

## NEGOTIATING SOCIAL IDENTITY THROUGH QUESTIONS IN CASUAL CONVERSATIONS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

Questioning is a potential means to establish identity in social interaction, and thus it helps position oneself in relation to others. However, this relationship between question and social identity remains relatively under-explored in the theoretical territory (Kao & Weng, 2012; Tracy & Naughton, 1994). This paper contributes to this area of inquiry by employing critical discourse analysis in investigating the construction and negotiation of social identity through questions. Data are drawn from four sets of casual conversations I conducted with two native and two non-native speakers of English. Two stages of analysis are carried out. Firstly, I present and distribute the questioning patterns that emerge from the conversation. Secondly, I analyse the questioning process and its relation to the negotiation of social identity. Findings and discussion reveal that social identity is multiple: as a site of struggle and subject to change. The negotiation of identity through questions is evident from the emerging patterns of the length of interrogative form, repetitive questions, and the intensity of social control.

**Keywords:** question; social identity; critical discourse analysis; casual conversation

When I meet someone new, how do I relate myself to them? Do I converse the same way? How do I establish myself in relation to others? How do I negotiate my place in a new social order? Questions such as these prompted the impetus of this article to explore the ways I relate myself with others or the ways I establish my identity in casual conversation. In addition, this article demonstrates the value of adopting critical discourse analysis (CDA) to study social identity.

Social identity matters because it is the awareness of identifying and positioning oneself in relation to others, only then an interaction occurs (McCarthy & Birr Moje, 2002). Particularly as a language learner, social identity is the struggle of *negotiating* 'a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time' mediated by language, which in turn contributes to enable or inhibit the language learning (Norton, 1995: 13). Although there are many observable language features generated in a casual conversation, such as speech acts, intonation, discourse markers, and turn taking; this article focuses on the question (which I posed during the conversations).

Question is a potential means to *negotiate*, thus it is a possible means to constitute, represent, and perform social identity in casual conversation (Banda, 2005; Fairclough 1989; Goody 1978; Wang, 2006). More specifically, interrogatives or questions are tools to take control of conversation and even to terminate the discussion (Banda, 2005; Eggs & Slade, 1997).

My intention is therefore explicit – to analyse my own construction and negotiation of social identity in four sets of conversation with

interlocutors having different backgrounds: a male non-native (NN), a female NN, a male (NS) native speaker, and a female (NS) of English. More specifically, this article wants to explore the ways I question in four sets of casual conversation (whether I question in the same or different way) and reflect on that questioning behaviour.

This article is, therefore, significant for two reasons. *First*, while there have been many literatures solely on questions in casual or institutional conversation (such as Kao & Weng, 2012; Kearsley, 1976; Koshik, 2003; Wang, 2006) or the relationship between language in general and social identity (see McNamara, 1997; Norton, 1997; Price, 1996), yet the analysis that question is as a potential means to establish identity remains relatively under-explored in the theoretical territory (Kao & Weng, 2012; Tracy & Naughton, 1994). This article seeks to contribute to that area of inquiry. *Second*, by investigating questions I posed during conversation, this article is a space for 'self-reflection' of my linguistic behaviour, especially the ways I question. It is critical to understand, evaluate, and reflect our own linguistic behaviours which exist inside the complex social relations of power (Pennycook, 2001). In this line, the article intends to apply a functional view of language to the critical discursive analysis of the construction of one's own social identity. This echoes Wodak's argument that the systemic functional view of language is valuable when carrying out a critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2001).

In attempt to answer the questions, this section would briefly map the terrain of the three concepts driving this article, i.e. casual conversation as a

discourse, social identity and questions.

### **Casual conversation as a discourse**

Casual conversation is one form of discourse because it is ‘an extended sample of spoken dialogue’ which involves ‘interaction between speaker and addressee’ (Fairclough, 1989: 3). Casual conversation could be categorically classified as a form of natural and informal discourse as compared to, for example, public speech or job interview. It is natural because the speakers ‘talk for the sake of talking’, and are driven by ‘interpersonal, rather than ideational or textual meaning’ (Eggins & Slade, 1997: 50). In other words, the nature of casual conversation is twofold. *First*, it aims to maintain interpersonal relationships. *Second*, it is open-ended, thus the action of tossing back and forth meanings is marked by, one of which, questions produced by the speakers.

While recognising that casual conversation is a discourse which could be looked at from various perspectives (such as corpus and conversational analysis), however, I select a *critical* perspective. This is because the extent of participation (or the ‘rights to speak’) in a conversation is also determined by power relations between interlocutors, not purely motivation or communicative competence (Norton, 1995; 1997). Such challenge towards an apolitical view very much resonates Pennycook’s research agenda of ‘problematizing the givens’ (Pennycook, 2001); particularly concerning how I position myself in the relations of power within the structure of conversation – how I negotiate my social identity.

### **Social Identity**

The competing arguments on social identity in the context of language learning and use suggest that this terrain is *never* fixed, constant nor unitary (McNamara, 1997; Norton, 1995, Price, 1996). And so does what counts as social identity itself in a poststructuralist view. Identity is ‘located not in the private realms of cognition, emotion and experience, but in the public realms of discourse, interaction and other semiotic systems of meaning making’, while it is ‘actively, ongoingly, dynamically constructed, rather than reflected, in talk and texts of all kind’ (Benwell & Stokoe, 2010). Grounded on the basic assumption that power is entrenched in social relation, social identity is, to Norton (1995; 1997), a construction and negotiation of ‘a sense of self’ in social relation mediated by, one of which, language. Therefore, casual conversation is not merely an action of exchanging information with the interlocutors, more significantly, it is also a space to constantly organise and reorganise a sense of ‘who I am’ and ‘how I relate to the social world’.

While it is widely acknowledged that Norton contributes to advance the understanding that power relations impact directly on language learning and

use, critiques surfaced: that her blind spot of equating identity with subjectivity is flawed (such as McNamara, 1997, Price, 1996). Norton argues that the three characteristics of subjectivity – multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change – are influential for her theorising of social identity. Price (1996: 332), for instance, counter argues that such theoretical conflation (of identity and subjectivity) ‘blinds her to the practical distinction’ of the notion of subjectivity and identity itself. While it is partly true that, in interpreting her data, Norton uses the three characteristics of subjectivity and claims those as social identity, and this explains the blind spot; however, such critique is superficial, not least because identity and subjectivity echoes similar ontology. Chris Weedon, the theorist referred by Norton, defined subjectivity as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding *her relation to the world*” (Weedon, 1997: 32); whereas identity to Norton is “how people understand *their relationship to the world*, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (1997: 410). Therefore, I argue that Norton’s theory is still useful and relevant in understanding social identity because it enables us to make sense of data (linguistic behaviour), and thus understand the complex identities (a sense of self) and changing conditions encountered by the language learners to claim their ‘rights to speak’ (Norton, 1995; 1997). Norton’s theorising on social identity is placed central to this article because it offers the lens to reflect *critically* and conceptualise the way I relate myself to the larger social processes.

In the context of linguistic analysis, social identity is analysed distinctly according to respective perspectives. For example, in the field of conversation analysis and ethnomethodology, identity is understood as an ‘accomplishment of interaction’, therefore, identity is studied as the sequence of talk and other conduct in social interaction (Benwell & Stokoe, 2010). The analysis usually includes intonation, discourse markers, and turn taking. In the field of CDA, however, identity is analysed by looking at the context – which demonstrate that identity may be negotiated, modified, resisted, or even refused to preserve and construct individual agency (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004; Benwell & Stokoe, 2010). By employing CDA, this article would focus on question as a projection of social identity.

### **Questions**

For analytical purpose of this article, questions are mapped in three levels: syntactical, functional and process.

First, syntactically, questions are largely interrogative, yet they could be categorised into

three: yes/no questions, tag question, and wh-questions (Wardhaugh, 2003). Yes/no questions require either 'yes' or 'no' answers. A question such as "is it correct?" demands answer either 'yes' or 'no'. Tag question is the extension of yes/no question which is formed by repeating the first verb of the verb phrase and changing the negative-positive polarity of that verb, for example, "you arrived in 2008, didn't you?". In that question, the first verb of the verb phrase, that is 'arrived' is repeated by 'did not' by the tag. Wh-questions are questions initiated by the wh- words such as who, whom, whose, which, what, where, when, why and how, for instance, "Why do you study accounting?" Notwithstanding its micro details, this syntactical perspective is reductive: although it is useful in analyse the questions descriptively, it neglects the significant functions of each question category.

Therefore, *second*, in functional perspective, questions which are generally posed to 'elicit verbal responses' could also be echoic, epistemic, expressive and social control (Kearsley, 1976). Echoic questions require repetitions and are often the paraphrase of original questions. Epistemic questions, which seek for new information, could either be referential or evaluative. Referential question asks for contextual information, whereas evaluative attempts to evaluate the interlocutor's knowledge. Expressive question shows attitudinal information, such as surprise, disbelief, and expectation. Questions could be employed as social control, particularly when used to exert authority and maintain the discourse. As Kearsley has suggested, questions might have multiple intents, thus functions. For instance, a question like 'why did you do that?' might be a referential as it requires a contextual reason of an action, but at the same time also as social control because it shows the authority to judge a particular action.

*Third*, as I intent to self-reflect on the questions I addressed, looking at the *processes* of question would hint the critical reflection. There are three processes: selection, formation, and asking (Kearsley, 1976). Question selection relates to the consideration of why and how a particular question arises; question formation deals with linguistic formulation and generative rules; and asking process is the emphasis that questioning is a strategy to maintain conversation.

In the discussion section, I would describe the data from syntactical perspective, investigate their similarity and difference from functional perspective, and relate them to social identity from questioning processes.

## METHOD

This is a critical discourse analysis (CDA) on four casual conversations I carried out in April and May 2012. Although the analysis is on my own linguistic behaviour, four participants were involved in four

separate conversations, i.e. a male non-native (NN), a female NN, a male native speaker (NS), and a female NS of English.

To keep the confidentiality of participants, the names of participants are symbolized by NN1, NN2, NS1, and NS2. The first participant, NN1, is a male non-native speaker of English from Vietnam. He has been in Australia for almost one year and currently majoring Accounting at La Trobe University. While studying, NN1 was playing soccer for the university league. The second participant, NN2, is a female non-native speaker of English from Chinese. She has been in Australia for almost three years to undertake a Bachelor degree in Economics. She is also the chair of Chinese student association in La Trobe University. The third participant, NS1, is a male Australian who speaks only English. He works as a driver of the campus security bus which usually operates after working hours. The last participant, NS2, is also a female Australian. She underwent a manoeuvre in her professional career. She was a teacher of primary school, but shifted to hospitality business 17 years ago. In early 2010, she missed teaching, thus gave up the business and started to pursue her Graduate Diploma of Education at La Trobe University.

These four participants are central in my study as they contribute to the 'discourse' we were creating – for their responses prompted my ways of negotiation, thus my social identity. To take a focus, this article would concentrate only on one social identity, that is the issue of nativeness. In other words, I will not discuss about other related issues, such as gender or personality traits.

CDA is selected as an analysis tool to analyse the conversations because it offers a framework to understand that 'language is not merely a reflection of social relations but also part of them, as actually (re)producing them in a dialectical relation' (Pennycook, 2001: 80). This means that the ways I questioned in four conversations were not only a reflection of how I relate to them, but also the questions I posed continually shape and re-shape the social relations. The word 'critical' before 'discourse analysis' suggests 'a restive problematisation of the givens' (Pennycook, 2001: 10), implying that casual conversation cannot be taken for granted since it is the space where identity production, construction and negotiation occur. In sum, CDA is one of the most promising tools to analyse identity (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). I position social identity at the centre and problematise it, because in the context of second language learning, 'the right to speak intersects in important ways with a language learner's identity' (Norton, 1997: 411).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section is devoted to answer the two questions underpinning this study, i.e. the pattern of questions

and its relation to social identity. The former is a descriptive analysis of the questions by utilising syntactical and functional perspective as a starting point for critical analysis; whereas the latter is the critical interpretation of the distribution of questions on four conversations by emphasising the asking process and its relation to the negotiation of social identity. Syntactical and functional perspectives are useful to embark a critical discussion as it has also been adopted to analyse classroom discourse (Barlett & Erling, 2006; Lee, 2006), advertising texts (Magalhaes, 2005), group discussion (Tracy & Naughton, 1994), casual conversation as compared

to institutional dialogue (Wang, 2006), and social identity (Hoon, 2004; Stamou 2004). They are in line with Wodak’s argument that the systemic functional view of language is valuable when carrying out a critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2001). The discussion of this article will contribute to this area of methodology by specifying itself in questioning to native and non-native speakers of English in casual conversations.

**Question patterns**

Table 1 outlines the distribution of questions I generated in the four conversations.

Table 1. The distribution of questions on four casual conversations.

Perspective	Category	NN1	NN2	NS1	NS2
Syntactical	Yes/no question	19	17	14	13
	Wh- question	15	17	8	5
	Tag question	4	4	5	3
Functional	Echoic	3	5	4	3
	Epistemic	31	34	22	20
	Expressive	2	2	-	-
	Social control	-	-	2	2
Processes	Selection (consideration)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-native speaker</li> <li>• His answers were concise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-native speaker</li> <li>• She speaks for herself well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Native speaker</li> <li>• He is expressive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Native speaker</li> <li>• She is an articulate person</li> </ul>
	Formation (linguistic formulation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short clause</li> <li>• 2/3/4 questions at once</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short and Long clause</li> <li>• Questioning after stating argument or statement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long clause</li> <li>• Clarifying my understanding to his statement, before questioning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long clause</li> <li>• Linking and confirming my understanding to whole story, before actually questioning</li> </ul>
	Asking (strategy to maintain conversation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of expressive</li> <li>• More yes/no and wh- questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of expressive &amp; epistemic</li> <li>• Equal yes/no &amp; wh- questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of social control</li> <li>• More wh- question</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of social control</li> <li>• More yes/no question</li> </ul>

From the syntactical and functional analysis (for general overview, see table 1; further detail, refer to appendix 1), I utilised three categories of questions to the interlocutors. I addressed yes/no questions more than wh-questions and tag questions to the interlocutors. Respectively, I addressed yes/no questions 19 times to NN1, 17 times to NN2, to 14 times NS1, and 13 times to NS2. Whereas for wh-questions, I posed 15 times to NN1, 17 times to NN2, 8 times to NS1, and 5 times to NS2. The least used category was tag question. I employed tag questions 4 times to NN1, 4 times to NN2, 5 times to NS1, and 3 times to NS2.

For example, two yes/no-questions I posed to NN1:

- Are you the only child? [1]*
- So, some courses that you took in Vietnam are recognised in La Trobe? [2]*

Syntactically, question [1] and [2] are yes/no questions. Although not an interrogative in form, question [2] is actually a yes/no question because I raised the intonation. The same case happens with NS2:

- Do you think, if you go back to school, later when you graduate from this university, will the school be the same or different, as compared to the school that you’ve been teaching in 17 years back? [3]*
- So, basically your motivation is not only because now teachers should have a four-year degree, not a three-year degree. So, you go back to the university not only for that reason, but there is, you know, deeper meaning than that? [4]*

Question [3] and [4] are yes/no questions, although different in form. Despite the similarity in syntax and category, there is a marked difference

between the yes/no questions I posed to NN1 and NS2. Questions [3] and [4] which I addressed to NS2 are relatively longer than [1] and [2]. The first pattern is, therefore, with NN1 I used short interrogative form, but with NS1, I preferred a longer form of question with the purpose of elaborating, such as question [3] *'as compared to the school that you've been teaching in 17 years back'* and confirming my understanding, such as question [4] *'So, basically your motivation is not only because now teachers should have a four-year degree, not a three-year degree'*.

The same case happened with NN2 and NS1. The following are some examples of yes/no questions I addressed to NN2 and NS1. Question [5] which I addressed to NS1 is relatively longer than [6].

To NN2:

*Are you proud of being the chair of Chinese Student Association at La Trobe?* [5]

To NS1:

*Are you working here full time or part time? I mean, do you have any other activities other than driving the security bus?* [6]

In addition, the wh-questions I directed to NN1 were mostly referential – that I asked him contextual information, for instance about Vietnam, his study in Ho Chi Minh, and his family. Question [7] and [8] illustrate this question category.

*Which part of Vietnam do you come from?* [7]  
*How many years have you been taking for that petroleum?* [8]

Similar case happened with NN2. I asked her several referential questions, such as the following.

*Why are you interested in student association?* [9]  
*When did you start to be involved in the organization?* [10]

Another interesting finding is that I found a recurring pattern of my questioning behavior with NN1 and NN2: I posed two, three and even four questions to elaborate my previous question, and they varied in terms of question category. This means, I paraphrase the questions.

*Why do you study accounting? Is it because you like it?* [11]  
*What brings you here? Why don't you study in Vietnam? Why Australia?* [12]  
*Politics? Why? I mean, when you want to study this course, someone would say 'No, it's not good'... or? What kind of politics do you mean?* [13]

With NN2:

*How do you manage your time to study, handle the student organization, and work a part-time job? You know, study here is highly demanding, but you have to manage your organization and you still have got a work to do. How do you do that?* [14]

Question [11] involves wh-question and yes/no question at time. Question [12] comprises three wh-questions. Question [13] starts with yes/no question as an expressive (because I was surprised that his answer was politics), then followed by three wh-questions. Whereas questions [14] were repetitive, or repeating the same idea – *how do you manage your time?* and *how do you do that?*.

With NS1 and NS2, on the other hand, I did not use much wh-question as compared to with NN1 and NN2. However, the following are some exemplars from my questions to NS2.

*So tell me, what are you interested in?* [15]  
*And you'll be in primary or secondary?* [16]

Question [16] might not appear as wh-question like [15] because it does not have any. However, it could be an ellipsis of 'which', therefore, it might read as *which will you be, in primary or secondary?* Although not much found, there is a pattern in wh-question I directed to NS2 – that they implied 'social control' not solely epistemic, such as question [15] and [16]. I used the phrase 'so, tell me' in [15] which might sound steering the conversation topic, and giving closed-options in [16] which means I limited her answers.

I used tag questions in relatively the same frequency to both interlocutors (4 times to NN1, 4 times to NN2, to 5 times NS1, and 3 times to NS2). I used several forms of tag such as finite, 'right' and 'yeah' as tag with the purpose to toss back and forth conversation. With NN1, I asked:

*That's your Vietnamese name, right?* [17]  
*You guys come from different region, yeah?* [18]

With NN2 and NS1, I employed finite as tag as follows:

*Such a great task, isn't it?* [19]  
*Driving is fun, isn't it?* [20]

I posed the following tag question to NS2:

*This is your first semester, yeah?* [21]  
*Mutual learning, yeah?* [22]

It is interesting to find out that the pattern of tag question employed is less diverse, e.g. *right*, *yeah* and *isn't it*. I did not use other more complex tag such as *don't you* or *didn't you*. One possible explanation may be due to the challenging automatic response of a question tag requires. This phenomenon echoes Agustien's research that interpersonal negotiation, especially tag question, is one of the key competencies to be developed by non-native speakers, including myself (1997).

In sum, there are three emerging patterns from the data: the length of interrogative form, repetitive questions as echoic, and the intensity of social control. These patterns of my linguistic behaviour of questioning are useful starting points to deal with the larger social processes – the negotiation of social identity.

### Negotiating social identity through questions

The different patterns of my questioning behaviour in the four casual conversations demonstrate that my social identity is multiple and not fixed – that I related myself differently to different interlocutors, thus projected and negotiated my social identity in different ways. Generally, with NN1 and NN2, there was a propensity that I used the short interrogative form and repeated the questions at one time (echoic). Having identified myself as a non-native speaker too (NN1 is a Vietnamese, NN2 is a Chinese and I come from Indonesia), I positioned myself as having the same social identity with NN1 and NN2. The fact that I repeated my question at one time explains that I was aware of the issue of communication breakdown. Question [13] demonstrates that although pointing at the same message (I was surprised by NN1's answer, thus required him to further explain about the political issue of studying in Vietnam), I was being repetitive by asking four times at time. This linguistic behavior could be interpreted that I have an awareness that English is not our first language, thus, I needed to anticipate communication breakdown by repeating my question to elaborate what I meant. Furthermore, NN1 answered in a concise way, therefore, he gave me the 'right to speak'.

- Me* : Why do you study accounting? Is it because you like it? [11]  
*Tan* : Because when I studied in Vietnam, I studied technical field and I felt disappointed with this.  
*Me* : What kind of technical field? Is it engineering or...? [23]

The above set of question and response illustrates how he gave me the 'right to speak'. His answer was relatively concise, and for me, that was a 'space' to speak. Therefore, to have an equal interaction with him, I did not have to 'struggle' so hard to claim my 'rights to speak' (McCarthy & Birr Moje, 2002).

Nevertheless, with NS1 and NS2, I negotiated my non-nativeness by selecting the long form of interrogatives and exercising 'social control'. I struggled over the inequitable relations of power: native vs. non-native speaker of English. My social identity is, thus, a 'space to struggle' to claim that I have the 'rights to speak'. Unlike with NN1 and NN2 where I could speak in equitable chances, but with NS1 and NS2, I had to seek the opportunity to exercise my English. Consciously or unconsciously at that point of time, I selected strategy to maintain the conversation. In selecting long interrogative forms, I was aware that NS1 and NS2 were in a powerful subject position and I resisted being relegated to the margin of 'the ownership of English'. I struggled over the idea that 'English belongs to White native speakers of standard English' and wanted to prove that English belongs

to 'all the people who speak it, irrespective of linguistic and sociocultural history' (Norton, 1997, 409). This awareness might come from the social construction of my social identity in Australia as international students from Asia – as a non-native speaker of English. My strategy of linking the question to the whole story and confirming my understanding could be read as my resistance of the unequal relations of power between I and my interlocutors, at that point in time. The following is an example of my question to NS1.

*But why are you still doing this security bus job, if you actually have got a better position at other university as a graphic designer? I mean graphic design is way more convenient... well, at least to me, rather than driving the bus after dark like now? [24]*

Similar case is also displayed with NS2:

*With that diverse interest, and if I would like to connect that to your previous stories that you're teaching, but then after that in 17 years you're in hospitality, but now you want to go back to teaching, may I know what kind of thought that, you know, you have this kind of decision? [25]*

To address the meaning of question [25], I could have said: *why do you decide to go back to school?*, yet, I asked NS2 by referring to her previous story to prove that I could also speak well in a considerable length as she did. This shows my 'struggle' that I did not want to remain *subject* to the discourse in our conversation, whereas NS1 and NS2 became the powerful *subject* of the discourse.

Such struggle is also evident from the use of imperative phrase I inserted before the wh-question as 'social control'. In question [15], I initiated my question by saying 'so, tell me' which might sound imperative and steering the conversation topic. Other form of social control I used was by giving closed-options which means limiting answers. Question [16], which is an ellipsis of 'which' – *which will you be, in primary or secondary?* demonstrates this linguistic behavior. As compared with NN1, I left the options open.

*What kind of technical field? Is it engineering or...? [23]*

My different way of playing out with the function of wh-questions to NS1 and NS2 (that wh-question is not merely an epistemic, but also social control) shows my struggle over the control of power. This 'space to struggle' captures my ways of negotiating my social identity (Norton, 1995, 1997; Weedon, 1997). Consciously or unconsciously, my ways of questioning to project my identity in both native and non-native social contexts in which they are operating are the space in which I have to relegate my status (Barlett & Erling, 2006). This finding confirms Wang's argument that in questioning, there is an exercise of power (2006).

Furthermore, not only social identity has the defining characteristics that it is not fixed (or subject to change) and a space to struggle, but also it is multiple. The emerging patterns of the length of interrogative form (with NS1 and NS2, I preferred longer sentence), repetitive questions as echoic (with NN1 and NN2), and the intensity of social control (with NS1 and NS2 by employing wh-question) prove that I projected and negotiated my social identity in a multiple ways depending on whom I talked to, particularly with the issue of nativeness.

The process of different ways of questioning is itself an act of negotiating identity, consciously aligning oneself with what, by default a binary model of language ownership, one is not (Norton, 1997). This performance of familiar cultural conduct ensures that the discourse of language ownership, in this case e.g. English, is further sustained.

## CONCLUSION

By studying the patterns of questions I generated during four sets of casual conversations with non-native and native speakers of English, it is possible to negotiate my social identity. In this study, a descriptive analysis of the questions by utilising syntactical and functional perspectives serves as a starting point for critical analysis (Wodak, 2001). The questions appeared to be distinctive in the conversations with non-native and native speakers of English. I tend to use longer interrogative form, more repetitive questions as echoic, and wh-question as social control to native than non-native speakers.

The different patterns of my questioning behaviour in the four casual conversations demonstrate that my social identity is multiple and not fixed – that I related myself differently to different interlocutors, thus projected and negotiated my social identity in different ways. Generally, with non-native speakers, there was a propensity that I used the short interrogative form and repeated the questions at one time (echoic). Having identified myself as a non-native speaker too, I positioned myself as having the same social identity with the non-native speakers.

Nevertheless, with the native speakers, I *negotiated* my non-nativeness by selecting the long form of interrogatives and exercising ‘social control’. I struggled over the inequitable relations of power: native vs. non-native speaker of English. My social identity is, thus, a ‘space to struggle’ to claim that I have the ‘rights to speak’. Unlike with the non-native speakers where I could speak in equitable chances; with native speakers, I struggled over the idea that ‘English belongs to White native speakers of standard English’ and wanted to prove that English belongs to ‘all the people who speak it, irrespective of linguistic and sociocultural history’

(Norton, 1997: 409). My strategy of linking the question to the whole story and confirming my understanding could be read as my resistance of the unequal relations of power between I and the interlocutors, at that point in time.

As I have outlined, this article focuses one variable – nativeness over the issue of English ownership. This in turns ‘reduces’ the complexity of investigating what counts as social identity, as I did not embrace other related variables such as gender and personality traits. Although this article is a reflexive practice, the above limitation reminds researchers to attend to calls for greater reflexivity “interpreting one’s own interpretations, looking at one’s own perspectives from other perspectives, and turning a self-critical eye onto one’s own authority as interpreter and author” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000: vii). Despite the fact that CDA is one methodology to carry out reflexive projects, however, researchers should suspend their critical faculties when it comes to their own research methodology. Furthermore, what has not been the focus of this study, e.g. linguistic behaviour, gender, and personality, can be analysed to contribute to the study of social identity.

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