5
Self-Access as Access to 'Self': Cultural Variation in the Notions of Self and Personhood

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> *I often think it's comical*
> *How Nature always does contrive*
> *That every boy and every gal,*
> *That's born into the world alive,*
> *Is either a little Liberal,*
> *Or a little Conservative!*

<div align="right">(W.S. Gilbert, Iolanthe)</div>

Introduction

The processes through which personal identities are constructed are so hidden, out-of-consciousness, that the results, as W.S. Gilbert points out, often seem simply natural. But, of course, far from being innate, or just a matter of wondrous coincidence, individuals are socialized into categories like 'Liberal' and 'Conservative', 'Man' and 'Woman', 'electrician' and 'shopkeeper', 'Geordie' and 'Cockney', and a myriad more. The processes of socialization – the 'ways we bring up children' in the widest possible sense – vary from one period, one society and one group to another, as do the social categories available (for example, 'Liberal' and 'Conservative' were available, but, say, 'ecologist' or 'Member of Gay Pride' were not to Gilbert's boys and 'gals'). The components and architecture of identity, and thus identity itself, are cultural variables.

In this chapter, I propose to look at certain aspects of the socialization process and the construction of identity, and to suggest how they might relate to the main topic of this book: autonomy across cultures.

First, though, we will clearly need to look at the meaning of the term 'identity' itself, and so I will briefly outline an approach which has been developed over recent years with colleagues at the CRAPEL (Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues), University of Nancy.[1] This approach is an eclectic one, but has its main roots in anthropological linguistics, philosophy and social psychology: more detailed references will be found in the discussion which follows.

An approach to the notion of identity

The expression 'personal identity' can be seen as a superordinate term for an entity including two primary constituents: *person* and *self* (see Figure 5.1). In very general terms, 'person' refers to public, social aspects of the individual, addressed by others as "*you*", and it will be treated here as synonymous with social identity. 'Self', on the other hand, refers to private, subjective aspects of the individual. This fundamental difference, though widely acknowledged, has always been a major source of problems, since it seems to confer on 'identity' two mutually exclusive meanings, social identity being based on characteristics which are shared with others (Liberal, Conservative, etc.), whilst self is the essence of the individual, reporting as "I" – what makes me *me*, different from everybody else. The individual as person (participant in social interactions) goes through successive synchronic states, playing different roles such as teacher, customer or son according to the situation; but the individual as self is the continuing, diachronic subject of these varied experiences.

person vs self

Person: Social identity	Self: Numerical identity
(*What sort of* individual?)	(*Which* individual?)
Public, social	Private, subjective
Addressed as "you"	Reports as "I"/"me"
A set of roles	The agent of my actions
Member of groups	Essential individual
Participant in interactions (synchronic focus)	Continuity of memory (diachronic focus)

Figure 5.1 Identity, person and self

At the risk of trivializing an immensely subtle problem, consider the example of what we might say when we introduce one person to another:

This is Sally Cattermole. She's a teacher.

Here, the proper name is used to pick out or specify the numerical identity, the individual self, whilst the category 'teacher' is selected as a situationally relevant or salient aspect of social identity. (The fact that this linguistic distinction is culture-specific, that there are societies which adopt very different systems of nomenclature and address, only serves to underline the closeness of fit between language and the structuration of identity.)

Philosophers are interested in 'conditions of sameness': criteria for saying that an entity (a human being, say, or a stone) continues through time. They can therefore discuss 'identity' as a quality which entities 'have' without reference to other entities, since it is intrinsic. To put it simplistically, a stone does not need another stone to tell it what it is.

Socially speaking, though, 'identity' is a quality which is ascribed or attributed to an individual human being by other human beings. We do need other people to tell us who we are, and, as we shall shortly see, they do so all the time: waiters and doctors, siblings and bus conductors, colleagues and friends all constantly bombard us with instructions concerning the positions and roles we occupy, what groups we are and are not members of. And, as we shall also see, we ourselves jockey for position, sending out a stream of identity claims.

Rather than trying to argue that the difference is superficial, or that one or other of self or person is the 'real' locus of identity, the approach adopted here embraces the seeming paradox, accepts it as the consequence of our human nature: we are both separately incorporated individuals and members of society (cf. Figure 5.1). With a few sad exceptions such as wolf children and the autistic, every individual lives as a member of an array of social groups or figurations. These include Liberal and Conservative, boy and girl, but also ecologist, man and woman, electrician and shopkeeper; and the list could be extended to include hundreds, possibly thousands of other terms in an encyclopaedic repertoire of social categories: religious, political and professional groups; socioeconomic figurations; groups based on place of residence, class, level of education and lifestyle; age cohorts; speech communities; ethnic, kinship and family structures; sporting associations and teams; and so on (cf. Figure 5.2).

Obviously, no single individual can ever belong to more than a relatively small selection of such groups. Partly, this is because many of the

Aspect	Figuration
gender	male, female
age	teenager, pensioner, middle-aged, …
audition	deaf, hearing, …
residence	Londoner, Liverpudlian, …
occupation	lawyer, welder, cashier, …
religion	Plymouth Brethren, Muslim, atheist, Catholic, …
politics	Green, socialist, conservative, …
pastime, sport	chess player, swimmer, …
marital status	married, single, divorced, …
ethnicity	Jamaican, Irish, Pakistani, …
language(s)	speaker of Urdu, French, Arabic, English, …

Figure 5.2   Parameters of social identity

categories are mutually exclusive: man/woman, Catholic/Mormon, hearing/deaf, for example. Partly, too, because the practicalities of life may act as a filter, so that certain combinations of categories become difficult to achieve, membership of one category limiting access to one or more others: a poor, black, female President of the USA? An illiterate member of the Académie Française? Again, some categories are permanent (you can't do much about your parents or place of birth) whilst others can be changed by happenstance or deliberate effort, by chance or nature's changing course untrimmed, as we get married or divorced, celebrate an eighteenth birthday, win the National Lottery or an election, obtain a driving licence or a diploma in brain surgery. (En passant, it is worth noting that society recognizes the relative importance of these shifts, modifications or additions to identity through the kinds of rites of passage which ratify them.)

Let us illustrate this notion, and the way it relates to language, by examining the following utterance:

> Mary Smith is a thirty-six-year-old mother of two who works as a cashier for Lloyds, votes Labour and sings in East Chester choir.

In this statement, Mary is categorized in terms of her

- age cohort
- gender and family

- occupation
- political affiliation
- residence
- leisure activity.

All of these categories are related to language in at least two different ways:

(i) They are encoded in language: expressions such as 'occupation', 'cashier', 'mother' and 'Labour' are selected from the repertoire from which identities can be constructed, different languages and societies having in varying degrees different repertoires.

(ii) These different aspects of Mary's identity are likely to influence the ways she talks and the ways people talk to her – as mother, cashier, chorister, and so on.[2]

Any individual, then, accumulates a specific configuration of memberships of social groups, so that his/her social identity can be defined as *'the sum of the social groups of which the individual is a competent and recognized member'*. As we shall see later, since membership of specific groups confers the rights or duties to enact particular roles, our social identity is very closely linked to the nature of our participation in communicative situations. For the moment, though, I will limit myself to three points which indicate the relevance of this discussion of social identity to 'autonomy' and 'self-direction':

Firstly, included in the list of social groups of which any individual is a member we will sometimes find the category *'language learner'*. However, in the approach to personal identity adopted here, although this might be the salient category in a particular communicative situation (such as the classroom, or a counselling session) it can in no way be dissociated from the rest of that individual's identity. To do so would, in fact, be to fall into the trap which has bedevilled so much discussion and research on second language acquisition over the past thirty or more years, where the term 'the learner' has been used as an abstraction, a simplified representation or personification of *the learning process*, devoid of any truly individual and social dimension and, therefore, conceptually unsuitable for analytic reflection on problems of learner autonomy.

Secondly, we need to keep reminding ourselves that the 'auto' in autonomy means 'self', and that 'autonomy' is just one of a raft of related terms mapping out the field: self-instruction, self-evaluation,

self-direction, self-access, self-image, etc. This is clearly not just a freak of etymology, as many of the other terms employed – not just in the field of autonomy, but in language learning in general – 'memory', 'needs', 'motivation', say – clearly entail the existence of an individual person, an identity, someone real who has those memories, needs and motivations.

Thirdly, the various constitutive aspects of identity need to be learnt or acquired as part of the process of socialization, providing an overarching framework for personal development and education, so that any attempt to understand particular learning paradigms, such as autonomous or self-directed learning, must be situated within that wider context.

However, if the suggestion made earlier that the two meanings of 'identity' refer to complementary aspects of human nature is to be anything more than simply playing with words and diagrams, we have to be able to say something about the relationship between 'self' and 'person' which is more than a simple affirmation that they exist, and that this distinction reflects our nature, that each of us has a kind of dual nationality, that as sociopolitical animals we are both members of society, and embodied individuals. If, that is, our theory of 'identity' is to have any kind of explanatory or even descriptive power, we have to be able to say something about the sources of selfhood and personhood and the relationship between them.

I would like to suggest that as the result of work, much of it empirical, carried out in a wide range of the social sciences, we are now in a position to do just that: to make principled and cogent claims about the sources of identity, its architecture and the processes through which it is constructed. This is an immensely complex field, so much so that there is probably no single person fully competent to deal with all the approaches and issues involved. As it would be quite impossible to give any kind of overview or summary of all this work in the space available, I will just give a very limited sample from three of the major disciplines concerned: anthropology, social psychology and linguistics.

Anthropology: concepts of personhood

In a sense, the whole aim of anthropology is to ask "What does it mean to be a human being?" What, that is, are the parameters and limits, the degrees of variability, of human nature? So it is not surprising to find the self, personhood and identity at the very centre of anthropological inquiry, with its sister discipline ethnography adding the question "– and what does it mean to be French, English or Cantonese?" (Sperber,

1982). Together, then, these disciplines examine the essential and local forms and processes shaping 'identity' (Duranti, 1997; Foley, 1997). Precisely because these issues are so central to anthropology, the relevant literature is vast, and concepts, terminology and theories proliferate confusingly, making generalizations of any kind perilous. Moreover, the account sketched here is highly selective, as it is only one strand in a discussion of autonomous second language learning, a topic to which anthropologists do not normally attend. *Caveat lector.*

Most people working in this area would agree that the agenda for modern anthropological discussion of selfhood and personal identity was set by Mauss (1938). Mauss puts forward a theory according to which there existed in the past bounded societies consisting of totemic clans, each clan having a fixed stock of names ('personnages') transmitted by recognized procedures, the bearer(s) of a name being reincarnations of their predecessors back to mythical times, and dancing out the fact at rituals. Children are recognized as reincarnations of particular ancestors:

> The individual is born with his name and his social functions [...] The number of individuals, names, souls and roles is limited in the clan and the line of the clan is merely a collection of rebirths and deaths of individuals who are always the same. (cited by Allen, 1985: 33)

One way of understanding this idea is to look at aristocratic societies, where one is born into a title and its properties and functions: The Ninth Lord Shawfield of Effingham inherits the name, rights and duties and property of numbers one to eight by right of birth. His title and the kind of identity it indexes precede and survive the individuals who bear them, and are unrelated to individual abilities, temperaments, qualifications, and so on. Mauss cites examples of such societies in Africa, Polynesia, Malaysia, North America and Australia, but pays closest attention to the Romans, who gave the 'persona' a legal and moral status: slaves could not be personae, as they had no legal existence and in some societies the old, the infirm, the young, and unmarried (or childless) women might be excluded. The age and conditions whereby the individual attains personhood also vary from one society to another. For example, there are societies where the individual only becomes a full person at death.

Mauss argues that the concept of a form of identity which survives the individual after death was picked up by the Church (via Aristotle) as the idea of an immortal soul. However, the Christian apologists added

the notion that all individuals, not just those recognised by society as personae, but children, women and slaves, possessed metaphysical and moral value, that persons were sacred. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, sectarian movements developed a philosophy of this person, the self, positing and examining ideas of individual freedom, conscience, and agency – ideas that influenced the big gun philosophers like Leibniz, Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, Berkeley, Fichte, Kant and led to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the French Revolution. Anticipating in detail, and with far more evidence, certain ideas of Michel Foucault and the postmodernists, Mauss insists that this interest in the notion of an autonomous self is a characteristic of modernism and unique to Western thought.

In the seventy years since it was published, Mauss's theory has been extremely influential and there have been many anthropological studies of the concepts of person and self and of the construction of identity in specific societies (useful general discussions will be found in Lévi-Strauss, 1977; Shweder and Levine, 1984; Carrithers et al., 1985; Giddens, 1991; Levine, 1992). La Fontaine (1985) provides an extremely useful set of examples and a cogent review of Mauss's ideas, and extends the theory with her own powerful suggestions concerning the main source of variation in the concept of the person. She discusses published ethnographies of four traditional societies, all agricultural peoples without centralized political institutions. There are many differences between them, but

> overall they resemble one another in their concepts more than they resemble the individualist West. [...] In these four societies, human beings are seen as composite creatures; in all four, the individual human being is composed of material and immaterial components [...] concepts of the person serve to identify and explain a wide range of behaviour, emotions and events. None of the concepts are strictly comparable with the concept of person which characterises individualism, for the elements are not unified into a whole which of itself has significance. (p. 126)

All four concepts are based on different ways in which the individual participates in tradition. Let us look at one of her examples, the Tallensi of Ghana, in slightly more detail. For members of this society, a human being has 'sii', which is not life itself, but which constitutes the living body as a unique identity, an individual in our terms. An individual's possessions are imbued with their sii, and taboos prevent conflict

between sii of eldest son and father. Siis attract and repulse one another, giving rise to likes and dislikes. Sii vanishes at death. The living body distinguishes persons ('niriba') from ancestors, ghosts and non-human spirits; the immaterial aspects distinguish men from animals (except for some sacred crocodiles, since they are manifestations of the ancestors and therefore persons).

Individual men are distinguished from one another by their distinct sii, not by names, for names identify an individual with (a) an event in the life history of his family (the public name) and (b) an ancestral guardian (the private name). A 'personal identity shrine' embodies the fate already prepared for its owner and is associated with a set of ancestors; it thus distinguishes him as an individual, but in terms of a place in a system of social relations.

In such societies, the concept of person refers to a 'moral career'. The completed person is the product of a whole life:

> In Western societies, the conferring of a name serves to achieve the same end: personhood and individuality are thus identified from the beginning. But for the Tallensi, personhood is finally validated at death. It is the completion of a proper life which qualifies an individual for full personhood, for marriage and the birth of children are essential prerequisites [...] no individual qualities of behaviour or temperament can disqualify a parent from personhood; conversely, no matter how loved and admired an individual may be, if he or she fails to fulfil the ideal pattern of life and leaves no children, then full personhood has not been attained. (p. 128)

La Fontaine concludes that Mauss's conclusion has been validated by subsequent ethnographic work. The concept of the social personality allows us to see Tallensi ideas as concepts of the person: the sum of statuses.

However, the concept of the person in individualism is different. In individualism, the 'person' implies a general moral status accorded to human beings by virtue of their humanity, which recognises their autonomy and responsibility for their actions. As Mauss said, it is the extension into the moral sphere of the unique nature of the individual. By contrast, the Tallensi, for example, do not generalize but particularise, and personhood varies according to social criteria which contain the capacities of the individual within defined roles and categories.

In the West, for example, society is constituted of autonomous equal units and the institutions which reflect this vision are based on a rule of

law (the state) where persons are citizens, all people (ideally even rulers) being subject to law. As Weber (1921/1978) pointed out, this principle is the defining characteristic of bureaucratic organization. The main features of such structures are: a clear distinction between office and office-holder, and hence between individual and social role; and the allocation of authority on the basis of fitness for office, fitness being of course a quality of individuals. The equality of persons and competition for office are thus integral to the structure of Western society. Hierarchy and inequality are conceptualized as attributes of social roles; all individuals are equal as persons. By contrast, the Tallensi, for example, base their concept of society on tradition, established once and for all – society is the projection over time of the original founders, heroes or ancestors; in such a society each new baby has a position defined at birth.

La Fontaine's conclusion is that the Western concept of the individual is unique. However, as this summary of her article shows, so is every other society's. Personal identity and the self are malleable. Any form of social intervention which aims at engaging with the individual (including self-direction, self-access and learner-centred approaches of any kind) must therefore attend to the types of personal identities involved. This is particularly true in situations where the social intervention has an intercultural dimension, as is necessarily the case in second language learning. Although the example of a traditional African society we have been looking at is worth quoting because it is particularly striking, it should not be imagined that there is no variation in the structure of personal identity even within the Western world. This can be recognised in everyday stereotypes (distant Englishmen, stuffy Germans, warm outgoing Italians, etc.) but it is also supported empirically by studies such as Budwig's (n.d.).

The overall thrust of this line of argument is that any discourse-based practice aimed at promoting autonomy (for example, caretaker talk, counselling) will have to be sensitive to local notions of personhood if they are to be successful.

Social psychology: the social origin of selves

A number of social psychologists have arrived at similar conclusions to those of the anthropologists, but by a very different route. They take as their starting point the theory of the sociologist George Herbert Mead on the social origin of selves. Mead (e.g. 1934) argued that minds and selves can only emerge as a result of communicative interaction via language, and that what is called 'the mind' is in fact an internal

conversation based entirely on language and social meanings. We can see this in terms of an 'I' and a 'Me', where both are part of the 'self', but where the 'I' is the individual as having consciousness, the 'Me' is the individual as an object of that consciousness, including the internal, subjective representation of the Person. This representation of the person to the self is possible because the child is able to reproduce subjectively in intra-action the discursive processes acquired intersubjectively in interaction.

Over the last decade or so, this theory has been resurrected by social theorists in various forms and combined with ideas borrowed from a very diverse group of thinkers (Vygotsky and Bakhtin; Foucault and Althusser; Elias, Mannheim and Schütz; Lévi-Strauss) who share this vision of discourse as the primary mechanism of socialization and the construction of selves. These theorists include Fairclough (1992) and Billig (1987). A masterly synthesis of this approach is provided by the neo-Marxist Ian Burkitt, who argues that

> The self is social in its entirety. Only if we begin from the study of social relations can we truly understand how individuals are social selves [...] social life is the source of individuality and human beings only develop as truly human within a social context. (1991: 215)

This has important implications for any kind of constructivist theory, where learning is seen as a socially mediated activity, since it provides a clear bridge between interpersonal and intrapersonal, showing that 'social' and 'individual' aspects of the learning process, far from being contradictory, are essentially similar.

Burkitt's formulation may well strike you as overly deterministic, so it is important to remember that certain of the membershipping strategies mentioned below are clear evidence of our individual ability to resist, negotiate and manage our identities. In addition, metalinguistic activity of almost any kind can be seen as strategies for the reconfiguration of identities, for redefining the speaker's ethos or self-image (Goffman, 1969; Amossy, 1999).

There is, then, an increasing weight of evidence drawn from disciplines across the board that identity is socially constructed, that our sense of self can only emerge as the result of communicative interaction with others. Children raised outside society do not acquire language – though they have the capacity to do so – and, for that very reason, they fail to form selves.

Linguistics

Both of the above approaches insist on the importance of language and discourse as the primary mechanism for the construction of identities, so it is not surprising that linguists should have been keen to examine in real detail just how that mechanism functions. At least three major lines of investigation have been opened up. The first concerns the role of language as a component of ethnic identity, and there is already a copious literature on this topic, much of it related to multilingual communities (Fishman, 1977; Haarman, 1986). The second, an offshoot of anthropological studies of rearing practices (Jahoda and Lewis, 1988), deals with the ways adults speak to children in different cultures according to social expectancies of competent adult persons (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1984).

The third, relatively recent and relatively neglected line concentrates on deictics and address systems in general and pronouns in particular. An especially interesting and detailed study is Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990). They examine the pronominal systems of dozens of languages from all round the world and present convincing evidence that they vary in the social space, positions and functions allocated to the 'I' and that these correlate with variations in the ways in which identities are conceived and configured, represented and enacted. 'Identities' are constructed appropriately through the acquisition of certain practices, particularly those involved in taking and assigning responsibility: individuals have to learn a local theory of personhood which is to a large extent both summarized and instantiated in the pronoun system and other communicative practices.

Despite widespread belief to the contrary, not all languages have pronominal systems with three 'persons' (!) and two numbers. There are languages where 'self' may include close members of one's family, and there are languages which have sets of pronouns marked for different tenses, contradicting Western notions of physical continuity. There are also languages such as Inuit and Japanese which are group- rather than speaker-oriented, so that individuals speak first and foremost as representatives of their collectivity. This seems congruent with the Inuits' collective behaviour (documented by Mühlhäusler and Harré, 1990): when one laughs, all laugh, when one cries, all cry.

My own attention was drawn to this issue by a Burmese student of mine as early as 1985. Although he was a specialist in French, he confessed to me that he was having problems because he found French "such an impolite language". Somewhat surprised, I pressed him for examples.

"The word 'je'," he replied. "In my language, I have an 'I' for when I am superior or inferior to you, for when I am pleased with you or angry with you, so that when I speak French, I always feel like a bull in a china-shop, never respectful, never expressing my attitudes appropriately."[3]

At discourse level, there are a number of ways in which language is related to the construction, specification and expression of discourse: membershipping strategies and identity claims, the use of domain-specific discourse, and metaphorical recategorization. Let us look at these points briefly (a more detailed discussion of the first two will be found in Riley (2002), from which some of my examples are taken).

To illustrate the ways in which speakers select situationally salient aspects of their addressee's identity, the philosopher Louis Althusser cites the case of a policeman being called to the scene of a crime. His uniform and his revolver confer on him both symbolic and real power, so that when he shouts at a person running away "Hey, you, stop!" that person becomes a criminal because the policeman says so. The runaway, that is, is both the subject of and subject to the policeman's discourse: "Ideologies interpellate individuals."

If that were all, as some postmodernists claim, it would be a very deterministic, very pessimistic account of personal identity. However, if you look at discourse, at actual examples of situated communicative interaction, what you find is that the individual is consciously and constantly trying to affirm his/her sense of identity. Our attempts are not always successful, of course, and this can give rise to conflict, but the very existence of conflict disproves the thesis of absolute social determinism.

Identity claims are utterances in which individuals affirm their membership of specific social figurations or sub-groups in order to fore-ground them with reference to the matter in hand and thereby orient their audience's behaviour and expectations. In English, such claims are commonly, but by no means exclusively, made by using the expression "(speaking) as an X, I...":

"Speaking as an economist, I..."
"Speaking as a single mother, I..."

Other expressions include "I am an X"; "You're talking to an X"; "We/Us Xs"; and there are, of course, numerous indirect strategies:

"Those of us who have the privilege to work in higher education..."
"Look, I've spent half my life in the tropics..."

Other strategies include:
"Well, wearing my hat as Treasurer of the Sports Committee..."
"Are you asking me for advice as a lawyer or as your friend?"
"I'll have you know you are talking to someone who spent thirty years in India."

Membershipping strategies are speakers' attempts to identify and/or impose membership of specific social figurations on their interlocutors.

"Are you ready to order, sir?"
"Why do you Northerners (women, Catholics, teachers, etc.) always..."
"Non-EU nationals."
"Pregnant women should consult their doctors before using this medicine."
"Place your hand on the Bible and repeat after me..."

As these examples show, such strategies are very often employed for positioning the addressee in a specific role and thereby eliciting particular types of behaviour which the speaker desires or expects. However, it is important to note that individuals who are the subjects of another's membershipping strategy may refuse to accept the identity or role being attributed to them. One of the commonest ways of this resistance, it seems to me, is to lay a counter-claim to a different identity or role:

"Look, I'm the secretary here, not the tea-lady."

As is to be expected, membershipping strategies frequently occur at the beginning of relationships and interactions and counsellor–learner discourse is no exception. For example, where I work in France at least, counsellors are used to being told:

"I need someone who will really make me work."
"Just tell me what to do and I promise to work hard."

The role-relationship implied in such utterances shows that here they are being membershipped as teachers. Counsellors may have a range of resistance strategies of varying degrees of force and tactfulness, including:

"Why don't you tell me what it is you want to do?"
"I'm afraid I'm not much of a slave-driver."

"Well let's just say I'll try to help you learn."
"You have to remember that I can't learn things for you."

The use of domain-specific discourse, including technical language and slang, is one of the most common and powerful forms of identity claims and membershipping strategies. As I mentioned earlier, any of the categories of identity can correlate with language, though not necessarily in the same ways, of course. We have also seen that many of the categories of identity available in a society are lexicalized in relatively transparent ways ('man', 'old-age pensioner', 'teacher', 'card-carrying member of the Winchester Young Conservatives', 'asylum-seeker', for example). One of the most strikingly familiar examples is the close relationship between 'occupation' and vocabulary. Individuals demonstrate their membership and knowledge of trades, professions, gangs, political movements and the like by their use of technical terms and jargon.

This point is immediately relevant to counsellor–learner discourse, where the participants can often be seen to be accommodating to one another's terminology. Over the course of several counselling sessions, learner A, for example, began using several expressions which had clearly been picked up from his counsellor, such as 'language skill' and 'oral comprehension'. The counsellor took this metalinguistic development as a hopeful sign, as being at least a precursor of metacognitive development. On the other hand, counsellors will sometimes go to great lengths to use the learner's own words, with the aim of making their intervention less intrusive. In either case, these metalinguistic strategies are part of a wider process of role and identity negotiation.

Metaphorical recategorisation: Speakers are always free to recategorise their interlocutors metaphorically:

"Be an angel, ... "
"You are an absolute jellyfish!"

As these examples show, this recategorisation involves the identification of one thing with another. We use language in this way to resituate objects in semantic ('quality') space by providing them with new linguistic coordinates (cf. Fernandez, 1986). The metaphors learners and counsellors use about themselves, their relationship, and about language and language learning, and the ways they develop can be extremely informative. For example, English-speaking language learners often have recourse to a conceptual metaphor LEARNING IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Riley, 1994) which generates linguistic

metaphors such as

> "I'm making good progress."
> "I've made great strides."
> "I've fallen behind."
> "I'm completely lost."

So when learner B says "I'm a plodder" and learner C says "I keep going off in all directions", they are using this metaphor for self-description, providing the counsellor with a valuable glimpse of their self-image.

Conclusion

In this chapter, two basic points have been made. The first is that 'identity' and its primary constituents 'person' (social identity) and 'self' are to some extent at least cultural variables: personhood involves a sense of self and a range of competences which satisfy a society's expectations and requirements of the ideal member. Secondly, it has been argued that the primary mechanism of this process is language, since it encodes those culturally specific concepts, and is the dynamic locus for the inter-individual negotiation and enactment of social identity, and for the intra-individual dialectic from which the self emerges.

The implications of this line of argument for autonomous or self-directed learning schemes and for counselling for language learning are profound, though not, it has to be admitted, always clear. In fact, until considerably more research has been done on the discursive construction of identity in general and on the negotiation of roles in the counsellor–learner dyad in particular (cf. Clemente, this volume), only the most general and tentative conclusions can be formulated.

The first is that there can be no one 'best' form of counselling, or even one that is applicable over a wide range of cultural contexts. In research terms, this means looking at communicative practices in general and the 'language of counselling' in particular in a number of different cultures. Clearly, the model of discourse analysis used will have to be sensitive to intercultural variation, which argues strongly in favour of ethnographic approaches such as those developed by Hymes (1974) for the 'ethnography of communication' and Gumperz (1982) for 'interactional sociolinguistics'. If the argument developed here is followed, priority will be given to strategies used in the negotiation of roles and identities, and to the relationships between discourse and metacognition (with language awareness and self-awareness seen as opposite sides of the same coin).

This certainly does not mean, however, that the nitty-gritty of counselling should be neglected, nor its importance underrated: by focusing on the ways in which specific decisions are taken concerning the constitutive elements of the learning programme – materials, activities, organization, forms of evaluation, and so on – we will develop both a better understanding of counselling as practice and of the ways in which roles are realised in specific settings.

Secondly, there have to be serious reservations about the wisdom of counselling in a language other than the learner's mother tongue, and where this is inevitable for practical reasons there should be constant monitoring of the counsellor's cultural assumptions concerning his/her own and the learner's respective roles. The principal danger is, of course, that the asymmetric distribution of knowledge is exacerbated by unequal linguistic competence. In these circumstances any attempt to establish free and fair relationships, empowerment and mutual respect is seriously threatened. However, to finish on a more positive note, there are ways of reducing this risk, such as recruiting the help of successful learners as peer tutors, or developing relevant mother tongue materials and instruments for the learners to use themselves. Again, both of these tasks imply further research.

Reflection/discussion questions

1. Draw up a list of the social sub-categories to which you belong, and another list for one of your students (cf. Figure 5.2). What are the main differences between the two lists? How do you think these might relate to different ideas of personhood?
2. What membershipping strategies do you and your learners tend to use with one another? How do they reflect (or not) your ideas concerning your respective roles, and concerning learner autonomy in particular?

Notes

1. More detailed discussions of this approach will be found in Riley (1999, 2002). The colleagues in question are the members of GREFSOC (Groupe de Réflexion Sociolinguistique): Hervé Adami, Virginie André, Sophie Bailly, Désirée Castillo, Francis Carton, Maud Ciekanski, Jeanne-Marie Debaisieux, Marie-José Gremmo, Florence Garcia-Poncet. I am indebted to my discussions with them.
2. In fact, there is an important third possibility: Mary might be a member of more than one speech community. In other words, she might enact different memberships in different languages. For example, let me add the information that Mary Smith is also Mrs Benali. She met Rachid, a Frenchman of Algerian origin whilst on holiday in Paris. They use both French and Arabic at home

and because of her language skills, Mary is regularly called on to help in the Foreign Exchange department. Like all bilinguals, she code-switches between her languages according to the specific roles she is called upon to play, according, that is, to the situationally salient aspect of her identity. However, I shall not be pursuing this point here.

3. I understand that Burmese does not in fact have any pronouns strictly speaking, using conventional nominalized expressions as terms of address, etc.