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## **I PARTICIPATE; THEREFORE, I AM (AND I LEARN): RESEARCHING LEARNERS' MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY IN THE MULTILINGUAL SCHOOL CONTEXT**

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**Summary.** This study examines the relationship between the participation of multilingual students in FAL (French as an additional language) classroom and language learners' identities associated with the related community of practice. Classroom participation, a key concept of the study, is defined as a verbal form of learners' investment in language learning, which can both enhance language learning and change the identity of language learners. The research was conducted in an international multilingual school in Croatia among eight 5<sup>th</sup> grade multilingual and multicultural students learning French as an additional language. For data collection purposes, French language lessons and twelve video recordings with a total length of approx. 480 minutes were observed and taped. A qualitative analysis of the participation of each student was conducted with the regard to the power relations among members of the classroom. The analysis revealed that, from the chosen theoretical perspective where an additional language is seen both as a tool of power and a tool for power, the identity of language learners can be described as a dynamic combination of some of the following identity positions: a language learner in a position of power, a language learner in a higher position of power than others, a language learner in a reduced position of power but eager for a position of power, a language learner in a reduced position of power but not eager for a position of power. The results of this study are consistent with the main assumptions about the identity of language learners made by other socially oriented authors in SLA (Norton-Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Darwin & Norton, 2015), according to which language learners' identity is multiple, dynamic, discursively shaped and context-dependent.

**Keywords:** language learners' identity; investment; multilingual context; participation.

### **Introduction**

It may seem that SLA researchers have only recently begun to pay more attention to language learners' identity; however, it has always been a subject of interest to them, although different terms were used to describe it. During the period of psychological and socio-psychological approach to SLA research in the late 70s, 80s and early 90s, learners' identity was explored as a set of

relatively fixed and long-term traits or characteristics, such as personality traits or learning practices and behaviours. The new line of investigation in SLA, typical of the late 90s and the 21<sup>st</sup> century, became more concerned with the socio-cultural context of L2 learning and its dynamic relation to active learners' participation in those contexts (see Norton and Toohey, 2001). This shift towards a social paradigm, to which Block (2007) refers as a social turn in applied linguistics, was accurately portrayed by Caranagajah (2004):

From focusing on the abstract grammar system and treating learners as a bundle of psychological reflexes, scholars have begun to consider how learners negotiate competing subject positions in conflicting discourse communities. After being treated as non-entities in SLA research and feeling silenced, we ESL students have now achieved complexity, with researchers straining their ears to catch every inflexion and modulation in our 'voice.' After being theorized and objectified, imposed with flat stereotypical identities, we see ourselves celebrated as hybrid subjects who defy analysis (p. 266).

In this new, so-called social paradigm, the attention was shifted away from a learner as an object with a stable identity to a learner as an active subject with multiple and dynamic identities, who can accept, resist or negotiate his or her identity positions in language learning contexts. In addition to this conceptualisation of identity, a few new notions were introduced to SLA, such as agency, positions, positioning or subjectivity.

Among the latest concepts, one of the most cited is probably the investment, which Norton-Peirce introduced to the field in the mid-1990s. Investment can be described as a relative category that represents the historically, socially, and discursively constructed commitment of learners to language learning (Norton-Peirce, 1995). The concept has been further developed by Darvin and Norton (2015) in their model of investment, which proposes a comprehensive and critical examination of the relationship between identity, investment, power relations, and language learning. According to this approach to language learners' identity, if a learner invests in a language, he or she does so with the understanding that he or she will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will, in turn, increase the value of their cultural capital and social power. The model is inspired by the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1991), especially his concept of symbolic power, which

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he defined as power based on recognition; renown, prestige, honour, glory, and authority (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 251). According to his theory, every interaction is marked by a disproportion of power. Using the metaphor of the language market, Bourdieu wanted to point out that the interlocutor who has the linguistic capital of a socially desirable language at his disposal is a more powerful participant in conversational interaction. In foreign language teaching, the most powerful participant would be the teacher, and the least powerful would be the learner with the scarcest foreign language communication repertoire. In other words, the source of symbolic power in foreign language teaching is the range of foreign language resources that the learner has in his or her communication repertoire. On the other hand, the least symbolic power has a learner who is not allowed to use certain resources from his language repertoire, which are forbidden, undesirable or which are not understood by others. However, unlike Bourdieu who held that an individual with less capital and power was destined for a less powerful position, poststructuralists believe that each person possesses the ability to act, change, and resist imposed positions. Furthermore, community members who hold a more powerful position can not only limit but also provide access to community members who hold a less powerful position by providing them with good learning conditions, such as numerous opportunities to practice, participate, and invest in language and identity.

The growing interest in identity and language education facilitated with this methodological toolkit has resulted in a rich body of work devoted to investment in language learning and teaching (Darvin & Norton, 2017). While earlier research focused on language learning research in the North American context and on the learner and the learning context (McKay & Wong, 1996; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Potowski, 2004), in recent years interest in the construct of investment has been taken up in widely dispersed regions of the world and extended with some new concepts, such as imagined communities (Ollerhead, 2012; Chang, 2011). Moreover, researchers have turned their attention to the investments of language teachers (Reeves, 2009; Carazzai, 2013; Sanches Silva, 2013).

## **The Study**

In this study, the following research questions were addressed: What is language learners' identity and how can we describe it using the methodological lens? How do members of the learning community influence each other's identity? What role do languages and power play in constructing language learners' identity in a multilingual context?

To answer these questions, the notion of participation was introduced and defined as a verbal form of learners' investment in language learning which can both enhance language learning and change learners' social identity associated with the related community of practice. According to the chosen theoretical approach, language in this study is considered a cultural capital that can be transformed into symbolic power. The participation, as a construct, is considered very useful; i.e. it provides a more tangible representation of investment in a formal language learning context and it allows the description of two concurrent, complex and interdependent processes: learning a language and expressing and constructing learners' social identity.

The research was conducted in an international multilingual school in Croatia among eight 5th grade students learning French as an additional language. All students were multilingual and multicultural and, therefore, differed greatly in terms of individual characteristics, and personal and educational experiences. Some of them were global nomads, others, Croatian citizens. All were, so-called, dynamic multilinguals (García, 2009), which means that their multilingual competence does not develop linearly but dynamically. Apart from French, they all learn English (i.e. the language of schooling) and Croatian, either as their mother tongue or as an additional language. However, the group was very heterogeneous according to the level of competence in the three languages.

For data collection purposes, we decided to observe French language lessons. Twelve video recordings with a total length of approx. 480 minutes were taped from October to April and qualitatively analysed with respect to student participation. In order to operationalise their participation, the following criteria were proposed: chosen communicative resources (i.e. target language – French, non-target languages – English or Croatian, and

translingual utterances), the origin of the incentive (i.e. self-initiated, initiated by another classroom member), and content relatedness to the language classroom (i.e. related to the lesson, non-related to the lesson). Classroom discourse was transcribed and all utterances of students were classified using the aforementioned criteria to find a specific pattern that could provide information about the identity of language learners. The participation was always analysed with respect to other classroom members – the teacher and other students since the power relations in the classroom and the role of language as a tool of power were of interest to us.

Prior to the start of the research, in September 2016, the school principal and coordinator received a written description of the research, and written approval was requested to conduct the research at the school. Informed consent forms for parents were made in two versions, in English and Croatian, and submitted by the class teacher.

## **Results and Discussion**

In our analysis, four identity positions related to language learning emerged: a language learner in a position of power, a language learner in a higher position of power than others, a language learner in a reduced position of power but eager for a position of power, and a language learner in a reduced position of power but not eager for a position of power.

In the following, each of the four identity positions, which have been found useful for describing the identity of language learners in an additional language classroom, if analysed through the proposed theoretical lens, will be presented.

### **Language Learner in A Position of Power**

All students, in this study, often positioned themselves as powerful language learners by displaying their proficiency in French in front of other classroom members. To illustrate this identity position, the following examples were chosen.

**Example 1**

T<sup>1</sup>: Qu'est-ce que les Français mangent au déjeuner? / What do people eat in France for lunch?

S: Au déjeuner les Français mangent les sandwiches, des salades ou des grillades. / French people eat sandwiches, salads or barbecue for lunch.

**Example 2**

T: Pourquoi tu aimes l'EPS? / Why do you love P.E.?

S: J'aime l'EPS parce que c'est amusant. / I love P.E. because it is fun.

**Example 3**

T: What can we find at the bottom part of the [eating] pyramid?

S: Les céréales. / Cereals.

**Example 4**

T: Qu'est-ce que tu aimes faire? / What do you like to do?

S: J'aime danser. / I like to dance.

It appears that students have always positioned themselves as powerful by giving correct answers in French to the teacher's questions related to the classroom topic. The third example is particularly interesting because it shows the student's willingness to answer in French, even if the question is asked in English. The following conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the chosen communicative resources are important – the target language, which is, in this case, an additional language, French, allows them to position themselves as language learners in a position of power. Secondly, the content of the utterance must be related to the language lesson. Finally, for this position, the teacher has proven his role as a classroom member who can either hinder student participation or allow them to participate and therefore create opportunities for them to negotiate their identity. If the teacher asks a question that is consistent with the actual level of proficiency of students in the target language or immediately above it, a student gets the opportunity to position himself/herself as a powerful language learner. On the other hand, if the teacher's incentive exceeds a student's level of proficiency in the target language, this student will most likely not be able to position himself/herself as a powerful language learner in front of others. Finally, only students in a position of power can express their other identity positions, those not associated with a foreign

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<sup>1</sup> T stands for the teacher and S for a student.

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language classroom, such as a sports enthusiast (see Example 2) or a dancer (see Example 4).

### **Language Learner in A Reduced Position of Power but Eager for A Position of Power**

All students, in this study, often positioned themselves as language learners in a reduced position of power but eager for a position of power. They did so by showing their willingness to acquire the target language, i.e. a wider range of symbolic resources. The following examples illustrate this position:

#### **Example 5**

T: Quels cours tu as le mardi? / What classes do you have on Tuesday?

S: [x]Mardi, j'ai un cours d'Histori / [missing article / wrong pronunciation] / Tuesday, I have a History class.

T: D'histoire. / History.

S: ... d'histoire. / ... History.

#### **Example 6**

S1: What does it mean?

S2: It means curly.

#### **Example 7**

S: What's "la récré"? / What's "the break"?

#### **Example 8**

T: Qu'est-ce que tu bois pour le petit déjeuner? / What do you drink for breakfast?

S: *Milkshake* avec des fruits. *Milkshake* with fruits.

#### **Example 9**

S1: And how do you say "spending time with his friends"?

S2: Sortir avec des amis. / To go out with friends.

#### **Example 10**

S: Teacher, how do you say "horseback riding"?

In Example 5, the teacher revises and the student accepts the implicit feedback from the teacher. In Example 6, the student directly asks the teacher for the missing target language resources in order to communicate more effectively and the teacher responds explicitly to him. Examples 7 and 8 are

an example of translanguaging that has proven to be a common way of students languaging when they position themselves as language learners in a reduced position of power but eager for a position of power. Furthermore, participation in translingual utterances was important for these students not only to learn French but also to ensure their authenticity, i.e. to show a more complete and accurate representation of what they are, i.e. their social identity. For instance, in Example 10, a female student wanted to position herself in front of her colleagues and the teacher by implying she is a horseback rider. Therefore, the permitted use of non-target languages in foreign language teaching seems to be particularly important for groups of foreign language beginners or groups consisting of students of different levels of foreign language proficiency, as otherwise, beginners can only present a narrower aspect of their identity.

However, translingual participation was sometimes the result of selecting the line of least resistance, as shown in Example 11.

**Example 11**

T: Qu'est-ce que tu bois pour le petit déjeuner? / What do you drink for breakfast?

S: Tee.

T: En français, s'il te plaît. / In French, please.

S: Le thé. / A tea.

Some self-initiated comments in languages other than French, as in Example 12, were also noted.

**Example 12**

S: You know teacher what is great...galloping with your horse...I would like to go to the mountains...

This student did not express a desire to learn French, but a desire to express some aspects of his social identity that were not related to the French language. Even though such participation is not entirely conducive to learning French, it cannot be considered unfavourable either because it shows that the student follows the course of the activity and understands the statements of other participants in the interaction in French. In addition, such participation can show the teacher that the student belongs to other communities of practice, which can make it easier for the teacher to choose teaching topics and activities

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that can ultimately encourage students to participate more often.

In these examples, students positioned themselves as language learners in a reduced position of power but eager for a position of power, while the teacher was positioned as the most powerful participant in the related community of practice. However, Example 9 reveals that the most powerful participant does not have to be a teacher, but other students can take that position. From these illustrative examples, it follows that students have always taken the identity position of a language learner in a reduced position of power but eager for a position of power when he or she participated in a classroom discourse by using utterances related to the language lesson. Another important point to note is that the chosen language resources and the origin of the incentive did not appear to be important criteria for this position.

### **Language Learner Not Eager for A Position of Power**

In this study, only two out of eight students repeatedly positioned themselves as language learners not eager for a position of power. From the analysed data, it can be concluded that students, positioning themselves in this way, participated in non-target languages with content not related to language teaching, as illustrated in the following few examples:

**Example 13**

S: Teacher, where is the Schtroumpf?

**Example 14**

S: Moramo li pisati na francuskom ili možemo na engleskom?  
/ Do we have to write in French or can we write in English?

**Example 15**

S: I don't have teacher [homework]...

**Example 16**

T: Peter, calme-toi! / Peter, calm down!  
S: But teacher, I am just handing over a paper...

Example 13 illustrates a student's disinterest in the lesson. This is evident in the question that the student asked the teacher which is not related to the French lesson. It was more than obvious from the video recording that

the student was bored and decided to *entertain* other students. In this case, his participation could be described as an absence of willingness to learn the target language or, in other words, to acquire a wider range of symbolic sources. Moreover, he wanted to be put in a position of a class clown. Example 14 illustrates a student's lack of agency. The student was not ready to make an effort to learn the target language. However, it is important to emphasise that the student pronounced this utterance quietly, perhaps not wanting to be positioned as a language learner not eager for a position of power by other members of the group. In Example 15, the same student showed a lack of investment by not doing homework. He pronounced that utterance quietly again, most likely for the same reason. In Examples 13, 14 and 15, students positioned themselves as language learners not eager for a position of power, however, in Example 16, the teacher tried to impose that identity position. Nevertheless, in this case, the student resisted and tried to negotiate that position. It seems important to emphasise two things: firstly, the student was right, and secondly, the teacher never tried to impose that identity position on any other student, except on those two students who repeatedly positioned themselves as language learners not eager for a position of power. This situation points to the power of the teacher and reminds us of the potential danger of a self-fulfilling prophecy in education.

### **Language Learner in A Higher Position of Power Than Others**

For some students, participating in class discourse to occupy a higher position of power than others was a very common form of participation. It is important to emphasise that those two students who often positioned themselves as language learners not eager for a position of power very rarely positioned themselves as language learners in a higher position of power than others.

The analysis of student utterances revealed the following forms as the most common forms of demonstrating power:

- giving feedback to other students on the accuracy of their utterance,
- translating words or utterances to the rest of the group,
- answering the questions which the teacher asked the entire group, and
- answering other students' questions.

The following examples illustrate the ways in which students have positioned themselves as language learners in a higher position of power than others:

**Example 17**

T: Qu'est-ce qu'il y a sur la table? / What's on the table?

S1: Le gâteau. / A cake.

S2: Le gâteau d'anniversaire. / A birthday cake.

**Example 18**

S1: What does it mean "frisé"?

S2: It's wavy.

S3: No, it's more like curly.

**Example 19**

T: Quelle date sommes-nous aujourd'hui? / What's the date today?

S: C'est le 3 février. / It's the 3rd of February.

**Example 20**

S: Teacher, we have already written ami, amie.

In Example 17, one student gives feedback to another student's response by adding some details to make his statement more accurate. Example 18 illustrates the hierarchy of power among students: the first student seems to be the least powerful among the three, the second more powerful than the first and the third the most powerful among them. In the following exchange, the teacher addressed her question to the entire class, but only one student was powerful and confident enough to impose himself and by answering this question he positioned himself as a language learner in a higher position of power than others. Example 20 was particularly interesting to us because the student was giving feedback to the teacher thus positioning himself as a language learner in a higher position of power than the teacher. It seems typical of all utterances that they were always connected to the language classroom and that students almost always demonstrated their power on their own initiative. However, there were several situations when the teacher positioned a particular student as a language learner in a higher position of power than others, the position which the student accepted – as in the following example:

**Example 21**

S1: Teacher, qu'est-ce que c'est "la natation"?

T: Andrej, what is "la natation"?

S2: [addressing to the student who asked the question] It is swimming.

It is important to mention that the student to whom this identity position was *imposed* is one of the students who most often positioned himself as a language learner in a higher position of power than others. Obviously, even though the learner's identity is changeable, highly depending on the context and the interlocutor, some identity positions seemed to be more often occupied, or, in other words, some identity positions were more stable than others. It can therefore be concluded that the positioning *game* is reminiscent of a vicious cycle and we do not know where it all begins. In this case, was the student himself the first to position himself as a language learner in a higher position of power and the teacher accepted the *game*, or was it the teacher who decided to put the student in this position and the student subsequently accepted? Whatever the answer, the teacher remains the most responsible and powerful participant in the classroom, one who can create learning opportunities and inspire or discourage students in their perseverance and commitment in learning and using the target language.

### **Other Identity Positions**

It should be mentioned that many other identity positions have emerged during the study, associated with other communities of practice to which these students belong, as illustrated in the following examples:

**Example 22**

S: Teacher, how many subscribers does Joyce Jonathan have?

**Example 23**

S: Teacher, you have already asked me, but you did not ask Sofija.

In these two examples, one student positioned himself as a YouTuber and the other as someone's best friend. They did so in English and on their own

initiative, meaning that these positions were important to their social identity unrelated to the language classroom.

Furthermore, students at first glance often demonstrated multiple identity positions, as in the following examples:

**Example 24**

S1: Je n'aime pas le foot. / I don't like football.

S2: Really?! But football is so cool...

**Example 25**

T: Qu'est-ce que tu n'aimes à l'école? / What do you dislike about school?

S: To study.

In Example 24, student number 2 positioned himself as a football fan; furthermore, this language learner put himself in a reduced position of power. Even though he understood the utterance of student number 1 in French, he was not in a position of power to answer in French. However, he decided to participate in this discussion probably because it was important for him to position himself as a football fan. For the student in Example 25, it was important to resist the potential portrayal of himself as a "nerd". Since he was not in a position of power to answer in French, he replied in English.

The importance of authenticity in classroom participation is illustrated by the following example:

**Example 22**

T: Leo, qu'est-ce que tu manges? / Leo, what do you eat?

S: Je mange...what do I eat the most, or? / I eat... what do I eat the most, or?

In this example, Leo could have chosen the path of least resistance, and thus participate using words he knew in French. For example, he could offer the answer "pizza" and that would be linguistically accurate and acceptable in the context of classroom discourse. However, it was more important for him to participate truthfully, that is, to show *who he really was*.

## Conclusion

In this study, we advocated the idea that the identity of language learners is

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multiple, dynamic, discursively shaped, and dependent on context and community members. This idea was confirmed by our analysis.

The analysis of the data presented in this paper showed that the identity of language learners, with regard to the power relations in the language classroom, can be described as a dynamic combination of several identity positions: a language learner in a position of power, a language learner in a higher position of power than others, a language learner in a reduced position of power but eager for a position of power, and a language learner in a reduced position of power but not eager for a position of power.

The analysis also pointed to the importance of the role that other members of the community play in positioning and negotiating one's identity. Members who hold a more powerful position have more power to restrict access to other members in communication and, accordingly, their positioning.

They may also try to impose identity positions on other members. A member to whom an attempt has been made to impose an identity position may either choose to accept that position, resist it, or try to negotiate it. This study revealed that students resist or negotiate imposed identities, especially those that might be assessed as negative in the language community, such as the position of a learner not eager for a position of power. Those learners resisted using non-target languages because they were not proficient enough in the target language. Clearly, this finding points to the importance of nurturing the use of all communicative resources available to multilingual students. If we describe the teacher as the most responsible and powerful member of the foreign language classroom who shapes learning opportunities and inspires students to persevere in learning, in a multilingual classroom he/she is the one who should design and apply a teaching approach that would provide multilingual students with the greatest opportunities to participate and learn and thus enable them to increase their power. In order to do so, the teacher should know, understand and respect the life stories of his students, their socio-cultural background and their linguistic and non-linguistic resources, communities to which they belong outside the foreign language classroom, topics of interest, identity positions that are important to them, but also their desires and hopes. All linguistic and cultural resources of students should be considered as desirable and useful capital, resources for learning and

teaching, and not limiting factors. This is especially important in bilingual and multilingual educational environments, where the symbolic value of languages, determined by the ideology of the wider social space, is expressed in school policy and teaching approaches and can increase or decrease students' opportunities to participate.

It is also important to emphasise that participation in a language classroom is limited in time and number of students. This means that students who participate more often consequently occupy more space. In other words, students who participate more often limit the participation of others. What our research showed was that students who participated more often on a topic in the classroom on their own initiative, regardless of the language chosen, usually possessed more symbolic power in the community and, therefore, gained more power. Thus, a language classroom could be described as a place of struggle and reproduction of power, while classroom participation could be described as a struggle for power.

It is also important to highlight some of the limitations and ethical considerations of this study. First of all, the researcher encountered certain technical challenges. Namely, microphones were not intentionally used during the recording of classes to ensure the authenticity of the class discourse and to minimise the invasiveness of the research. However, due to this, it was not possible to analyse student discourse during group work. Due to the same limitation, it was not possible to analyse the students' whispering. On the other hand, the question of the ethics of the analysis of their whispering could also be raised. In this research, it was shown that, depending on the forms of participation, students express different combinations of their identity positions in classroom, and thus different foreign language identities. In future research, it would be interesting and important to explore the connection between the combinations of these positions and language skills, as well as students' perception of their agency.

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**DALYVAUJU, VADINASI, ESU (IR MOKAUSI):  
BESIMOKANČIŲJŲ DAUGIAKALBĖS TAPATYBĖS TYRIMAS  
DAUGIAKALBĖS MOKYKLOS KONTEKSTE**

**Santrauka.** Šiame tyrime analizuojamas ryšys tarp daugiakalbių mokinių, besimokančių prancūzų kaip papildomos kalbos, dalyvaujant pamokose elgesio ir kalbos besimokančiųjų tapatybės, susijusios su konkrečia kalbine bendruomene. Svarbiausia tyrimo sąvoka „dalyvavimas klasėje“ apibrėžiama kaip mokinio indėlio į kalbos mokymąsi žodinė forma, kuri gali apimti kalbos mokymąsi ir pakeisti kalbą besimokančiųjų tapatybę. Tyrimas atliktas vienoje Kroatijos tarptautinėje daugiakalbėje mokykloje; tyrimo dalyviai – aštuoni penktos klasės daugiakalbiai ir daugiakultūriai mokiniai, kurie mokosi prancūzų kalbos kaip papildomos. Duomenų rinkimo tikslais buvo išanalizuotos ir įrašytos prancūzų kalbos pamokos bei 12 vaizdo įrašų, kurių bendra trukmė apie 480 minučių. Atlikta kiekvieno mokinio dalyvavimo kokybinė analizė, siekiant nustatyti klasės narių statusą. Analizė parodė, jog iš pasirinktos teorinės perspektyvos, kai papildoma kalba suvokiama kaip priemonė naudoti galią ir naudotis galia, kalbą besimokančiųjų tapatybę galima apibūdinti kaip dinamišką tokių tapatybės pozicijų derinį: kalbos besimokantis galios pozicijoje; kalbos besimokantis aukštesnėje galios pozicijoje nei kiti; kalbos besimokantis žemesnėje galios pozicijoje, bet siekiantis galios pozicijos; kalbos besimokantis žemesnėje galios pozicijoje, bet nesiekiantis galios pozicijos. Šio tyrimo rezultatai sutampa su kitų socialinės krypties autorių pagrindinėmis prielaidomis apie antrosios kalbos mokymąsi (žr. Norton-Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko ir Blackledge, 2004; Darwin ir Norton, 2015), anot kurių, kalbą besimokančiųjų tapatybė yra sudėtinė, dinamiška, formuojama diskurso ir priklausanti nuo konteksto.

**Pagrindinės sąvokos:** kalbą besimokančiųjų tapatybė; indėlis; daugiakalbis kontekstas; dalyvavimas.