

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

This section will examine more closely the Critical Pedagogies, and their related “tools” and methodologies, which have both inspired and ideologically underpinned my research. With this perspective in mind, we are then able to explore the ways in which broader social forces, political and historical, have come to shape the production, dissemination, and legitimization of knowledge – most especially, of course, in regards to language and education. Finally, this overview of my theoretical framework will demonstrate how the employment of various epistemologies which focus on social processes of identification, and the educational theories which permit such complex processes to be accounted for, may be utilized by concerned critical pedagogues who strive to facilitate forms of education which ultimately encourage autonomous learners to reshape themselves, the field of language-learning, and ideally, the world.

2.1 Critical Pedagogy and TESOL

Most histories of Critical Pedagogy begin with Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s concerns for poverty, teaching literacy, and an education which ultimately allows its participants to attain liberation. However, drawing on the ideas of Marxism and the critical theorists, Freire was ever vigilant of the prescriptive processes which constituted such an education. In Freire’s words, “One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is *prescription*. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber’s consciousness” (2005: 46-47). From this, we can already see how processes of identification may be shaped or disrupted by education. Changing the messages a teacher delivers in the classroom to messages that are not seen as biased or oppressive, is not sufficient, because so often the classroom and Foucauldian power relations between the institution, teacher and student, are themselves the problem. Because discourses of TESOL often state (arguably *over-state*) the necessity of

learning English in order to become “literate” in the dominant modes of communication expected within a global marketplace, and because the wealthiest and most powerful countries prescribe the “right” kinds of language suitable for this global participation (Graddol, 2006) Freire’s original pedagogical concern with poverty, literacy, and an educational process wherein the learners “participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation” (2005, p. 48) is imminently relevant, though often sorely lacking, in the practice of TESOL.

However, the past couple decades have seen SLA research grow increasingly critical of the behavioral and cognitive psychological epistemologies which have historically shaped the field, and many researchers and theorists today emphasize the need for addressing the social and political complexity of language learning demanded by ever-changing learning contexts and conditions (Hall, 1995; Norton, 1995, 2007; Lantolf, 2000; Block, 2002; Canagarajah, 1999; Kramsch, 2007). Critical Pedagogy can be framed as an alternative approach capable of bringing together a criticism of mainstream TESOL practice with a passion for social justice and a willingness to adopt new, even radical, methodologies and epistemologies.

2.1.1 Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Freire’s best known work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (originally published in 1970), lays out a model for education which departs radically from the hierarchical, uni-directional oppressive modes of education, and conceives of its learners as more than empty depositories for cherry-picked knowledge. Indeed, a chief goal of Freire’s pedagogy is the humanizing of its participants into authentic beings with voices and power in the real world – in other words, he conceived as learners as co-constructing their own knowledge in their own social context. Freire’s scathing model of the traditional process of education is what he terms “banking education,” because here knowledge is deposited, by the teacher, into empty receptacles: students. In this model, according to Freire:

- (a) The teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- (b) The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing
- (c) The teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) The teacher talks and the students listen – meekly;
- (e) The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;

- (h) The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (j) The teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. (2005, p. 73).

Banking education, then, assumes knowledge does not require active construction or participation from its learners.

Because Freire grew up in peasant community “which he intimately understood as informing his central identity,” (Malott, 2011, p. 140) his focus on the poverty and suffering which stem from the imperialist tendencies of global capitalism pushes well beyond the theoretical. Freire specifically details his pedagogy of the oppressed as featuring two distinct stages: “In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation” (2005, p. 54). It is probably fair to say, going by this definition, that many TESOL practitioners are still struggling to achieve the first stage.

Achieving this first stage requires changing one’s perceptions of the world, in order to better see how and why power and knowledge are positioned as they are. It is stressed that this requires a continual effort, and may be aided by processes of critical reflection or critical consciousness (or as Freire called it, *conscientização*). For Freire, the perpetual need for this critical awareness is necessary for both learners and teachers. For learners, it is necessary because, having internalized the values and power structures of their oppressors, they “almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle [...] instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors” (Freire, p. 45). Freire is very careful to make clear that this awareness is not something which can simply be taught, or given, to the learners. Rather, to become more fully human requires an authentic struggle to transform which an educator may only hope to help facilitate through problem-posing and dialogue.

But critical consciousness is necessary for teachers as well. Reminiscent of Oscar Wilde’s famous quotation: “the worst slave-owners were those who were kind to their slaves,” Freire cautions against the “false generosity” brought to learners by teachers who “attempt to ‘soften’ the power of the oppressor” (2005, p. 44). In other

words, approaching our learners with the best of intentions from within systems of education which may be deemed coercive, destructive to their sense of identity or discriminative, only contributes to, and reproduces, the problem at hand. Regarding teachers who make realizations of their complicity in such acts, Freire says: “Discovering himself to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish, but it does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed. [...] Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture.” (Freire, p. 49). McLaren argues Freire’s “radical” praxis should be taken as true radicalism, and that Freire was influenced heavily by the theories and actions of Che Guevara (McLaren 2000). Indeed, Freire repeatedly stresses the uselessness of an awareness of oppression without subsequent action, whether grassroots or revolutionary, being taken. “In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. This perception is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for liberation; it must become the motivating force for liberating action” (Freire, p. 49).

During later discussions of the processes of identification which TESOL encourages, these themes will recur, as many NNES-learners may reject progressive educational theories which encourage classroom autonomy, just as many NES-teachers often relate most comfortably with Freire’s pedagogy from positions securely placed within institutions that perpetuate discrimination.

2.1.2 Critical Pedagogy as Social Justice and Activism

Though Freire or Giroux are the oft-cited and celebrated starting points for critical pedagogy’s usual narrative, Malott (2011) interestingly traces the ideas back much further, noting that “critical pedagogy emerged from a long historical legacy of radical social thought and progressive educational movements” (113). Malott therefore begins his in-depth history of CP with the revolutionary Arawak resistance against Columbus, “because [Columbus’] legacy defines the brutality and barbarism of the contemporary, Euro-centric capitalist present” (2011, p. 114). Beginning his discussion with historical resistances against power also sets a good example of a hidden curriculum by comparing the often heroic accounts of American “forefathers” in textbooks with their actual legacies of genocide, human trafficking and perpetuation of class and gender hierarchies (well documented, for example, in Zinn, 1980).

Malott, in fact, considers many historic and organized struggles against hegemonic forces to be examples of critical pedagogies, and terms what recognized

proponents of the field, such as Kincheloe or Giroux, write about, as “*academic critical pedagogy*.” This is seen as keeping in the spirit of Freire’s original conception, which had radical intentions and aimed, as its second goal, for social transformation. This also comfortably aligns with postcolonial criticisms of TESOL (Motha, 2006; Pennycook, 1998, 2002; Canagarajah, 2005) which find that policies embedded within the field “frequently serve as a breeding ground for epistemologies and constructs that support colonial-like relationships” (Motha, 2006, p. 76) including a deep division between native and non-native English speaker identity (Pennycook, 1998).

For the present research, it is my intention to use critical pedagogy in this broad and historical sense, as any pedagogy which criticizes dominant discourses and epistemologies while maintaining a passion and concern with issues of justice and discrimination, deserves to be called critical.

2.2 Knowledge Production and Institutionalization

While Freire and his influences, such as Gramsci or Che Guevara, were living in environments and times where oppression was violent, suffering was graphically visible and actual revolution and uprising always possible, the oppression exerted by contemporary global capitalism, corporatization and neoliberalism are far more ideological and covert in nature (Phillipson, 1992). However, educational theorists such as Michael Apple (1990), Henry Giroux, from whom the actual term “critical pedagogy” originated, (1981) and Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) drew on Freire, as well as other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (often postmodern or post-structural), to begin conceptualizing a critical pedagogy more capable of addressing discrimination and other less visible social forces, often while articulating an interest in the politics of identity.

In *Deschooling Society* (1971), Ivan Illich exposes the “hidden curriculum” that he argues is hosted by compulsory public schooling, which:

“initiates the citizen to the myth that bureaucracies guided by scientific knowledge are efficient and benevolent. Everywhere this same curriculum instills in the pupil the myth that increased production will provide a better life. And everywhere it develops the habit of self-defeating consumption of services and alienating production, the tolerance for institutional dependence, and the recognition of institutional rankings” (1971: chapter 6, para. 8).

One point he makes here is that knowledge, as passed down in school, is itself socially constructed and often embedded in historical structures that tend to serve Capital and the status quo through the socialization of its participants. Education itself is an inherently political process (particularly when encouraged or mandated by governments) and, as Reagan and Osborne maintain: “efforts to present it [education] as objective or neutral are not only misguided but fundamentally misleading and even dangerous” (2002, p. 28). Through institutional “schooling” (or other forms of public institutionalization) this loaded information eventually becomes normatized to its learners, who are never taught to question it nor to question the reason for why they’re being taught it (often in compulsory contexts in which repetition of these facts is said to award them points which will, in turn, award them better positions within the capitalist undertaking that the public schools emerged from). Bowles and Gintis similarly criticize schooling from a decidedly Marxist perspective, arguing that schools reproduce hegemony by socializing students from working-class families into working-class jobs, and so on (1976).

Gatto traces the template for the educational system imported to the United States in the early 19th century to a Prussian military state’s strategy originally designed expressly to standardize the citizenry of a country and put down dissent, claiming “the Prussian system was useful in creating not only a harmless electorate and a servile labor force but also a virtual herd of mindless consumers” (2009, p. xx). Lest this seem like 20/20 hindsight, educators should be aware that our basic template for education, which we continue to operate under today and have by now exported to most of the world (sometimes by force) – was criticized even upon its arrival in the US. Investigative journalist Upton Sinclair, well-known for his criticism of the meat-packing industry in *The Jungle* (1906) and of the de-skilling effect that industrialized labor has on its workers in *The Flivver King* (1937) (both problems that remain at large a century later), wrote a lesser-known work criticizing the plutocratic educational system which was recently made compulsory in America, thereby robbing families of labor and children of a more personalized apprenticeship at home. In *The Goose-Step* (1923 – the title is in reference to the way in which students shuffled to school in rank and file), Sinclair claims “Our educational system is not a public service, but an instrument of special privilege; its purpose is not to further the welfare of mankind, but merely to keep America capitalist” (18). Illich echoes the sentiment in *Deschooling Society* (1971), accusing compulsory educational institutions of segregating humans, constructing a concept of “childhood” that is historically unlike anything imagined prior, and of accomplishing very little other than convincing the public that more schools and more education are needed. The following quotes from Illich illustrate a radical, critical interpretation of general education, for the hidden curriculum which it imparts on its forced attendees:

“We cannot go beyond the consumer society unless we first understand that obligatory public schools inevitably reproduce such a society, no matter what is taught in them.” (1971: chapter 3, para. 13)

“School initiates, too, the Myth of Unending Consumption. This modern myth is grounded in the belief that process inevitably produces something of value and, therefore, production necessarily produces demand. School teaches us that instruction produces learning. The existence of schools produces the demand for schooling. Once we have learned to need school, all our activities tend to take the shape of client relationships to other specialized institutions. Once the self-taught man or woman has been discredited, all nonprofessional activity is rendered suspect. In school we are taught that valuable learning is the result of attendance; that the value of learning increases with the amount of input; and, finally, that this value can be measured and documented by grades and certificates.” (1971: chapter 3, para. 15).

2.2.1 Kincheloe and FIDUROD

A basic principle of the aspiring critical pedagogue is therefore to uncover the hidden curriculum, to question cultures and knowledges being taught or imposed, behavioristic agendas and institutional or scientific claims of neutrality or objectivity in the production of the knowledge or routines being dispersed. But not all examples of hidden curriculums are deliberately coercive – some by-products of education can be imagined as accidental, or at least as being disseminated without consciousness by otherwise good-hearted instructors (whether or not there is anyone at the top who *is* consciously guiding and prodding the underlings). As Kincheloe points out (2008), much of the knowledge in the world today regarded as valuable and rewarded with legitimacy is situated in a mechanistic, positivistic epistemology. This criticism of the legitimization of knowledge is found often in postmodern and post-structural epistemologies, such as those espoused by Foucault, Derrida or Deleuze. This privileging of “scientific” knowledge and methodology is especially true in mainstream schooling, where “the way data is chosen for inclusion in the curriculum to modes of evaluation on standardized tests” is arrived at through so-called neutral and objective processes (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 22), or mandated formulas for the writing of acceptable research. Kincheloe characterizes and criticizes this knowledge with the acronym FIDUROD, standing for: Formal, Intractable, Decontextualized, Universalistic, Reductionistic, and One Dimensional, and argues:

“FIDUROD supports an education where the ability to conceptualize has little to do with culture, power or discourse, or the tacit understandings unconsciously shaped by them. Moreover, from this reductionistic perspective the curriculum becomes merely a body of finalized knowledge to be transferred to the minds of students. More critical observers may contend that this is a naïve view, but the naïveté is recognizable only if knowledge formation is understood as a complex and ambiguous social activity. The human mind is more than a mirror of nature. A critical complex epistemology assumes that the mind creates rather than reflects, and the nature of this creation cannot be separated from the surrounding social world.” (2008, p. 28).

Rejecting the mandate for knowledge produced by FIDUROD, Kincheloe has instead suggested rigorous forms of *bricolage* (2004) and names researchers who adopt such methods *bricoleurs* (a French word for a handyman who makes use of the tools available to complete a task). “Appreciating research as a power-driven act, the researcher-as-bricoleur abandons the quest for some naïve concept of realism, focusing instead on the clarification of his or her position in the web of reality and the social locations of other researchers and the ways they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge.” (2004, p. 2). This research methodology is intended to have the opposite effect of FIDUROD, to be grounded in context, to allow specificity and individual difference rather than generalization, to problematize taken-for-granted certainties, acknowledge complexity, and to embrace a plurality of voices rather than a purported single truth. Bricoleurs and critical pedagogues are also encouraged to turn to indigenous, non-western or otherwise unrecognized schools of knowledge (Reagan, 2005).

A *bricoleur* with interest in the issues of critical pedagogy and social justice has plenty of methods and tools at his or her disposal. The task is to “uncover the hegemonic veil that renders one unable to comprehend the philosophy behind the practice of modern, capitalist, Euro-centric practices, and perspectives,” as Malott puts it (2011:82), and to “disrupt the basic structures of power that are the root cause of human suffering and a neoliberal imperialist global order” (Malott, p. 109). To maximize the outcomes of this aim, a *bricoleur*, or critical pedagogue, can rely on a plurality of voices and subjectivities, ask how and why information became validated knowledge, search for hidden curricula, and maximize variables rather than attempting to reduce or generalize. Focusing on an ungeneralized, specific context or subjectivities then, may uncover forces of oppression previously assumed to be natural or taken-for-granted. With these values in mind, I now turn to an overview of how mainstream TESOL, as influenced by traditional educational psychology, has historically conceived of individual difference.

2.3 Traditional Understandings of Individual Difference

Since the prominence of audio-lingual theory which, according to Griffiths, gave “little or no recognition [...] to any conscious contribution which the individual learner might make in the learning process” (2004, p. 6), the idea of acknowledging differences amongst learners has obviously gained favor. Surely this occurred, in part, because of the practical observation that different learners seem to be more or less effective at learning languages, regardless of having undergone similar conditions, experiences, teachers or lessons. However, mainstream TESOL has traditionally approached individual difference from behavioral and cognitive psychological perspectives, often without concern for processes of identification that interact with broader social forces and external context.

In Hedge’s short chapter on individual differences amongst learners, she identifies aptitude, learning style/learning strategies, affective factors and motivation as examples of these differences (Hedge, 2000). Many of these attributes are based on the cognitive psychology of the 60s, 70s and 80s (itself a reaction to the behaviourist psychology that preceded it and was influential in the development of audio-lingual theory). Other factors we might add to the list include the distinctions Hadley makes between how people “sense things differently,” process information differently (cognitive style), and prefer learning with others or by themselves (2001, p. 76), as well as research which explores the effects of belonging to different cultures on learning an L2, or even an L1 (Hinenova and Gatbonton, 2000; Gopnik, 2001), and investigations into the various motivations or “language attitudes” that can influence the rate of learning (Gardner and Lambert, 1959; Dörnyei, 2008). If we are still not satisfied, checklists of “language strategies” detail numerous additional behaviors which, in the authors’ words, “can help you master a new language” (Cohen, Oxford and Chi, 2005: 1). The pedagogical implications are noble, as generally the stated purpose of identifying such variation is presumably, as Hedge puts it, “to ‘enable’ each learner according to his or her individual characteristics and cultural background,” (2000: 24).

Most of the above-mentioned attributes, aspects or styles of individuals are influenced, as is much of twentieth-century linguistics and language-acquisition, by the fields of behaviourist, social and cognitive psychology. Though these fields in some cases radically differ from each other, they are all associated with psychometric analysis and modeling. This includes a preoccupation with constructing componential categories of the mind or self, such as “aptitude,” then assessing and measuring an individual’s possession of these categories based on tools such as questionnaires, created by the researchers specifically for the purpose. As discussed in Chapter 1, this has created certain assumptions about language-learning that, even while being

rejected by more and more researchers, continue to underscore both professional and public understandings of language. Therefore, “enabling” students by discovering their styles or aptitudes or by essentializing their cultures ultimately resembles Freire’s banking education, only with the admission that each “bank” has its “slot” located in a different place, so the good banker better be familiar with a number of models.

An especially egregious example, “aptitude,” usually defined as a static attribute which cannot be trained and is independent of previous language learning experiences (Skehan, 1998) is problematic for several reasons, not least its attempt to predict whether someone would be able to learn before they’ve even tried, and the detrimental effects this could have on one’s sense of agency and motivation. Though seemingly focused on the individual learner, the idea of “aptitude” is certainly more beneficial to the psychologists discussing the presumably abnormal object of their case-study behind one-way mirrors. It in no way connects the individual to history, context or social forces, and is in no way instrumental or useful for the world’s language-learners (i.e. the majority of the world). Moreover, if aptitude is described as something intangible and unreducible which allows learners to learn faster or easier than others, we should at least consider that, in this case, finding results which show aptitude as a predictor of success (Kiss and Nikolov, 2005) seems circular and redundant – a bit like “discovering” that people who possess “highly attractive characteristics” are then seen as “attractive” by others.

Language motivation provides the field with one of its first examples of a (however primitive) model for identity. Gardner and Lambert’s famous work (1959) is a touchstone of motivation theory which, at a time when “aptitude” was considered the best predictor of achievement, demonstrated that intergroup attitudes and motives could equally influence achievement. This opened the field to social psychology and evolved into the SE (socio-educational) model of second language learning (Macintyre, Mackinnon and Clément, 2009: 44). Instrumental motivation, or the desire to learn a language for professional or financial or academic reasons, was seen as playing a part in the learner’s achievement but integrative motivation was seen as a stronger impetus. Integrative motivation is “defined by attitudes reflecting a genuine desire to meet, communicate with, take on characteristics of, and possibly identify with another group” (Macintyre, Mackinnon and Clément, p. 44). This model continues to loom large over many theories in L2 learning. In Gardner’s schematic representation of the integrative motive, “integrativeness” and “attitudes toward the learning situation” point directly to “motivation” which points, in turn, to “language achievement” (Gardner, 2001). There are, of course, a few other boxes scattered off to the side such as “language aptitude” and “other factors” which also feed into the end result, but it is clear that the process is systematic, linear, and ready for generalization. These constructs continue to be taken up by researchers in motivation

theory and factor heavily, for example, in Dörnyei's own model which, however many boxes, is no less linear than Gardner's (Dörnyei, 2009).

While motivation theory has opened the door for much of the more transgressive and socially-bent styles of research and methodology which focus on complexity and identity, it still smacks of the circularity of which I accused "aptitude" of having, and it still seems most useful for banker-teachers fumbling around to find the correct slots through which to insert their knowledge. Moreover, the implicit favoring of "integrative" motivation, especially when considered in today's globalized contexts (which are admittedly different than they were when the terms were coined), sets up the positioning of NES as goal and suggests something "non-genuine" about any motivation which refrains from integration. This is a hidden agenda which TESOL often propagates, resulting in the vast difference between native and non-native identity.

2.4 The Social Turn in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Critiques on these system-approaches to identity from what Block identifies as a social turn in second language acquisition (2003) include the argument that these schematics of boxes and arrows tend to centralize the static learner while making social contexts into either external variables that feed into the result without some theory of interaction, or by measuring nothing more than the individual's attitudes about social context rather than including the context itself. The aim is usually at best to uncover psychological rules that will explain how context affects motivation or language learning (much like predicting the motion of the stars), rather than to actually explore the dynamic complexity of socially-situated meaning-making. These systems likewise often assume the various affective factors which compose a learner's motivation are like binary switches – for example, a person either has a positive outlook to the target community or not. Ushioda, against the predictions such models would make, cites the example of a boy who learned English, self-reportedly, to spite a native-speaking ex-girlfriend – quite the opposite of *integrating* (Ushioda, 2009). Accepting such constructs, especially those intended to explain cultural difference, also runs the risk of essentializing the cultures we mean to observe. Ushioda argues "we need to understand second language learners as people, and as people who are necessarily located in particular cultural and historical contexts" (2009: 216). Leather and van Dam also call for more "deictic, pragmatic and ethnographic" data, in order to better observe a process that is "socially constructed and often dynamically negotiated on a moment-by-moment basis" (2003, p. 13).

2.4.1 Sociological Conceptions of Identity

Sociologist Richard Jenkins, criticizes psychological conceptions of “identity” for their attempts to accurately model unconscious processes which cannot be shown to exist. “Although conscious rationality isn’t the sum total of the human ‘mind’ – we dream, we forget and remember stuff, our decision-making can be intuitive and elusive, we improvise as we go along, our emotions are powerful, control of what we are doing isn’t always possible and so on – the existence of a mental territory called ‘the unconscious’ is epistemologically and ontologically problematic” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 52). The perspective of identity he presents, which he begrudgingly admits to being pressured by publishers into calling “social identity,” argues that:

- with respect to identification, the individually unique and the collectively shared can be understood as similar in important respects;
- the individual and the collective are routinely entangled with each other;
- individual and collective identifications only come into being within interaction;
- the processes by which each is produced and reproduced are analogous;
- the theorization of identification must therefore accommodate the individual and the collective in equal measure.

(Jenkins, pp. 37-38)

Jenkins argues that “all human identities are, by definition, *social* identities,” (Jenkins, p. 17) and that to theorize identity in any other way is to risk objectifying it, labeling it as something that is “just there,” rather than something which must always be established. Identification is a constructive process by which we create meaning, and this meaning requires interaction, whether actual social interaction or simply interaction with convention and popular discourse. This careless inattention to process and reflection and meaning-making is at best, reductionist, but risks the kind of essentialization and labeling which results in real-life marginalization, stereotyping and discrimination.

2.4.2 Sociocultural Theory and SLA

This sociological approach to understanding identity is influenced by the interactional perspectives of early American social theorists such as Dewey, Mead, and especially the social-constructivist theories of Vygotsky, whom Kincheloe labels

“a central figure in the development of critical psychology, a critical learning theory that can be employed in a critical pedagogy,” (Kincheloe, 2008b, p. 67). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory can be summarized, according to Johnson, by three interrelated major tenets:

1. the developmental analysis of mental processes;
2. the social origin of human mental processes; and
3. the role of sign systems in the development of human higher mental functions (Johnson, 2004: 105)

Vygotsky’s sociocultural model of psychology is critical of the popular psychological schools of his day, and favored dialectical approaches which concentrated on process rather than experimental approaches which focused on product. As explicated by his theoretical “zone of proximal development,” Vygotsky was more interested in the socially-mitigated potential level of development, rather than the current, or so-called “actual” level. Nor do Vygotsky’s “sign systems” precede the social interaction which constructs and applies them.

It is this sociological conceptualization of identity which more closely resembles the post-structuralist approaches that TESOL researchers such as Bonnie Norton called for SLA research to adopt in the 90s (Norton, 1995). Norton’s argument was critical of the absence of context in then-popular views of language learning (such as the enormously influential ramblings of Krashen), and her ideal conceptualization of identity was one which “integrates the language learner and the language learning context” as well as questioning how “relations of power in the social world affect social interaction between second language learners and target language speakers” (Norton, 1995, p. 12). By problematizing the existence of assumed dichotomous distinctions between learners and contexts, we can comfortably fit Norton’s approach into the broad definition of a critical pedagogy, which seeks to unveil hidden assumptions and challenge certainties. Similar post-structuralist perspectives in language-learning and education demonstrate critical concerns with identity (Lantolf, 2000; Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004; Block, 2007; Norton, 2000; Johnson, 2004). Key concepts, in such perspectives, include Foucault-like relations of power and regimes of truth (Foucault, 1990), symbolic and cultural capital as conceptualized by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977), and imagined socially-constructed identities, such as in Anderson (1983).

Influenced by Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, Donato (1998) revealed that “scaffolding” provided by fellow learners was about as useful as the scaffolding provided by experts (such as NESs). Johnson affirms these findings, saying “scaffolded help does not need to be created by the experts; it can be provided by the learners themselves” (Johnson, 2004, p. 131). Kramsch, also influenced by

Vygotsky, argues that “we learn language not by memorizing arbitrary linguistic shapes and sounds and then putting them to use in goal-oriented activities, but rather, we primarily engage in social activities like schooling, shopping, conducting conversations, responding to teacher’s questions” (Kramsch, 2000, p. 134). Such activities are mitigated by a range of semiotic or material “signs” such as expressions, gestures, and sounds. These interactions and signs play an active part in the processes of reflection which make awareness and the construction of knowledge possible, and are likewise able to reshape past assumptions (thereby, in some sense, transforming ourselves). Other SLA theorists influenced by Vygotsky have argued for social-interactive learning to be framed by an “ecological perspective” (van Lier, 2000; Leather and van Dam, 2003). According to van Lier: “Ecological educators see language and learning as relationships among learners and between learners and the environment” (2000, p. 258).

2.5 Why does Identity Matter in TESOL?

By exploring post-structuralist, sociological constructs of identity as multiple, transforming, often-contradictory products of desire that are always contextualized by their backgrounds and environments, what can we learn about TESOL or its practitioners?

2.5.1 Postcolonialism and Native-speakerism

First, plenty of research grounded in historical and political contexts have discovered the colonialist epistemologies still present in our everyday TESOL classrooms (Pennycook, 1998; Motha, 2006; Canagarajah, 2005; Phillipson, 1992). By exploring the close ties between the expansion of English-learning and a colonial legacy, Phillipson has argued that the dominant discourses of language-learning methodologies forms a linguistic imperialism, intended to strengthen the case to make English-teaching an enterprise which always requires power from the “centre” – the countries which speak English “natively.” Furthermore, these discourses have produced dehumanizing policies which go unquestioned by many practitioners in the field, such as banning students from using their “mother tongues” in the English classroom. Approaching TESOL from the perspectives of critical pedagogy may help

expose which institutional and classroom policies are rooted in colonialist epistemologies.

Even countries which have not been colonized, such as Japan, can be victim to the methodologies developed through colonial legacies. English teaching and learning contexts are often filled examples of what Holliday (2005) calls “native-speakerism,” which he defines as “an established belief that ‘native-speaker’ teachers represent a ‘Western culture’ from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology” (6). Real-life results of this positioning of NES as norm and goal for English learners includes discrimination in virtually every process of employment, from becoming qualified, to application requirements, to the possibility of being hired, to the rate of pay and job security.

Though the topic has been discussed extensively over recent years (Phillipson 1992; Pennycook 1998; Canagarajah 2005; Jenkins, 2000), it is still normal to assume the dichotomy of NES/NNES is a natural category, or at least a helpful distinction to make. However, this assumption has been problematized increasingly as globalization in our modern world has rendered “foreign others” as less and less “foreign,” and transformed the English language into a mode of communication that stretches far past its utility in interactions with native-speakers. The NES/NNES distinction, aside from the de-motivational affects it can have on practical classroom learning (which I believe is enormous), and the politically questionable connotations of labeling such a large swath of invested human-beings with the prefix “Non,” suggests a few additional assumptions which I would specifically like to further explore in Chapter 4, being:

1. NESs are the norm.

Hall puts it nicely when discussing Gender Theory: “classification systems are always hierarchical. Heterosexual/Homosexual, White/non-White, male/female exist as binary pairings in which the first term of the binary is the norm and value-generating term against which the second is judged and found to be inferior and lacking. [...] Claims of objectivity, both scientific and social scientific, always mask a thorough, even if unwitting, imbrication of the sciences within the value systems of a given time and place” (Hall, 2006, p. 106). And yet, both in terms of realistic demographics to whom such terms could matter, and even more importantly, in terms of the number of practitioners in TESOL, the opposite value, NNES, is overwhelmingly the statistical “norm.” Canagarajah finds that about 80% of English language teachers in the world are non-native English-speaking teachers (2005).

2. People speak languages either natively or non-natively.

Because monolingualism is normatized by the same structures and institutions which normatize the NES model, we tend to be skeptical of English being spoken outside monolingual settings. As Jenkins (2000) points out: “The term [native-speaker] fails to recognize that many varieties of English in outer circle countries, such as Singapore, are spoken not only as official languages but also in the home [...] it ignores the fact that English is often one of several languages available in the repertoires of the multilingual populations of, for example, Indian and African countries. In such contexts, it is often difficult to ascertain which language is a person’s L1 and which their L2” (8-9).

3. NESs have ownership of English

A recurrent joke in Linguistics, often (and possibly erroneously) attributed to Max Weinreich goes: “The difference between a language and a dialect is who’s got the army and navy.” Some pairs of “languages” have mutual intelligibility (Thai and Laotian, Finish and Estonian) while other languages cannot be understood even by others said to speak the same language. What comprises a “language” is often a complicated and political matter. The political fallback and feelings of identity invested in language can be seen in the current controversy in Moldova, where the 2013 declaration of independence states that the Romanian language, indistinguishable from Moldovan apart from expected regional differences, is the new official language. This stands to change nothing in policy nor day-to-day life apart from the name of the language they speak, and yet has caused much contention.

Responding to the question, “How many Romance languages are there?” Posner commented that: “An answer to this question that has been slightly labeled *sancta simplicitas* is that there is only one: the languages are all alike enough to be deemed dialects of the same language. Another equally disingenuous answer might be “thousands”—of distinctive local varieties—or “millions”—of individual idiolects.” (1996: p. 189). Languages are often grouped together then, to symbolize political and historical agendas, and the act of dismissing or delegitimizing languages has political consequences. Reagan and Osborne argue that “by challenging the legitimacy of particular languages [...] we in essence

denigrate and even reject the speaker communities of their languages, their cultures, and their worlds” (2002, p. 49). Indeed, it was with the codification and standardization of English and other European languages, a phenomenon that roughly emerged with Enlightenment ideals and the rise of industry, that languages came to symbolize and unify national identities, thereby constructing the very notion of the “non-native” (Graddol, 2006, p. 18). As nations lose their power to other structures that are more global in nature, such as corporations, institutions, and international communities of interest achieved by modern technology, the blurring of the lines that demarcate NES/NNES will continue rapidly. For me, this begs the question – at what point does the common Thai phrase “same same” to describe two things being the same, cease being considered a “mistake” and instead become a popular expression within the mainstream variety of Thai-English?

4. Native-English speakers make better teachers.

If NES’s truly *did* speak a purer, more legitimate form of the language, we could argue that even if they were poor teachers, it would be useful to have them in the classroom, simply as a model. The alternative is to agree with Widdowson when he maintains: “How English develops in the world is no business whatever of native-speakers in England, the United States or anywhere else [...] It is not a possession which they lease out to others, while still retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it.” (cited Holliday, 2005, p. 8).

And though many people do learn English in order to travel to English-speaking countries and chat about the weather, the majority of learners today need English to communicate internationally. Graddol (2006) found that the great majority of human interactions in traveling abroad do not involve a NES (29). Being then that Native-English speakers have no claim to the language, do not speak a more legitimate form of the language, and often do not even factor into the reasons why NNES’s want to learn English in the first place, it seems that local teachers may be more instrumental in language education. Canagarajah (2005), among others, has argued succinctly for the importance of “local knowledge [that] is context-bound, community-specific and nonsystematic because it is generated ground-up through social practice in everyday life” (4).

5. Language is unrelated to Human Rights

The last point I would like to make on the topic of native-speakerism is one that Phillipson (1992) makes well. The monolingual/NES model of learning often assumes that English should be taught without classroom interference from other languages, the earlier the better, and preferably at as great an exposure time as possible. Aside from this belief relying on unproven assumptions concerning language-learning, it is framed on colonialist tenets written with the explicit intentions of subjugating foreign others. By this point in my argument, it is clear that many English-learners do not intend to become “native-speakers,” and that whatever use they get from English in their futures will certainly be in conjunction with their alternating use of other languages. Therefore not allowing them to switch languages during classroom activities with their peers is not only impractical to their goals and unrealistic to the way English is actually spoken in the majority of the world, it is denying them opportunity to freely construct their own languages in their own voices. Such classroom management techniques were not benevolently created in order to foster students’ linguistic development, rather they were used as tools to manage and control by teachers who were afraid of being unable to understand what was being said behind their backs.

2.5.2 Identity and Desire and Transformation

The sociological, post-structural conceptualization of identity is always an active process of identification with specific roles, communities and positions as possible target-identities for an individual to strive toward. The field of language socialization sees the novice learner’s progression in language-learning as an apprenticeship into a community of practice (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1979; Wenger, 1998). Kramsch argues for the need of a theory which can unite the “learner-as-computer” metaphor of language-learning (such as those based on the behavioral and psychological models discussed above) with the “learner-as-apprentice” i.e. “socialization” metaphor (2002, p. 2).

Pavlenko and Norton (2005), relying on ideas inspired by Wenger’s communities of practice and Anderson’s “imagined communities” (1991), suggest that the desired roles/identities which the learner strives to become may be actual or *imagined*. When conducting their own research on identity within the context of English-learning, they conceptualized learning as “a process of becoming, or avoiding

becoming a certain person, rather than a simple accumulation of skills and knowledge” (Pavlenko and Norton, 2005, p. 590) and identified five “identity clusters that have relevance to English as an international language: (a) postcolonial, (b) global, (c) ethnic, (d) multilingual, and (e) gendered identities” (Pavlenko and Norton, 2005: 591). In each of these contexts, English, and the identities and subjectivities which it makes available, can be imagined in different ways, and desired in different ways. Elsewhere, Norton (drawing on Bourdieu) argues that learners *invested* in acquiring a second language, “do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital” (Norton Pierce, 1995, p. 17). This is seen as different from Gardner’s instrumental motivation, in that it conceives the learner as having “a complex social identity and multiple desires” (pp. 17-18).

Masny argues that subjectivity, difference, desire, and becoming are intimately related to *creative* processes of learning, and that *becoming* may produce the individual in *untimely* – that is, unpredictable – ways (2006). This is paradigmatically linked to the postmodern models of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who, in stark contrast to the “learner-as-computer” models of learning, present the model of the *rhizome*. “A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles,” (1987, p. 6), “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order,” (Masny, p. 7), “a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (Masny, p. 7). This is similar thematically to an ecological approach to understanding learning (van Lier, 2000; Leather and van Dam, 2003) whereby the environment and learner coexist inextricably. In van Lier’s conceptualization of an ecological situating between learner and environment, he makes use of a construct borrowed from Gibson: the *affordance*. According to van Lier, the affordance refers to “a reciprocal relationship between an organism and a particular feature of its environment [...] an affordance is a particular property of the environment that is relevant – for good or for ill – to an active, perceiving organism in that environment. An affordance affords further action (but does not cause or trigger it). What becomes an affordance depends on what the organism does, what it wants, and what is useful for it” (2000, p. 252).

This postmodern, post-structural model of identity and transformation is helpful for its acknowledging of complexity, powerful social structures, and imagination. It allows a conceptualization of identity which can *become other*, and do so in unexpected, uncharted, untimely ways. It also provides the helpful constructs of *investment*, *affordance*, *imagined community* and the model of the *rhizome*. These concepts can be employed in rich, qualitative analysis of learners interacting with their multiple contexts and desires.

2.6 Conclusion

I have argued so far that engaging in critical pedagogy requires first, the cultivation of an *awareness* of the broader forces which invisibly construct the institutions and schools we participate in, and of examining the knowledge we are taught, or asked to teach. Where does it come from? What is its historical and political context? And who benefits from its dissemination? I have also argued that through the process of the institutional privileging or legitimization of certain kinds of knowledge (such as those which derive from Kincheloe's FIDUROD, or from various psychological psychometric schemes), a focus on individual subjectivities and identities and their relation to specific, historical, political contexts, has often been lost in social science research, including the educational and linguistic research which informs TESOL. By exploring post-structuralist, sociological constructs of identity as multiple, transforming, often-contradictory products of desire that are always contextualized by their backgrounds and environments, we can see that processes of identification can and do have real consequences, ranging from self-actualized transformation to labeling and marginalization from others.