

Special issue on
**Insights into Applied Linguistics: Linguaging,
agency and ecologies**

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Editorial

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In summer 2012, we had the privilege of hosting the conference *Insights into applied linguistics: languaging, agency and ecologies* at the University of Jyväskylä. The conference marked a very special anniversary in the history of applied linguistics in Finland: it was the thirtieth time that a special summer school for teachers, scholars, and post-graduate students of applied linguistics was organized at the University of Jyväskylä. Kari Sajavaara, the late professor emeritus of applied linguistics, started the summer school tradition in the 1970s with the aim of introducing applied linguistics as a discipline to Finnish academia. Over the years, a great number of international scholars from all over the world participated in the school's program of lectures and workshops. Gradually, as the field of applied linguistics expanded and the number of applied linguists grew, the school turned into an international conference where scholars had a chance to give papers, meet and interact with other participants.

In the summer of 2012, the conference was organized around the theme of **new insights into applied linguistics**, with the focus on new ways of thinking about language, language learning and their relationship to the language learner. A number of pre-eminent scholars from around the world, including Stephen Cowley, Yrjö Engeström, Timo Järvillehto, Claire Kramsch, Alistair Pennycook, Annalisa Sannino, Steven Thorne, and Leo van Lier, were invited by the conference chair, professor Hannele Dufva, to give key note addresses on languaging, agency and ecologies in language learning and teaching. Sadly, the conference was to become the last time Leo van Lier visited Finland, as he passed away after a sudden illness later that year.

This volume is a collection of articles based on the research papers presented at the conference. They represent a broad spectrum of issues involved in re-conceptualizing what language is, what learning other languages may involve, and how to go about studying such things. The articles range from quantitative statistical studies to conversation and membership categorization analyses, and offer a wide perspective to the role of agency, autonomy and identity in particular in language learning.

All articles in this volume examine, in one way or another, the relationship of agency, identity, and autonomy either in language use or in the language learning process. In several articles, new insights are offered in the way agency, identity and/or autonomy can be analyzed and defined.

In the opening article, *Teppo Jakonen* explores how students' informal language learning experiences with English find their way into the formal context of content-based language teaching (CLIL). He focuses on classroom talk in which native Finnish-speaking students draw on their expertise of English-language popular culture, and use their knowledge as a semiotic resource for producing various types of actions. Based on the data, he argues that the organisation of peer group talk in the language classroom provides students with affordances for participation that are characteristically different from

whole-class interaction and thus also support the development of the agency of the students.

In *Anne Huhtala's* study, agency and identity are seen as complex, temporal and contextual phenomena that are inextricably linked with each other. By examining the expressions of agency in autobiographical narratives about career plans by Finnish speaking university students of Swedish, she finds that the way the students write about themselves as acting agents differs depending on whether they have explicit or vague or unclear career plans. Even though all the narratives contain several instances of agentive action and conscious planning, in the narratives telling only about vague plans, agency is often hidden or covered by expressions emphasizing the unforeseen and serendipitous. Huhtala suggest that this indicates a conflict between these students' actual identities and their designated identities, highlighting the relationship between agency and identity construction.

Kristiina Skinnari explores how Finnish fifth and sixth grade elementary school pupils experience and present their agency in English lessons, with a special focus on pupils' silence and resistance. Silent and resistant pupils are often seen as problematic and non-agentive in the language classroom. In contrast, Skinnari shows that remaining silent and showing resistance in the classroom can be manifestations of complex pupil agency.

Tero Korhonen, in turn, investigates the theoretical interconnections of agency, autonomy and identity in the context of adult foreign language learning by examining one student's narratives about her foreign-language related experiences. As a result, two forms of agency involved are identified in the analysis: learner agency and agency beyond language learning purposes. Based on the findings, he offers a slightly revised definition of agency in language learning: agency is "a form of committed intentional engagement in one's language learning – negotiated in interaction with each learning context". Above all, it forms a point of origin for the development of learner autonomy and identity that contribute to achieving agency beyond language learning purposes.

Marina Ruiz Tada employs sequential conversation analysis and membership categorization analysis to the study of identity construction among multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual Japanese-English speakers. In her study, codeswitching emerges as a communicative resource that invokes not only multilingual identity, but also multiethnic and multicultural identity.

In a number of articles, agency, autonomy and identity were studied in the context of language teaching programs. Agency and motivation are the main topics in *David Brown's* study of EFL university learners (n=134) in France. His findings suggest that goal achievement, as expressed by quality of work produced and scores attained on the post-test by the students, tends to be a function of whether or not they were supervised rather than a result of inherent agency or motivation. His research highlights the importance of learners' personal goal-setting and involvement in the learning process, and the significance of sociocultural context as a shaper of learners' personal involvement.

In *Anna Kyppö's* study, the development of Slovak as a foreign language learners' communicative competence and the growth of their learning awareness in an e-learning environment are viewed as a reflection of their agency. Kyppö, too, links agency to the learner's degree of motivation and engagement as well

as their conscious approach to learning. One interesting outcome in Kyppö's study was the challenge that learning Slovak diacritics offered to the students: students' awareness of this challenge increased through pen-and-paper writing, not through the e-learning environment. Her findings provide indirect evidence for the importance of language ecologies, the intricate relationship between language and its environment, in this case the context of language learning and use.

Finally, *Françoise Blin* and *Juha Jalkanen* present three educational design approaches currently in use in technology-rich learning environments: learning design, designed based research and activity theoretical designs. Blin and Jalkanen argue that design models rooted in cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) in particular can help re-conceptualize the challenges that digitally enhanced learning spaces bring and to help understand the new affordances they to offer to language teachers and learners. Drawing on CHAT principles, they studied the student interaction in a Finnish literacy skills course offered to international students at the University of Jyväskylä in order to examine the students' agency and their relationship to language.

Wishing you exciting and interesting moments reading the articles!

Riikka Alanen & Peppi Taalas