

HIROSHIMA UNIVERSITY広島大学

Reflection Sheet: Class 4

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND COMMUNICATION II

外国語習得とコミュニケーション II

**Submission Information**

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1. Introduction

This session focused on how power and social identity affect communication for people learning a second language (L2). The session focused on the stories of Eva and Martina, two immigrants facing challenges while trying to speak English. Their experiences showed how subject position and cultural biases shape their opportunities to speak and interact. Key topics included the challenges faced by L2 learners in navigating unequal power dynamics, the intersection of social roles with communication competence, and the evolving nature of identity in response to these interactions. Class discussions explored these issues and their impact on everyday life, like in workplaces and social settings.

1. **Social Identity in Communication**

## Power Dynamics in Conversations

Communication isn’t just about using words, it’s about who has power in a conversation. When Eva’s coworker Gail asked her a rhetorical question about a fictional character named Bart Simpson, Gail wasn’t actually expecting a real answer and used this question to show her own position of power in the conversation. This made Eva feel like an outsider, showing how L2 learners can be made to feel less capable based on their identity as immigrants.

## Investment in Social Integration

Eva’s story, and Martina’s too, highlighted the concept of investment, as proposed by Peirce (1995). Rather than a static measure of motivation, investment reflects a learner’s commitment to gaining social and material resources through language learning, like Eva’s migrancy due to “economical advantage.” While Martina’s case demonstrated how her role as a mother and primary caregiver shaped her determination to communicate effectively, even when faced with feelings of inferiority.

# Developing Communicative Competence

## Challenging Power Through Language

Communicative competence involves more than knowing grammar and vocabulary; it includes understanding the social and cultural contexts of language use. According to Hymes’s ideas, learning the rules of language is not enough, learners must also question whose interests those rules serve. This means navigating power dynamics that determine who gets to speak and who is heard. Martina’s actions, such as negotiating with her landlord and standing up to unfair treatment, demonstrate how communicative competence enables L2 learners to resist marginalization.

## Power to Impose Reception

While Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of "the power to impose reception" is crucial to understanding communicative competence. Eva’s experience highlights how communication is shaped by societal assumptions about whose voices matter. Eva’s silence at first came from feeling excluded, but over time, she became more confident and started joining conversations, challenging her subject position that was marginalized to her by the counterparts.

# Evolution of English

In the 1990s, immigrant women like Eva and Martina navigated English learning in an environment dominated by a binary view: native versus non-native speakers. However, the 2000s brought a growing acceptance of diverse English varieties, encouraging individuals to take pride in their unique ways of speaking English. This is evident that over time, perspectives on English have shifted from a narrow focus on native and non-native speakers to a recognition of “World English(es)”, which includes varieties shaped by cultural contexts, such as Japanese English in Japan.

# Conclusion

The case studies of Eva and Martina illustrate that learning a second language is deeply tied to navigating social identity and power dynamics. Success in language learning goes beyond mastering vocabulary and grammar; it requires overcoming cultural biases, asserting one’s right to speak, and finding confidence in diverse interactions.