

Book Review

Kanno, Y. (2003) *Negotiating Bilingual and Bicultural Identities: Japanese returnees betwixt two worlds*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum. ISBN 0-8058-4154

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In today's global world, it is no longer uncommon for people to live in several different countries or socio-economically and culturally different communities, or move between two countries frequently during their lifetime. *Negotiating Bilingual and Bicultural Identities* provides a unique opportunity to examine the development of bilingual and bicultural identities of students who spend their adolescent years in a host country and then return to their home country.

The book presents findings from a longitudinal study of four teenage Japanese students who spent several years in North America and then returned to Japan to attend university. Using narrative inquiry and communities of practice as a theoretical framework, the author, Yasuko Kanno explores the intimate link between language, experience, identity and culture by analyzing the narratives of the Japanese students who are the sons and daughters of Japanese businessmen. The focus of this longitudinal study is mainly on how identities of young bilingual "returnees" (called kikokushijo) and their relationship to their two languages and two cultures change as they move from adolescence to young adulthood. According to Kanno, the study is significant and unique in that three characteristics of it differentiate it from other studies on bilingual and bicultural identities. First of all, this is a longitudinal study in which Kanno had followed the same bilingual students over a long period of time. And as oppose to the other studies, Kanno mainly focus not only on how learners grown-up as bilingual and bicultural individuals, but also on where they decide to place themselves between two languages and cultures. Second, this study documents student voice, which is lack in bilingual research in general. Third, although studies on bilingual and bicultural identities focus mainly on immigrants who move to a new country and stay there, this study focuses on the bilingual students who go back to their home country. It is also striking that the book is written in a language accessible to a wide readership.

The book is organized in eight chapters. A very brief introduction, in which Kanno provides an overview of the book, is followed by a presentation of a short background of her own story of learning English and her own personal motivation for this study. Then the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study are introduced in Chapter 1.

Chapter one provides the framework for this study in which Kanno reviews recent studies on bilingual and bicultural identities in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and bilingualism. Then, Kanno describes the narrative-inquiry and communities-of-practice perspectives in order to conceptualize how students' identity development show a gradual shift from a rigid simplistic approach to bilingualism and multiculturalism to a more sophisticated skill at negotiating their multiple identities in a unified self. The rest of the chapter, Kanno describes the process of this inquiry: how she met the participants and worked with them, and the procedure she undertook to reconstruct and analyze their narratives.

In the next four chapters, Kanno presents the four students' stories. In these chapters, Kanno explores these students' family backgrounds, academic performances, personality characteristics, feelings regarding living abroad and their home country, and their attitudes towards languages and cultures. By presenting the students' stories, Kanno aims to describe the process of the students' efforts in developing an identity to become a member of their communities.

Chapter six, 'The Development of Bilingual and Bicultural Identities,' is an analysis of the students' stories to find out common themes about the students' cross-cultural experiences. Kanno conceptualizes these themes in relation to the three phases in the students' journeys: sojourn to North America, return to Japan, and later reconciliation. It is interesting to see how the students' social environments have impacted on their identities in each phase. As teenagers in North America, these

students had taken ESL courses in their school. And these courses had created a physical and psychological distance between these Japanese students and native-speaking students. Thus, the school had constructed a social environment in which the Japanese students lose their interaction with native students. Furthermore, the Japanese students also had enrolled in 'hoshuko', Japanese supplementary school, where they strengthened their Japanese identity. Their families also had created a social environment at home where Japanese traditions were valued. It appears that two different types of social environments, one is their public school which reinforced their minority status, and the other is 'hoshuko' and their homes which strengthened their Japanese identity, have constructed different types of identity formations for the students. And, it is striking to see how these students negotiated these multiple identities in these different social environments. With their return to Japan, the students readjusted their strategies to deal with the daily life problems. Despite their engagements in Japanese language and culture while abroad, upon return to Japan they had felt as strangers in their home society. While all the Japanese students had difficulty in adjusting their life in Japan after their return from the North America, Kanno argues that "Once they moved from the pressure to assimilate, they had the freedom to fit into their narrative those aspects of their identities (such as their individualistic streak) that were not compatible with the past story line" (p. 121). According to Kanno, the students felt more comfortable with their own past experience and more accepting of their own bilingual / bicultural identities.

In chapter 7, Kanno examines the theoretical implications of the study. Kanno concludes that "locating multiple identities that a learner may possess in different settings is only one half of the necessary investigation into the relationship between identity and language learning. The other half is to explore how the learner makes implicit and explicit connections among these identities and integrates them into his or her story of language learning...It is in the narrative weaving where lies the key to understanding the relationship between identity and language learning" (p. 133).

In the final chapter, Kanno gives a number of educational suggestions from the findings of her study. For Kanno, it is necessary for educators to show respect to their students' strengths and capacities, and to listen to their stories to understand who they are and what they want to become as social agents.

Consequently, *Negotiating Bilingual and Bicultural Identities* is a clearly written and well organized research study. Kanno's skillful use of the techniques of narrative inquiry and communities of practice is quite impressive. There are two issues though I found problematic.

First, my difficulty in relying only on the concept of narrative inquiry as a framework for exploring the processes of identity construction is that it considers only the students' "told stories" to describe and theorize the complexities of identity formation. Although this is a longitudinal study, the author rarely uses alternative (third person) voices to interpret and describe the students "lived experiences." At the end of the book, the readers is left with a curiosity of what other people such as the students' teachers, classmates, native students in public school in Canada might have thought about these four students' interactions and negotiations with their social environments. Thus, the author fails to portray multiple points of views in the study.

Second, the book would have been more inclusive if Kanno would have touched upon the analysis of power and identity construction in the study. The lack of analysis of power and identity relations in the book limits the understanding of how institutional discourse impacted on the students' reflexive individual construction of social realities in their social interactions at micro and macro level.

Taken as a whole, the book provides a valuable approach towards analysis of the relationships between language, experience, identity and culture. The book deserves to be regarded as a good source for those concerned about and willing to rethink the fundamental assumptions of second language acquisition and education, and bilingual identity construction.