



Content list available at www.urmia.ac.ir/ijltr

*Iranian Journal
of
Language Teaching Research
(Book Review)*



Urmia University

***Researching Identity and Interculturality*, Fred Dervin & Karen Risager Routledge, New York (2015). 245 pp., ISBN: 978-0-415-73912-2 (pbk)**

Parviz Alavinia^{a,*}, Zahra Aghazadeh^a

^a *Urmia University, Iran*

Soon after its debut in the wake of 1980s, the notion of interculturality, delineated as “communication between people from different ethnic, social, gendered cultures within the boundaries of the same national language” (Kramersch, 1998, p. 81), turned to a popular catch term among ELT research community. Among the most prominent publications addressing this avant-garde concept, one may refer to the recent work of Dervin and Risager, entitled *Researching Identity and Interculturality*.

Successive to the Introduction chapter, in which the editors demarcate the distinctions between research method and research methodology (via elaborating the five major components of research methodology opted for in studies of identity and interculturality), the main content of the book is arranged in four sections. The first section of the book, titled *Identity and Interculturality: Studying Narratives*, is composed of three chapters. The focus of the introductory chapter is on the influence of interculturality on the intra-subjectivity of the participants in their narratives about life in Greece. The authors are interested in the transformation of the participants’ identities. In so doing, they opt for a three-stage dialogical analysis of the data gathered through narratives, episodic interviews and focus group discussions.

The second chapter embarks on a close analysis of discourses of belonging in interactions by Latin American migrant and transmigrant women in the United States. Throughout the chapter, De Fina goes through two narratives told by two Latin American women who are involved in low-skilled careers in the United States. What the author concludes in this paper, particularly on the basis of the second narrative in which the interviewee takes on a non-defensive role, is that even within situations that prescribe stereotypical positioning for migrants, attempt to counteract these

* Corresponding author: Urmia University, Iran
Email address: pevinia2006@yahoo.com

© Urmia University Press

 10.30466/ijltr.2015.20397

deterministically ascribed social positions may lead to forming 'emergent identities' by the individuals, a feat that results from their experience of transnationalism.

In the third chapter, Baynham pursues the discussion of interculturally constructed identities by elaborating on two dichotomous conceptions of 'identity brought about' and 'brought along'. While the former delves into the role of interaction and intercultural encounters in performing and creating identity, the latter deals more with the notion of 'preexisting identities'. Though, as the writer claims, current research on identity and interculturality has buttressed the more paramount role of the former, the author himself advocates a view in which both types of identity have a crucial role to play. Resorting to participant observation and open-ended interview techniques for collecting data, the author of this article refers to narrative as a "privileged site for identity work" (p. 73) and lists four prominent and distinctive features of narratives, i.e., *repeatability*, *involvement*, *distribution of evidential responsibility*, and *pragmatic and metapragmatic explicitness* in this regard. Residing mainly on a narrative recounted by a Moroccan migrant living in the UK, the remaining part of the text analyzes the narrative in terms of stance, positioning and alignment, and comes to the conclusion that identity is actively built and rebuilt through social encounters in an intercultural arena.

Entitled *Identity and Interculturality: Studying Interaction and Discourse Contexts*, the second section of the volume is composed of three chapters that seek to analyze the natural interactions taking place in intercultural milieus. In the first article, Stokoe and Attenborough draw on the two ethnomethodologically-driven methods of conversation analysis (CA) and membership categorization analysis (MCA), and analyze some extracts characterized mainly by the discourses of 'complaint' and 'denial'. The focal message of this chapter is thought to be its instigation of the ethnomethodological perspective of 'culture-in-action' and the fact that "people invoke, produce, propose and sustain cultural knowledge about their own and others' identity category memberships" (p. 106).

In chapter 5, Hua demonstrates that interculturality provides an analytical perspective where cultural membership is said to be "neither prescribed nor static" (p. 119). Utilizing Membership Categorization Device (MCD) as the principal analytical means in this study, she investigates the interactional resources utilized by multilingual participants in a Chinese diasporic family in acting upon cultural identities. In so doing, the author delves into the role 'translanguaging' practice plays in constructing affiliation and disaffiliation. Among such translanguaging attempts, she makes mention of address terms, 'metalanguaging,' language play and code-switching, as useful devices employed by members of the diasporic community to establish accounts of Chineseness and non-Chineseness.

The last chapter in section 2 tracks the very line of argumentation regarding the dynamic and discourse-oriented nature of cultural identity. Thus, to Tranekjar, cultural identity encompasses "a hybrid performance of various cultural memberships that are actualized and enabled by the specific interactional context" (p. 126). Founding her research on Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA), in a manner akin to the other researchers referred to in the second section of the book, she implements the framework of discursive ethnography in the context of international student counseling sessions. In brief, this paper mainly highlights the role of 'passing' and "movement

between different membership categories” (p. 145) as the key components by means of which multiple cultural identities “are constantly established, negotiated and shifted” (p. 145) in the ongoing process of interaction.

The two chapters in section 3 deal with “social and cultural practices related to wider global and historical processes” (p. 20). Chapter 7 of the volume looks into the concept of cultural diversity in ethnographic research. Conducting her study in the context of Orthodox Christians in Egypt, the author of this article raises important questions about the simultaneous process of constructing and exploring differences in relation to ethnography as a method. This paper capitalizes on the claim “that any encounter between researcher and interlocutor is informed by differences” (p. 152). Thus, throughout the chapter, issues of access, autoethnography, and interactionism are highlighted and interactions between the researcher and her object in three different pieces of fieldwork are presented.

Chapter 8 illustrates “how postcolonial reflections and critical research on development inform each other in projects that concern questions of identity and interculturality” (p. 149). The chapter presents and discusses a chart used in an ongoing preparation of a partnership-based research project. The chart serves as a useful tool to substantiate, verify, and correct the partners’ subjective experience of different agents and of the process. It prevents the researcher from merely recording answers that confirm our assumptions and helps in identifying what discourses define problems and solutions.

The last section of the book, dubbed *Identity and Interculturality: Revisiting Concepts and Analytical Foci*, is comprised of two chapters written by two scholars from the field of cultural studies, i.e. Frello and Kramsch. In the penultimate chapter of the book, the author “problematizes the concept of cultural hybridity” (p. 191) via making the important distinction between hybridity as ‘displacement’ and as ‘blending’. Her goal is to open up the ontological aspect of interculturality by questioning the construction of different cultures and their boundaries. Importantly, the chapter also examines the confusion between the concept of culture and other concepts such as race and ethnicity.

Ultimately, Chapter 10 underscores the confusion created about the two relevant, yet different, notions of identity and subjectivity. In the author’s eyes, identity in language learning and teaching has lost its historical dimension, while subjectivity clearly includes the ideas of memory, imagination and emotion. The chapter presents a call for keeping the two notions separate in applied linguistics research while triggering methodological cooperation between the two notions.

Altogether, with its inclusion of the majority of big names in the domains of interculturality and identity, the book features as a comprehensive collection of seminal works in this area. The key characteristic of the book that renders it a bit different from, and hence more noteworthy than other comparable publications in the field is the step-by-step and detailed manner in which the methodological delicacies of research within the domain of interculturality is elucidated. This invaluable attribute of the volume sure has turned it to a handy guidebook for fledgling researchers who are interested in research within this burgeoning discipline.

After all, despite all the upsides the book enjoys, it appears that, at times, the contributors to the volume have failed to take into account the knowledge base of the readers and, in this regard, the high technicality of the chapters might prove to be somewhat problematic for novice scholars in the field. To help alleviate this alleged shortcoming, the editors could have provided a glossary of important terminology within the field of interculturality at the end of the book. The editors might also have included a separate section on possible recommendations for future research within this better-dubbed immature discipline of intercultural studies to help offer new avenues of research for avid young researchers. Nonetheless, the pitfalls just referred to never relegate the exquisite quality of the volume, which is no doubt one of the best recent publications within the realm of intercultural studies.

References

Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.