

Discourse and desire in a second
language classroom

Constance Ellwood

Doctor of Philosophy

2004

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that this thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of candidate

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my thanks to the following people and institutions who supported the writing of this thesis in ways financial, intellectual, emotional and/or practical.

For key conversations, expected and unexpected, exhilarating and troubling, helpful and despairing, my thanks go to Christa Albrecht-Crane, Roslyn Appleby, Annie Bolitho, Lyn Carson, Ross Forman, Chris Geagea, Adam Le Nevez, Alison Lee, David Lovett, Cynthia Nelson, Jill Molan, Alastair Pennycook, Carl Rhodes, Kit Shepherd, Nicky Solomon, Marian Waller and Jirí Vomáčka; for help with translation, my thanks to Axelle Chazal (French), Emi Otsuji (Japanese); and for help with transcription, Jennifer Ryan; for the opportunity to discuss Foucault (and other things) thanks to the girls of the Foucault Reading Group: Barbie Bloch, Jayne Bye, Anita Devos, Jane Durie, Anne Reich; for emotional support and companionship on the path, thanks to my fellow post-graduates in Room 5.570: Hamad Al Alawi, Faiza Al Raisi, Anita Devos, Usa Noytim, Emi Otsuji, Kelvin Tang, Sumiko Taniguchi - and to my daughter, Ella Ellwood-Shoesmith; for funding for the laptop, thanks to Jirí Vomáčka and to my father, Peter Ellwood; for use of tape recorders, thanks to the ELSSA Centre at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS); for the scholarship which allowed me to write obsessively, thanks to the University Graduate School of UTS; for fulfilling my requests for texts from around the planet, thanks to UTS Library; for support during the final difficult days of *supraspinatus tendonitis*, I would like to thank Alex Barthel for funding the voice-activated software, and all those friends who gave much of their time to help with typing; in particular, Penelope Ware and Ross Forman.

My deepest thanks go to the characters who made this story possible: the students and teachers who participated in the research.

Table of contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Beyond identity: poststructuralist notions of the subject	11
Section a: Beyond the Cartesian subject.....	11
Section b: Discourse and the subject.....	18
Section c: Desire and becoming.....	30
Chapter 3: Identities and subjectivities in second language teaching and learning	51
Section a: Modernist notions and their impact on conceptions of identity in second language learning	53
Section b: Notions of the founding subject under question.....	66
Chapter 4: Problematising methodology	84
Section a: Problematising the writing of a thesis.....	85
Section b: Problematising the researcher and her reflexivity	88
Section c: Problematising representation.....	95
Section d: Problematising the methodology	102
Section e: Given all this... where am I going?.....	118
Chapter 5: Discourses of cultural identity: the tyranny of representation	122
Introduction to Chapters 5, 6 and 7	122
Section a: Representations of cultural identity in the field	126
Section b: Discourses of Japanese cultural identity: passivity and participation in teacher representations of students	134
Section c: Discourses of Japanese cultural identity: passivity and ability in student representations of themselves.....	157
Chapter 6: Discourses of teaching and learning: the tyranny of identity	186
Section a: Teachers and students	187
Section b: Discourses of the good teacher.....	191
Section c: Discourses of the good student	236
Chapter 7: Discourses of becoming: escaping tyranny	245
Chapter 8: An immanent end to the story... ..	291
Appendix B: Schedule of interviews and classroom observations	303
Appendix C: Standard questions: semi-structured interviews with students..	304
Appendix D: Standard questions: semi-structured interviews with teachers ..	306
Appendix E: Collated student data	308
Bibliography.....	309

Abstract

This thesis draws on the theories of Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari to describe some ways in which teacher and student identities are produced and performed in a second language classroom. Three major aspects of identity are considered: cultural identity, teacher professional role identity, and the changing identity of the language learner.

The thesis uses poststructuralist perspectives to critique notions of identity current in second language theory and practice. It extends the conception of identity as 'subjectivity' proposed by Bonny Norton Peirce - that is, as multiple, impermanent, fragmented - to include the notion of subjectivity produced in interaction and desire. Through an examination of texts produced in an ethnographic study, the thesis addresses issues of cultural categorisation and stereotyping in second language teaching and learning. It discusses the discursive production of subjectivity in discourses of cultural identity and the extent to which culture is a determining factor in subjectivity in the classroom site of the research. It shows how a homogenising effect of discourse leads to the positioning, both self-imposed and other-imposed, of individuals as members of particular cultural groups with particular characteristics. The thesis also discusses the discursive production of subjectivity through discourses of good teacher and good student, and demonstrates the extent to which these discourses are processes of molarisation. The thesis is thus concerned here with an examination of relatively static, fixed identifications and to demonstrate the power of discourse to determine subjectivities. It is also concerned to look at an excess to discourse, a flow which is beyond signification and identification: desire. Identity change at the discursive level is discussed through discourses of becoming, and is differentiated from movements away from subjectification. These movements of desire are proposed as a new way of conceiving agency.

The thesis attempts to show some ways in which these subjectivities, produced in discourse and desire, play out in the classroom, in terms of their production and reception by participants, and the impacts on the teaching/learning context.