Language variation as an Identity construct among Year Abroad Speakers of French

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The acquisition of sociolinguistic competence in second languages closely relates to speakers’ multifaceted social identities (Block, 2007). As in L1 acquisition, sociolinguistic competence, sociostylistic awareness as well as acquisition and use of sociolinguistic variants in a second language is crucial in the building of an identity in intersecting communities where L2 learners evolve. The use of variation patterns by L2 speakers can indicate the choices these speakers make in the possibilities offered by L1 speech for the construction of new identities in the L2. The L2 speakers may choose among variation patterns in relation to any level of language, lexical items, morphology, syntax or discourse, as part of the identity they may wish to construct for themselves. They may follow the linguistic habits of young speakers, or male/female speakers in a particular group if they wish to identify with this group (Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Eckert, 1989).

The present study investigates sociolinguistic competence as a strategy for identity construction. We focus particularly on the use of variable speech patterns as a way towards identity construction. Our study analyses the speech of young Irish adults in a Year Abroad setting (Regan, 1995), and focuses especially on their use of four variables in French: nous/on, /l/ deletion, ne omission and the future temporal reference. Results of a quantitative variationist study of these variables show how language use is an important factor in identity construction by L2 speakers of French, as well as a significant factor in the development of sociolinguistic competence when learners spend a long period of time in a foreign country.

References