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Editorial

Language, culture, communication – these three elements constitute the virtuous trinity upon which these pages are founded: language – a palette of semiotic symbols from which we select (paradigmatically) and generate (syntagmatically) in order to both position ourselves and be positioned; culture – sets of commonality realized through symbols, artefacts, behaviours and attitudes; communication – the manifold ways in which humans convey meanings to each other developed over millennia from basic sounds and gestures in the primordial forest, via hieroglyphics etched on papyral sheets, to multi-modal texts beamed across the world. At the centre of this triangle - so the story goes (Kuhn, 1970) - lies the phenomenon of identity. And it seems to us that in different ways, different facets of identity again underlie the six papers featured in this final issue of volume 13.

Identity has informed many memorable papers published in these pages over the past thirteen years. However, the concept has also come to saturate the social sciences since the ‘cultural turn’ some forty years ago, and has given rise to such a multiplicity of meanings that sometimes one can be sceptical about the work that the concept is still capable of doing. Recently, we have been introduced to an article by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000), thus far overlooked by us, which we think is helpful to pin down the notion of identity a little more firmly.¹ In it, the authors not only articulate their doubts about the value of the concept, but also suggest a number of ways in which the idea of identity can be developed. They address the problematic rather sternly:

Conceptualising all affinities and affiliations, all forms of belonging, all experience of commonality, connectedness, all cohesions, all self- understandings and self-identifications in the idiom of “identity” saddles us with a blunt, flat undifferentiated vocabulary (p. 2).

However, the authors go on to differentiate between what they call 'identification' and 'self-understanding', which speak in particular to John and myself as discourse analysts and interculturalists. For Brubaker and Cooper, identification entails either relational modes such as a 'web of kinship...patron-client tie, or teacher student relations', or modes of categorisation such as 'membership in a class of persons displaying some categorical attribute ... race, ethnicity, language, nationality, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation'(p. 15). On their argument, identification has an active, processual and discursively articulated nature, and this can often be informed by the activities of the modern state. By contrast, self-understanding entails 'one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how...one is prepared to act' (p. 17). Thus, self-understanding emerges as something more particularistic and non-instrumental, having cognitive and affective dimensions. Through this distinction, Brubaker and Cooper move away from the notion of 'identity' as a static, objectified condition to conceiving of it as being more of a fluid and dynamic process.

The first two papers in this volume both deal in their different ways with the relationship between language and identity on the part of groups of émigrés. Nibbs considers the relational categorisation of Hmong émigrés who came from Southeast Asia to Southern Germany and Texas. Here she challenges conventional attributions of kinship through lineage, the stock-in-trade of her core subject of anthropology, by assigning a role to language. Her findings indicate that émigré groups of Hmong self-identify not just along the lines of lineage, but also through their choice of a particular dialectal form of language. Thus language works alongside other forms of kinship as a distinctive symbol system not only as the realisation of cultural tradition, but also as a means of encoding social relations. Furthermore, a particular dialect does not emerge as something to which different members of a community – or clan – are automatically subscribed, but something to which each individual social agent engages with some degree of self-awareness. Thus, language operates

in this social network both as (externalised) symbol system and as (internalised) mode of self-understanding. By contrast, O'Neill uses a narrative approach to investigate the experiences of four French subjects who relocated to Australia. Her interviews demonstrate the ways in which the participants perform their French identities within the context of the preconceptions articulated within a foreign language. Not only do her subjects 'notice' the difference between the ways in which Australian and French speakers say things; but they also make strategic linguistic choices in order to represent themselves within the particular conditions of a social setting. Thus, although O'Neill's context is conventionally somewhat more agentive than that of Nibbs, in their different ways both papers perhaps explore distinctive forms of the complex dialectical interplay which takes place between identification and self-understanding.

On Brubaker and Cooper's argument, the educational praxis of a particular culture also emerges as a powerful form of identification. Indeed they maintain that the relationship between the teacher and the student is an example of the relational mode of identification. Robyn Moloney offers a case study of an intercultural online collaborative language learning project run by a Chinese English language teacher acculturated in part to Australian education system (the 'Australia teacher') and a Chinese teacher of English living and working in China. The fact that the project became compromised by the differing beliefs of the two teachers gives a powerful insight into how different culturally bounded ways of thinking about learning can impact upon the success or failure of a particular pedagogical project. Although she does not use the word as such, it may be that the identity of Moloney's subject - still in transition between a set of Chinese beliefs about pedagogy and those of an Australian pedagogic culture - was a key element in shaping and in being shaped by the online pedagogical project. Moloney concludes by calling for the recognition that "one important aspect of the use of technology in language teaching is the 'who', rather than the

technical aspect of the ‘what’ in any online project”. If Moloney’s teacher engages with virtual texts, Shie’s Taiwanese students engage very much with words on paper – albeit the titles extracted from the radical British magazine *spiked*. His study considers the ways in which his English language students in Taiwan can allude to sets of meanings from other texts (‘allusive intertexts’) in their reading of the rather esoteric intertexts from this magazine. On this argument, shared knowledge about a particular text can come to characterize a particular group of readers as a form of discursive ‘common ground’ or ‘shared knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions’ (after Clark, 1996; Holler and Wilkin, 2009.) Thus, the intertextual knowledge of readers can constitute ‘an emerging sociocultural group or discourse community, who share a specific cultural identity’. The intertextual cultural context with which these students engage operates again both as an objectified set of textual relations and as a subjective means of self-understanding, as the learners engage with the set of cultural meanings embedded therein.

Other forms of identification are the names used in official discourse and in print media to refer to particular cultural groups, or sub-groups, within the state. Vald on’s article analyses US Census data and the Internet versions of seven major US Anglophone newspapers to describe the changes that have taken place in the usage of the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* to describe the Spanish-speaking ethnic minority group over a forty year period, and the extent to which the rapidly growing minority group has been negatively or positively represented. Overall, the article concludes that the usage of *Hispanic* has given way to *Latino* – not least in view of the ‘counter-naming’ carried out by members of this cultural group themselves. Furthermore representations of *Latinos* in the news appear to have moved some way from their original rather negative stereotyping. Perhaps one of the most introverted forms of self-understanding Brubaker and Cooper mention in their (2000) overview is that of cognitive disposition – or attitude - towards a particular phenomenon. In this respect, the final paper in

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this volume, by Gonzalez-Riano, Hevia-Artime and Fernandez-Costales, reports on a large scale sociolinguistic survey into the language attitudes of early adolescent attitudes towards the official national language (Spanish) and the dialect used in the area of Navia-Eo (Galician-Asturian). They found that participants used both Spanish and Galician-Asturian in both official and home environments, and also displayed positive attitudes to both languages. However, reflecting on Brubaker and Cooper's framework, one could posit yet another complex web of relations between the objectified mode of identification afforded by the dual language systems, and the self-understanding of the young people realised through their attitudes towards the dual language system. Positive attitudes toward one or other language would translate into increased frequency of use, along with the corresponding shift in self-realisation that ensues. This is true in particular of Gonzalez-Riano et al.'s results which indicate that exposure to formal lessons in Galicia-Asturia did indeed translate successfully into an increase in usage of the dialect.

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To conclude, given the centrality of different modes of identity to this issue, and the many others we have edited over the past three years, it would appear that Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) article provides us with some useful ways in which the nexus between language, culture and communication can be better understood – particularly in the ways in which the different elements relate to this central notion. Prospectively, by the time you read this editorial, many of us will be frenziedly putting the finishing touches to our PowerPoints – bags yet unpacked – for the 12th annual conference of the International Association for Languages and Intercultural Communication (IALIC) at Hong Kong Baptist University, which takes place from November 29th until December 1st. While the closing date for abstracts will be long past by the time you read this, it will still be possible to sign up if you want to join us for the intellectual frisson and general sociality. Our thanks are also due to Lurdes Armengol and Xavier Fontich Vicens for the incisive reviews which conclude this

volume. We would also like to thank the not inconsiderable number of referees who have lent their services throughout the past year. If any of you want to referee a paper or review a book in the next volume, do get in touch with the appropriate editor.

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Malcolm N. MacDonald and John P. O’Regan

ⁱ Thanks to Rachel Lewis for sharing this with Malcolm, and for her invaluable comments on this piece.