



# **Positional identity in Classroom**

Foreign Language Acquisition & Communication II  
Class 5 January 6, 2025



# Group discussion questions

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1. Where do you usually sit in classroom?

2. How do you choose your seat in classroom?

3. How do you form a group? Why?



## **HOW DOES SEATING RELATE TO INDIVIDUALS' IDENTITY?**

Your seat choice demonstrates your identity mediated by positioning acts.

# Personal and social identities

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- We construct our identities in interaction with others (Hecht, 1993; Norton, 2013; Simon, 2004).
- Individuals can be identified by their *personal* identity and *social* identity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).
  - *Personal identity* emphasizes a unique aspect of individualism by differentiating from others
  - *Social identity* views self from relational or collective perspectives by integrating to others in social groups → Collective identity

# Hecht's (1993) Communication Theory of Identity (CTI)

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- Four layers – *personal identity*, *enacted identity*, *relational identity*, and *communal identity*.
- Identity is performed or enacted through interaction in communication.
- The *enacted identity* emerges in relationship through positioning themselves and others.
- We tend to be concerned about how others view us, and we behave according to their expectations and evaluations. → *relational identity*
- *Communal identity* deals with the collective aspect of identity. With locating identity in group, attributes of personal identity are observed as collectivities in community.  
Ex. member of a Japanese-speaking group, member of a non-native speaker group

# The Self-aspect Model of Identity (Simon, 2004)

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- Emphasis on self-interpretation: individuals achieve understanding of themselves by processing and organizing a variety numbers of self-aspects (i.e., person's attributes or characteristics) in a context of social interaction.
- Attributes including 'personality traits (e.g., shy), abilities (e.g., poor dancer), physical features (e.g., curly hair, slim), behavioral characteristics (e.g., usually gets up early), ideologies (e.g., Christian, democrat), social roles (e.g., project manager), language affiliation(s) (e.g., English, Chinese), and group members (e.g., female, academic, Christian)' (Spencer-Oatey, 2007 p. 640).
- Such self-aspects are neither absolute nor isolated, but rather emerge in a relational context with others .



# **AN L2 CLASSROOM AS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

# *Communities of practice & identity*

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- Coined by Wenger (1998), such as at home, at school, in the hobbies ... everywhere
- Belonging to multiple communities of practice
- Classroom is also a community of practice.
- In classroom, teachers and learners position themselves and are positioned by their counterparts while learning 'how spoken and written text is produced and interpreted' (Martin-Beltián, 2010, p. 259) in a specific context.
- Individuals express 'self' through verbal and nonverbal behaviour.  $\Rightarrow$  displaying their *enacted identity* via *relational identity*  $\Rightarrow$  further indicating their *communal identity*, or ingroup membership (Schiffrin, 1996).
- What and how individual students say and behave in the classroom reflects multiple frames of identity occasioned by *moral* positions they have internalized through recursive interactional practices (Anderson, 2009; Martin-Beltrán, 2010).
- Students and teacher are the institutionalized roles.  $\Rightarrow$  behavior to meet *moral orders* or institutional norms



## Moral orders for positioning acts (van Langenhove, 2017)

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- Group norm: the overt and covert rules and routines socially constructed that operate individual students' (members') behaviors
- Cultural moral orders
- Legal moral orders
- Institutional moral orders
- Conversational moral orders



School, Classroom,

# *Where do such moral or conventional positions come from?*

- Through exposure to specific teaching approaches and materials reflecting national educational policy, and social ideology.

Ex. Shiroza (2011), Matsuda (2002)

- *Native speakerism* in English education




## Shiroza (2011)

- Analysis: 210 English-related instruction books published in Japan from the 1960s to the year 2007.
- Finding: the term ‘native speaker’ was found in the titles of 148 books.
- Such publication bias could have reinforced Japanese L2 English learners’ uncritical acceptance of the dichotomy between NSs and NNSs while believing NS English legitimate.

## Matsuda (2002)

- Analysis: seven first-year junior high school EFL textbooks approved by MEXT in 1996 and used between 1997 and 2002.
- Finding: an NS orientation in terms of English users and varieties through analysing
- Under the influence of the social moral order, Japanese L2 English learners undertake an inescapable position of NNS in English communication.



**Kayi-Aydar, H. (2014). Social positioning, participation, and second language learning: Talkative students in an Academic ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 48(4), 686-713**

**How does social positioning affect classroom participation?**



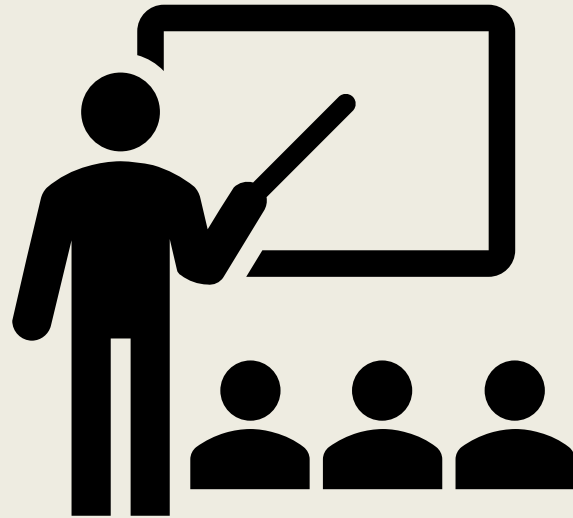
# Review the paper

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- Purposes
- Methods
- Findings
- Implications

Two talkative students: **How have their positioning acts changed over time? What factors have influenced their positional identities?**

Tarek



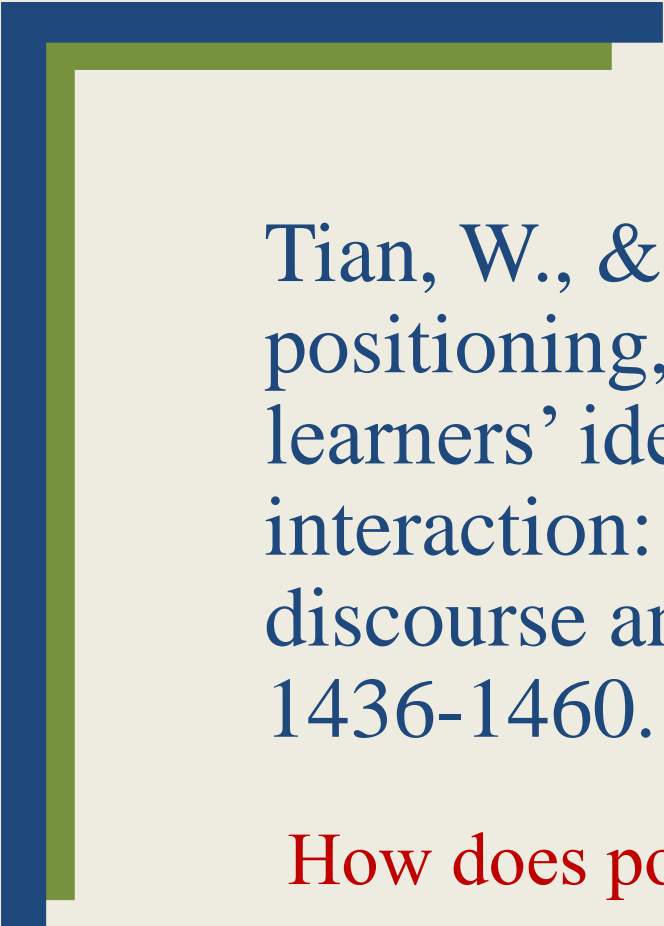
Ahmad



## Other students' position and Teacher's role

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- Ahamed's *you know*: Ahamad is showing off → negative perception
  - He is positioned as an arrogant or inconsiderate student.  
→ Other students could be *legitimately silent* (p. 707).
- Betsy: the power of *teacher talk* → reacting students' behaviors differently (unconscious)



Tian, W., & Dumlao, R. P. (2020). Impacts of positioning, power, and resistance on EFL learners' identity construction through classroom interaction: A perspective from critical classroom discourse analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 25, 1436-1460.

How does positioning affect students' power and resistance in EFL classroom?





# CRITICAL CLASSROOM DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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- a) Classroom discourse is socially constructed, politically motivated, and historically determined.
- b) English as a second or foreign (L2) classroom is not a scheduled, self-contained mini-society; it is rather a constituent of the larger society in which many forms of domination and inequality are produced and reproduced for the benefit of vested interests.
- c) The L2 classroom also manifests, at surface and deep levels, many forms of resistance, articulated or unarticulated.
- d) The negotiation of discourse's meaning and its analysis should not be confined to the acquisitional aspects of input and interaction.
- e) Teachers need to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to observe, analyze, and evaluate their own classroom discourse.

(Adapted from Kumaravadivelu, 1999, pp. 472-473)

# Research

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- (a) How do EFL learners construct identity in classroom discourse interaction? and (b) How might this identity construction have possible impact on
- Participants were of the same cultural background and language, Thai as their mother language, and English as a foreign language to them.
- The class was comprised of 31 undergraduate students (21 females and 10 males) majoring in English, with ages ranging from 15 to 20s.

# Positioning in classroom

## Learners' Choice of Code as Passive Resistance

- EFL learners demonstrate resistance in responding to their teachers and peers.
- Learners' language alternations convey their resistance during classroom interaction. ⇒ Use their L1 (Thai)

## Circulating power in interaction: struggles for knowledge

- Some learners are struggling for knowledge while others possess capability during the classroom interaction.
- Due to insufficient knowledge, learners might position themselves as incapable of interacting with others.

## Multiple positioning of EFL learners

- Every learner in particular classroom interaction demonstrates his/her own way of positioning him/herself.
- They position themselves and others in different ways.
- ⇒ Depending on who they interact with

**Shibata, M. (2021a). Japanese L2 English learners' positions in miscommunication: Who is responsible for failures? *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*.**

How do L2 English learners/speakers position themselves when interacting with L1 English speakers and another L2 English users respectively?

# Two scenarios

L1 English – L2 English	L2 English – L2 English
Smith-san (L1 American English speaker) and Suzuki-san (Japanese L2 English speaker) are talking in English. As the conversation goes on, Smith-san has difficulty understanding Suzuki-san's utterances or even barely understands some. What factors do you think influence their interaction? Please come up as many reasons for Smith-san's difficulty as possible.	Jan-san (French L2 English speaker) and Yamada-san (Japanese L2 English speaker) are talking in English. As the conversation goes on, Jan-san has difficulty understanding Yamada-san's utterances or even barely understands some. What factors do you think influence their interaction? Please come up as many reasons for Jan-san's difficulty as possible.
Smith-san (L1 American English speaker) and Suzuki-san (Japanese L2 English speaker) are talking in English. As the conversation goes on, Suzuki-san has difficulty understanding Smith-san's utterances or even barely understands some. What factors do you think influence their interaction? Please come up as many reasons for Suzuki-san's difficulty as possible.	Jan-san (French L2 English speaker) and Yamada-san (Japanese L2 English speaker) are talking in English. As the conversation goes on, Yamada-san has difficulty understanding Jan-san's utterances or even barely understands some. What factors do you think influence their interaction? Please come up as many reasons for Yamada-san's difficulty as possible.

# Positions observed in wording

## 1. Intransitive vs. Transitive verbs

- (1) Watashi-wa kare-no eigo-ga *kikitor-eru* ka shinpai-da.  
(I am concerned about if I will be able to comprehend what he says.)
- (2) Watashi-wa messeji-ga *tutawa-ru* ka shinpai-da.  
(I am concerned about if I can convey a message.)
- (3) ?Watashi-wa kare-no eigo-wo *kikito-ru* ka shinpai-da.  
(I am concerned about if I will comprehend what he says.)
- (4) ?Watashi-wa messeji-wo *tutae-ru* ka shinpai-da.  
(I am concerned about if I convey a message.)

## 2. *Hatsuon* (pronunciation) in L1-L2 English interaction vs. *akusento* or *namari* (both meaning accent) in L2-L2.

**Table 3. Distribution of the responsible agent in each miscommunication setting**

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Agent	L1-L2 interaction	L2-L2 interaction
Japanese L2 English speaker	145 (58.2%)	17 (12.7%)
Counterpart	55 (22.1%)	18 (13.4%)
Both parties	49 (19.7%)	99 (73.9%)
Total	249	134

# Hierarchical positioning in L1-L2 scenario

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English communication is likely to happen with native speakers of English.



Non-native speakers' English is not adequate for English communication.



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