt concretely and directly, such as neighbourhood, work and educational institutions. Wenger (1998) has argued that imagination – a process of expanding ourselves by transcending time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves – is another source of community. Kanno and Norton (2003) examine this process in more detail hoping to show how learners’ affiliation with imagined communities might affect learning trajectories. These communities, in their words,

include future relationships that exist only in the learner’s imagination as well as affiliations – such as nationhood or transnational communities – that extend beyond local sets of relationships. We suggest that these communities are no less real than the ones in which learners have daily engagement and might even have a stronger impact on their current actions and investment (p.242).

Norton (2000) illustrates the case of Katarina, one of the participants in her study of migrant women, identity and investment in English. Katarina left her English course after her teacher discouraged her from attending a computer course, advising that it would be too difficult. Katarina, according to Norton, felt she had been positioned as a ‘mere immigrant’ and that she had been denied the opportunity to gain greater access to her imagined community of professionals; for she had been a school teacher in her native country and so felt she had legitimate claim to professional status, *en par* with her English teacher. Being denied in this way was a humbling experience and her withdrawal signalled ‘a disjuncture’ between her imagined community of professionals and the teacher’s perspective. Kanno and Norton (2003) further argue that these communities have requirements for participation, specifying what we may need to accomplish to gain access. For instance, Katarina’s desire to take a computer course was linked to her goal to gain access to her imagined community of professionals – ‘it

is precisely because of the rule-based nature of imagined communities that they have a powerful impact on learners' educational goals' (p.244).

Empirically, research on migrant identity has developed by investigating linguistic experiences (Norton, 2000; Barker & Galasinski, 2001; Baynham & de Fina, 2005), although in policy and practice the diverse backgrounds of migrant learners of English are not well appreciated or understood (Cooke & Simpson, 2008), let alone the nature of their emergent linguistic, social, cultural, national and language learning identities. In this context, learners' socialization, and how it relates to the society they are in is an interesting aspect to contribute to the dynamic of their identity.

The study

Adopting a case study approach (Casanave, 2010), this study focuses on identity construction through narrations of adult ESOL learners in Belfast. They are Olivia and Anna from Poland, Carlo from Italy, Lucia from Spain and Martina from Slovakia, studying on an ESOL Skills for Life Level 1 course and also on a CAE (Cambridge Advanced Certificate) preparation course. They were all between 22 and 32 years old and pseudonyms were assigned to protect their privacy. The case approach provides not only insights into the contexts these learners were in but also facilitates the understanding of the co-construction of meaning and representation between researchers and participants. At the beginning of the project, we invited all ESOL students to participate in the study and these five students volunteered themselves to be in the study. They were interviewed by one of the researchers, who was also their ESOL tutor. He had the advantage of familiarity with the research site and was able to put the participants at ease and create a rapport with the participants. A suitable place and time was agreed for semi-structured interviews whilst the research questions were piloted at the University of Essex. The essential criteria were that participants consented to recorded interviews and that these would be conducted in English. Although an interview guideline was designed and applied, the interview was conducted in a conversational manner. The participants were not encouraged to talk about anything they did not wish to. Interviews were fully transcribed for analysis.

These adults came to Belfast for various reasons (see Appendix 1). For Olivia, she had finished high school a year before. She had a contact, another Polish migrant, in the Republic of Ireland who had offered her the chance to work as a kitchen porter. However, after a couple of months she came north to Belfast after another contact found a job for her working in the dining hall of a school. In her recollections there was the sense of adventure, and the chance to make money, as in Poland she had been unemployed. Anna claimed she had been a student before she came but also had had a company, employing a few additional employees, selling business materials. Due to her parents' financial problems, she stopped her studies and came to Belfast in order to make money and send a portion home. Martina was twenty-one when she came; she had applied for university but not been accepted for her particular course so she decided to move to the UK or Ireland where she could learn English – this was the most important thing for her. Carlo and Lucia had both arrived in Belfast in the summer of 2010 and so had spent almost a year in the city; both had come to work as volunteers in an organisation providing for the homeless with dependency issues. Lucia had been working in this field in Spain whilst Carlo had not, but wished to possibly move into this area of work. He also claimed that an important reason was to live abroad in an English-speaking country for a period of time and he had chosen Northern Ireland for historical reasons as he was interested in the local history.

The starting point of the analysis is a belief that each individual has his/her own way of constructing meanings and presenting themselves in relation to the world and this is also visible in speech and stories of the past, present and future. The data was first analysed individually for each participant as an independent case study. The main themes and ideas were developed through analyses. The next stage was to scrutinize the data across participants, looking for commonalities among the themes that had already been developed. In this procedure, both researchers did data analysis separately and compared. Caution was given to the data that might reflect personalities rather than findings. Findings largely fall within the theoretical framework in the areas of investment, access to cultural and social capitals and imagined community, and transmigrant identity.

Investment, access to cultural and social capitals, and imagined communities

The learners' paths to an ESOL class were different. Olivia and Anna were both doing their first ESOL course and had 'learned' English in the community and workplace in naturalistic contexts. Martina had spent nine months in Belfast and had been working before she enrolled on an elementary ESOL course; this, she felt, had really helped and given her more self-confidence at work. For Carlo and Lucia, an English language course seemed to be a major part of the whole experience of volunteering. Despite coming from different directions, so to speak, it is possible to discern from the interview data how their investment in ESOL class had a link to achieving symbolic capital (education, friendships and contacts, and certificates), to future imaginings and belonging to an imagined community.

All the five participants in this study demonstrated strong sense of investment in language learning and self, which is closely tied to the envisioned future and their roles in it. It is important for all of them to learn English because they view it a way to gain social and cultural capitals, a way to interact with and participate in the community they hope to belong to.

The biggest motivation for Olivia to join the course was to gain a certificate that would lead to a better job and pay. In Olivia's view, a better job and pay is the reward of her investment in learning English.

The reason I came to BMC was to improve and if I can get a certificate I can get a better job and better pay so this was the reason...it (English) is connected to my future. I will go back to college for another course and then maybe another course; this can get me better job, maybe I can buy a house, and can provide for my baby. (Olivia)

This may seem a straightforward motivation but if we view it as part of Olivia's imagined community of the future it takes on new significance. Gaining a certificate from Cambridge (ESOL Skills for Life in Speaking and Listening, Reading and Writing) and learning new skills – academic skills – as she put it, could position her in a new subject position, one not as a novice in a low-skilled job but as somebody with new-found skills in a more prestigious occupation. This was also related to her desire to gain a British passport. Olivia's imagined community of the future was thus conceived, it could be argued, as a mother (she had a two-year-old child) with a strong command of two languages which she could use with her daughter, as a working professional, and possibly as a British citizen.

It is obvious that there is a strong link between English and work. Anna's reason for joining the class was to gain a certificate and 'more academic skills, like grammar and proper writing' to enhance her opportunities for a different kind of career path either in Belfast or in Poland. Nevertheless, she was aware that she needed to study until advanced level and then she could

consider 'working more as a professional'. For example, Anna self evaluated her English is not advanced yet simply because 'I am unable to find work in an office. When I am working in an office I will be advanced'. She further clarifies that 'I want certificate. In June for level 1 exam and then I'll go to level 2'. So is Lucia, who claims her level is not good enough to work yet, despite the fact she works for charity. From their recollections, it seems that these adults had progressed so far in a particular kind of work environment and learned to a degree the communicative competence to function in such work places. There is also evidence that these ESOL learners have clearly established a link between English and professional success and their future self. In Martina's words,

There is of course a relationship between English and professional success. If I get more I could do CELTA and be a teacher...I will learn more and then maybe interpreter or teacher, we'll see. (Martina)

The investment in English studies, and the chance of a certificate, are linked to gaining a certain kind of capital which would allow the learners to join a more prestigious community of practice, and also to belong, as Yashima (2009) has shown, to an international community of fluent English language users, a community imbued with cultural capital.

However, because learners view English a way to socialize in the context, apart from gaining social and cultural capital, there is another kind of investment. In Martina's case, joining a class after nine months was related to her anxiety and frustration at not being able to communicate; going to class was thus empowering for her.

The first thing was that I was kind of pushed to learn so I was working in like between native speakers, a local environment, so I had no chance to speak another language and then I was living with a landlord who was from here so I had to speak in English again and when I was speaking with my colleagues at lunchtime I couldn't understand what they were talking about and it was really annoying. I could feel, you could feel if they were talking about you, gossiping about you. So I wanted to know, and sometimes they complained or accused me from something I haven't done and it was not my fault but I couldn't explain that it wasn't my fault – I felt it was unfair but I thought, you know, one day I will show you when I can speak English and prove myself innocent. (Martina)

After 3 months of living here I could begin to make out what people were saying and to speak more. (Martina)

We can see how the initial ESOL class, and the subsequent classes afterwards as she progressed through levels, provided access to the symbolic capital she required. This capital was connected to an imagined future career and community, and also wielded as a tool of empowerment. Through further courses and finally attending the CAE preparation class, a high level qualification, Martina was working towards a future self and able to imagine belonging to a community of teachers and linguists. During the interview, she claimed she wished to go further to study for the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English, and finally take the CELTA course to return home to be an English teacher. Being a student in a CAE class could, it is argued, provide this learner with the prestige and the associated capital to imagine belonging to a different community, distinct from the environment and community of practice where she currently worked, a cafe. Martina claimed she had always had the goal of learning English when she arrived at the forefront of her mind. It could be argued that by gaining symbolic capital through achievement in college, she was able to overturn her previous self image as somebody 'not good at languages' and as somebody quite marginalised, as she was in her secondary school English class. In addition, needing to understand her colleagues and

being able to confront them when she was accused of not doing things that had not been her fault, pushed her to study; Martina's case illustrates something akin to Norton's description of Eva becoming a multi-cultural citizen. Norton (1995) shows how Eva's sense of 'who she was' changed, and she then began to challenge her subject position as an illegitimate speaker of English. She developed an 'awareness of the right to speak' in her workplace. Her communicative competence developed to 'include an awareness of how to challenge and transform practice of marginalisation' (p.25). Martina took on a subject position mediated by English, contrasting herself sharply with other Slovaks whom she derided for not being able to speak in English at all despite having lived in Belfast for a number of years. This was appalling for her.

In their learning experience, all the learners identified almost the same important strategies they employed to improve their English. Listening to others attentively is a shared strategy for these learners. In Olivia's opinion, if you are a good listener, you would learn:

just talking with people and learning new words and making sentences. When you are a good listener yes. For example when I was ordering food, talking over the phone, if I wanted to order something I had to make it clear what I wanted. If I didn't know what to say I asked my boss and then listened to her, how she said it on the phone – once or twice – and then I knew what I had to say. (Olivia)

Or in Anna's words, 'I just catch words from air'. However, grasping opportunities to talk is also an identified strategy. Anna suggests,

You must find opportunity. I look for moments in work to speak and when I have time I go to my neighbour and we speak each other. I have a great opportunity to learn Belfast English. (Anna)

Similarly, watching movies and using dictionaries are also the shared strategies to improve their English. However, attending English course is considered 'probably the best' way to learn English. This is echoed by everyone's reflection. In the second language learning research, it is a widely shared assumption that the natural environment is the best place to learn English. If one is immersed in the environment, they will 'pick up' the language naturally. However, it does not seem the case for these learners, although they did feel the push from the environment made them speak the language and opportunities to talk to the natives help them. Collectively, they think taking English course probably is the best way to improve English, partially because they can also gain certificate and test their proficiency level, partially because it is easier to access than finding opportunities to engage in talk at work or socially. So although they live in a natural environment for language learning, because they do not have access to natural language resources, they are restricted in improving English. The course, for most of them then seems to be the best way to learn because they feel they are the same, not disadvantaged and sharing similar motivation. However, for Carlo, the course maybe is helping him achieving investment and future self, but not for everyday life.

The course, CAE, is not exactly everyday language and it is also a standard English which not everybody uses especially in this country; for example I have a flatmate and she is speaking a lot of time with Northern Irish people and I think she is more able than me to deal with local people; so maybe the best school is spending time with them and learning what they say. (Carlo)

Carlo had positive experiences which strengthened his investment. He had positive experiences learning languages and had a very good command of the language when he arrived in Belfast,

having already gained the Cambridge First Certificate. It is quite difficult to discern Carlo's imagined community, for he positioned himself outside the work community, but he seemed to view himself as belonging to an international community of multi-language users and his investment in a CAE class was the result of wishing to position himself as a fluent English language user able to enter the intellectual discourse of history and politics, culture and highbrow subject matter. He enjoyed the CAE class for this reason, claiming that he could learn academically and with intellectually challenging classroom materials. He made the point though that this kind of English did not necessarily help him in his work environment as neither his colleagues nor the vulnerable adults he was supporting would use such language. He thus saw himself learning two varieties of English, the more street vernacular necessary for progressing in his work community of practice and the academically challenging Cambridge English course requiring a high degree of lexical, grammatical and pragmatic competence.

Of course, the role of environment does have its place in helping these learners achieve their educational goals. For example, all of them felt they were pushed to learn and the context boosted opportunities to gain social and cultural capitals.

I had no choice when I came here and just had to speak. A few years ago I was dating with a Latvian and we had to communicate in English and it broke my barrier completely. At work all day I had to speak in English and then at home too. (Olivia)

I was kind of pushed to learn so I was working in a like between native speakers, a local environment, so I had no chance to speak another language and then I was living with a landlord who was from here so I had to speak in English again. (Martina)

And apart from Lucia, everyone else commented positively on the opportunities they gained in learning English socially and at work. In particular, Olivia holds a very positive attitude towards people's reaction to her accent. In her words,

They ask where you come from. I say Poland and they ask why I am here. They can hear the accent and if I am honest that bothers me. But I don't care. I speak just the way I speak. If I make mistakes in the past tense or something I won't care. If they ask you questions well I guess they are probably just curious. (Olivia)

She also highlights the fact that her positive attitudes are result of support from local people.

They were understanding – if I made mistakes they still knew what I wanted to say so they corrected me – ‘we don't say this but we say that, and in this way’. People were nice here and much nicer than Poland. (Olivia)

Because of the positive experience and attitude towards the culture, Olivia would like to see herself as a member of the community by gaining a British citizenship. The positive feeling is also shared by Martina and Carlo in their experience.

Because as they were bored with their life they had something new to talk about so they were quite happy to explain. I asked for example ‘where is the library’ and they said ‘Oh I will show you’ and all this, and they were very keen. (Martina)

When I talked to someone everybody was eager to spend a few minutes and talk and some people even correct me if I don't speak properly. (Carlo)

But for Lucia, it is a negative experience, which demonstrates the other side of investment and imagined communities. Lucia perceived herself as ‘lazy’ in terms of learning English and also intimated she was not good at languages. Nevertheless, there is a slight conundrum here as she had previously said she had enjoyed studying the language for a year in Spain and there was no hint she had been lazy then. Here we attempt to demonstrate that in fact categorizing someone like Lucia as motivated/ unmotivated, or lazy or committed, for instance, is over simplistic. Instead, we reveal how this learner perceived her relationships to other people in the new discourse of practice in which she found herself and how the experience impacted negatively on her self-identity as a language learner. Lucia stated the following in relation to the languages she spoke in Belfast and her network of friends.

I think the language is a barrier – for me it’s not easy to make friends, it’s easier to make friends with those in my English class – they are in the same situation. With locals no, my level doesn’t permit me to talk fluently and people haven’t interest to talk to you. I am too basic and the people here have to force to talk to me. (Lucia)

Lucia further explained the potential factors contributing to her ‘scare’ and ‘laziness’ and potentially negative feelings that ‘Belfast is not a good place to learn English’.

Maybe at the beginning it was a new experience and I closed my mind... I had a scare at the beginning. I didn’t want to go out. I was scared because I couldn’t speak. It’s very strange because in my country I was very extrovert person. I never could imagine that it would be so difficult. (Lucia)

Imagined difficulties and not being supported by the community (of the locals) made Lucia frustrated about learning English. Lucia’s experience suggests that naturalistic second language learning environment does not necessarily provide learners with more opportunities to be exposed to target language input than other contexts.

I don’t think I could learn English at work because no one talked to me. It’s true nobody helped me. They haven’t any interest if you learn or not; And so well I felt stupid all the time because I felt ignored and then disappointed; you are really sad because the point to come here is for a job and learn English but then you know you don’t have anything. (Lucia)

We argue that due to Lucia’s experiences at work and in her new community the conditions that could provide opportunities for investment were lacking, she felt marginalised from her imaginary community of social work professionals. This again, further challenges the current thinking learning a language through negotiation to achieve mutual understanding. In Lucia’s case, learning English is a sole activity and she has all the responsibilities which make her attitudes and strategies extremely important.

I watch films, and in my job I ask people and look for words in the dictionary. Sometimes I can learn from context and sometimes the words are similar to Spanish words. I don’t think I am good at learning languages. After ten months here I am not fluent, I don’t have grammar. My level now is of course better but not enough to work. Because my work is in Falls Road and the accent is impossible. I can’t understand in my job and they have strong accent... Learning depends on your experiences (Lucia).

Of course in my class it’s easier. I feel comfortable with this level and when I leave and go out it’s not bad but sometimes I know I can’t understand anything in the world outside. (Lucia)

It is argued here that Lucia was not able to visualise a future ideal self as a competent second language user, nor was she accepted by her imaginary community of fellow professionals. She did not draw on the hopes and fantasies that other adults in our study seem to have done. She felt thwarted in her attempts to learn and progress, largely through her work experience in which she felt alienated. Both the strong accent of The Falls Road where she was working and her colleagues' apparent disregard left her unable to contribute in this discourse community. Lucia, even though taking an ESOL course and attending regularly, did not feel sufficiently motivated to invest in the target language. She felt 'stupid' and scared both in her dealings with colleagues and even in the outside world when she had to do things like go shopping. Tellingly, she claimed 'learning all depends on our experiences' and also that she had gone from being an extrovert to its opposite during her stay in Northern Ireland. She intended to leave before the end of the course and therefore not take the Skills for Life exams, something very important, for example, for Olivia.

Transmigrants

Although they all had slightly different reasons for coming to Belfast and joining ESOL course, we can tentatively suggest from the data that they share more characteristics with that of the transmigrant, rather than that of the 'uprooted' migrant. Their daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relation-ship to more than one nation-state (Glick Schiller, et al., 1992a; Basch et al., 1994). They have become incorporated in the economy and political institutions, localities, and patterns of daily life of the country in which they reside. However, at the very same time, they are engaged elsewhere in the sense that they maintain connections, build institutions, conduct transactions, and influence local and national events in the countries from which they emigrated (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc, 1995, p.48). None of the participants felt they had lost their national or ethnic identity and 'taken on' a British or Irish identity. Martina had been in Belfast for six years and claimed she still felt Slovak even if local people had befriended her or accepted her in work.

I don't think they (locals) consider me one of them. I think they still see me as foreigner- in the coffee shop where I work, I guess I am one of them but still a bit different. But I wouldn't change that because it's the way we are brought up- I think I am Slovakian but not rejected from this environment. (Martina)

Carlo had a strong sense and deep understanding of being Italian, which he observed through comparisons and his own experience. In Carlo's words, '*something these people (locals) have and I don't have and I can see in myself some particularities, which people say belong to Italians*'. We can see here that identity is relational where Carlo relates how other people see him to his understanding of the self. Particularly, he acknowledges that '*it (Italy) is a big country and has different faces so sometimes 'being Italian' doesn't really mean anything. Italians think different from each other but I would say (myself) Italian*'. Different from Anna's feeling of being excluded and not always welcome, Carlo recognized the differences but also being included or accepted. He particularly emphasized,

I think that if I was here a long time they could consider me one of them. The feeling I have is related to my colleagues. They wouldn't make you feel any difference, or make you feel like a burden on your shoulder just because I am foreign. (Carlo)

Anna felt a Polish identity, helped as a volunteer in the Polish Association, and wished to go home to do a master's degree. She had been in Belfast over four years. For the meantime, working and saving was important for her but she did not see acculturation as a real possibility.

She claimed that as she was Polish she was not welcome, and strongly felt locals believed Poles to be a community apart and a threat to their jobs. This exclusive feeling was shared, in her view, among most of her Polish friends and in the Polish community. Lucia, who felt alienated in her workplace, felt quite strongly Spanish. Even Olivia, who hoped not to return to Poland, and to gain British citizenship, in a discussion of her current cultural identity and if she felt Irish or British, said:

I think I am (British). I just don't think I will even go back to Poland because it's so much better here. About 'one of them', I would say no; even if they say they like you and going out is good fun, I am not so sure if everyone would consider me local. (Anna)

The feeling of being recognized by people around us can be a strong indicator of who we see ourselves. For Olivia, even if she felt British and would be, she did not think she was completely accepted by locals and considered a member of the community. From her data we could argue that the perception of her identity had undergone some change; elsewhere she referred to feeling happier and more at ease in Belfast than at home in Poland, and how local people had to some degree accepted her. However, there is still ambivalence about full acceptance into the community as we can see from her comments above. It was also clear that these adults had not firmly committed to staying in Belfast, Ireland or the UK. There remained a link to their home nations and, except Olivia, the intention to return.

Discussion

The participants were engaged in a complex process of identity construction that was highly interactive with the environment in which they worked, socialized and studied. In reality, people usually possess a range of diverse identities that they switch on and off in different contexts but in this study, these ESOL learners seemed to strongly bear transmigrant identities and everything else (or other identities) evolved around this. For example, as ESOL learners, they possess a second language learner and linguistic identity, which is constituted by the fact that they are migrant workers who live in an English-speaking country. Related to this, is their investment and expected rewards, and an imagined community, which are all closely related to being transmigrants. This reflects what Glick, Schiller et al. (1995) have suggested, that one of the potent forces that lead immigrants to settle in countries that are centres of global capitalism and live transnational lives is a global restructuring of capital based on changing forms of capital accumulation. These migrants viewed coming to work in the UK as a way of securing 'terrain of settlement' (both in terms of career and life). However, they also point out that the potential racism in Europe contributes to the economic and political insecurity of the newcomers. This study might not show evidence of racism, but in the case of several participants there was the feeling of being unwelcome, contributing to their self construction as someone who is not valued.

The findings of this study help to shed light on the concept of investment and contributes to an extension of the concept of investment in a target language from ESOL migrant workers' perspectives. Norton (1997) used investment to 'signal the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it' (p.411). In this study, the learners demonstrated a complex history and multiple desires to learn English in college, the workplace and in social space. This is categorized as learners' investment to construct and display their social identities across time and space. The display and orientation of self in the journey of learning English in different spaces further highlights the expectations that these learners have in relation to gaining symbolic resources, which in turn 'increases the value of their cultural capital' (Norton Peirce, 1995, p.17).

Given that very real social practices exist in the world outside the classroom, student investment in practices within the four walls of the classroom are inextricably linked, as Norton has suggested. Lucia and Martina both perceived and experienced the situation where they felt marginalised at work, though Martina overcame this feeling and position by engagement and gaining cultural capital both through perseverance in the community of practice but also through classroom language learning. Carlo's ESOL experience further strengthened his cultural capital and prestige and connection to his imagined international community of proficient foreign language users. For Olivia, it provided the institutionalised and embodied forms of capital necessary to become a citizen, and for Anna it provided the more focused aspect of grammar, skills and means of achieving a higher status in the labour market.

In this study, what becomes tricky and frustrating for ESOL migrants in the investment of learning English is they are constrained by the social spaces they engage in. Investment, as they expect, should gain rewards for them, but in reality, this also leads to marginalization, frustration and confidence deconstruction.

These migrants project a sophisticated understanding of the local and international relationships between language, power, self, economy and society. They imagine that achieving proficiency in English will provide access to work and friendships locally. Imagination also figures in their hopes that English will give them power to establish a better career and economy in the future. In this research, imagination takes several forms, and as Wenger (1998) suggests, imagination involves some degree of fantasy, idealization, stereotyping and reification. It seems that the idea of being able to progress to further study, have a better job and earn more money is associated with the idealized view of this society. However, knowledge of English rarely improves labour market outcomes in the UK for those of other language origins. The idealized view of language as social and economic capital is prospective and hopeful. By linking past and current experiences, these migrants take us to their future and the possibilities they could (or not) have as 'rewards' they hope to gain from the investment.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the role of capitals, and students as transmigrants with ongoing identity work in a new environment. ESOL learning is inextricably linked to these social phenomena and as teachers we should consider these factors when conducting needs analyses, programmes of studies and in our interactions with one another in class. Different from regular language learners or students who come to this country for education and view English learning as an integral part of an educational ladder, ESOL migrant learners might find it difficult to see the immediate rewards from their investment and in such a case, this might create negative feelings and emotions towards their linguistic identity, as being able to speak English does not necessarily improve their financial situation. Of course, because these ESOL migrant learners have a different agenda in emigrating to another country, their English learning should be treated differently. Rather than purely focusing on improving their English skills, ESOL courses should be able to help these learners integrate into the society in a better way. In this sense, this study echoes what Norton Peirce (1995) and McKay and Wong (1996) suggest, that teaching and learning English is far more complicated than mere questions of using effective techniques and instruction. For ESOL learners, perhaps the focus should be placed on the fact that they are complex social beings and learning English should form a part of the activities that they engage in within society.

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Appendix 1

Participants' information

Participants	Country	Education	Reason to come to the UK
<i>Olivia</i>	Poland	High school	Financial benefits – unemployed in Poland
<i>Anna</i>	Poland	BA in Economics	Financial benefits – to help with her parents
<i>Martina</i>	Slovakia	Grammar school	Learning English –for further education
<i>Lucia</i>	Spain	High school	Charity job – to extend job experience and learn English
<i>Carlo</i>	Italy	Masters degree	Charity job – to move to this field and learning history of an English-speaking country