

**BONNY NORTON. *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters. (2013). 216 pp. \$24.95 (paperback). (ISBN 978-1-78309-054-9)**

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## BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

BONNY NORTON. *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters. (2013). 216 pp. \$24.95 (paperback). (ISBN 978-1-78309-054-9).

This second edition of Bonny Norton's (2000) now classic book offers a comprehensive perspective on identity and language learning scholarship over the past decade. *Extending the Conversation* has an Introduction and seven chapters, as well as an Afterword written by esteemed applied linguist, Claire Kramsch. Norton makes it clear in the Introduction that her aim in the second edition is not to re-write the book, as "it has its own logic and coherence" (p. 1). The bulk of the book, therefore, is the same as the first edition, which details the qualitative study Norton conducted in the 1990s with five immigrant women in Canada who were learning English as a second language. The study explores the women's exposure to and uses of English outside of the language classroom. Norton found that the women were negotiating a contradictory position of needing access to English-speaking social networks in order to improve their English, yet entry into those networks was limited until they learned English. Drawing on her data and on the work of theorists Pierre Bourdieu, Chris Weedon, and Benedict Anderson, Norton articulated what have become highly influential and interconnected constructs in the fields of language education and applied linguistics: investment, identity as multiple and as a site of struggle, and imagined communities. Investment explains why language learners who are highly motivated may not necessarily be good language learners in a given social context. For instance, the women in Norton's study were highly motivated to learn English, but were not always invested in participating in the language practices of their classroom or community, especially if they felt marginalized by target language speakers. Investment is founded on a conception of identity as discursively constructed, multiple, and social and historically embedded, which gives agency to the women to resist marginalized positionings (e.g., as unskilled immigrants). The women's investment in learning English was also shaped by the communities they imagined they might participate in, often linked to hopes of increasing economic mobility.

For scholars in the field of language education or second language acquisition (SLA), the seven core chapters of the book will be familiar. The significance of *Extending the Conversation* lies in the Introduction and Afterword, which reframe the original study in light of developments in identity research and language education since the publication of the first edition. *Extending the Conversation* does just that. The Introduction provides readers with a clearly-written, accessible, and comprehensive synthesis of a decade of identity research. The Introduction closes with an overview of current themes and suggestions for future directions, which will be invaluable for emerging scholars. In particular, Norton highlights research that has addressed how identity intersects with socially constructed categories of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. She also makes a strong case for using qualitative methodologies for examining issues of identity in language education, especially for considering how individuals negotiate power relations both within language classrooms and in their lives outside the classroom. Norton emphasizes the importance of developing pedagogical practices that enable learners to access powerful identities. The Introduction demonstrates that identity has become a research area in its own right, one that emerged in full force with the publication of the first edition, and one that will continue to address the complexities that learners face as they navigate their identities in globalized, sociocultural contexts, where power relations are always present.

In addition to the Introduction and Afterword, there are seven chapters in the book, which detail the theoretical framework of the study, the methodology and methods, findings, and implications of the study for SLA. Although some of the literature is now dated, the questions Norton addressed in the study regarding how social interactions are structured, and how learners act upon or resist these structures, are still relevant today. In Chapters 1 to 7, Norton is motivated by a desire to reframe language learning in SLA. The main argument is that SLA theories have not accounted for relationships between language learners and their social worlds, especially with regards to relations of power. She calls into question SLA assumptions of ideal language learners and ideal opportunities to practice the target language both inside and outside of class. Reading these chapters in light of the Introduction and Afterword provide the reader with a sense of how far the study of language learning and identity has come since 2000. However, for a second edition of a text that details so closely the experiences of immigrant women in their first few years in Canada, I found myself wondering how the women were doing now, almost two decades later. It would have been interesting, though perhaps not feasible, to have included a brief update on the five women and to re-visit the constructs of investment, identity, and imagined communities vis-à-vis the women's lives.

In the Afterword, Claire Kramsch contrasts the 1990s, when the first edition was written, as a period that was characterized by the "promise of freedom,

democracy and equal opportunity”, to the 2000s, and the decade’s “deregulated fast capitalism” (p. 199), which has put into serious question the ideals of the 1990s. Yet, she argues that despite social and political events of the past decade (e.g., 9/11; the 2008 financial crisis; increasing global terrorism), the constructs that Norton defined in the first edition still have purchase today because they draw on theorists (Pierre Bourdieu, Chris Weedon, and Benedict Anderson), who sought ways to capture that “the real world is messy and contradictory” (p. 198). Kramsch closes the book with a warning not to lose sight of Norton’s deep commitment to social justice and equality, and not to allow identity to be redefined in structuralist terms by those in positions of power. This Afterword leaves the reader with a sense of the utility of Norton’s work for interdisciplinary scholarship on language education and identity.

As Kramsch wrote in the Afterword, Norton’s 2000 book “provided a platform to talk about issues of identity in a new, narrative way.... Identity acquired a face and a heart” (p. 193). *Extending the Conversation* clearly demonstrates that Norton’s constructs of investment, and imagined communities and identities have been resilient and productive even in light of significant sociopolitical and economic shifts in the past decade. This edition is an essential read for applied linguists, SLA researchers, and graduate students interested in identity and language learning. It is clearly written and terms are well-defined. In addition, the reasonable price tag and the option of purchasing this edition as an e-book make this an accessible resource for students. The importance of this book for language learning research is inarguable, and the book is an important contribution for learners, who are not always readily visible in SLA theories. Overall, I would highly recommend this text.

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