Masculinity and the Study Abroad Experience

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In this paper I use uses psychoanalytic theory as a tool for understanding how learners construct and maintain their identities before their study abroad experiences. After discussing how subjectivity and masculinity are conceptualized within psychoanalysis, some of the commonly held ideas about identity and the acquisition of English expressed by male participants in the predeparture stage of study abroad is discussed.

この論文では、精神分析学を利用すると、留学前の参加者がどのように自分のアイデンティティを構成したり維持したりするかが明瞭になると論じている。前半は精神分析学の中で「主観性」と「男らしさ」という概念を詳述する。後半では留学への出発前の期間中に何名かの男性参加者が述べたアイデンティティと英語習得に対する共通意見を紹介する。

S HUN APPEARED obsessed with becoming a foreigner. Over the 10-month period during which I was his teacher and mentor, his desire to assume the identity of what he saw as the ideal image of a native speaker seemed increasingly urgent as the day for his departure to go abroad approached. For Shun, however, taking upon a "foreign identity" entailed much more than the acquisition of English language skills; for him it represented the possibility to transform himself into what he perceived to be a stereotypical Caucasian. It was this ideal that sustained and nurtured his motivation to learn English and get a score on the TOEFL test high enough to guarantee his acceptance into a 4-year degree program in the United States. The thought of metamorphosis began to consume him during his predeparture education, to the extent that he began wearing blue contact lenses and was even considering getting surgery to make his eyes and nose more like that of a Caucasian.

While the desire to acquire English manifested as a desire to radically change one's physical appearance may be relatively rare, most students who participate in study abroad programs—whether they last for just a few months or extend to an entire university career—see the experience as personally transformative. During the predeparture phase, on the several occasions when I interviewed and observed Shun, he repeated two ideas: a "longing for" or "admiration of" (*akogareru*) foreigners, on the one hand, and a need to "be recognized" or "be approved of" (*mitomerareru*) by them. As my research has progressed in various educational contexts, these two notions have come up again and again when individuals talk about their

desire to acquire English. And although Shun's image of himself as reflected in the mirror of the foreign *Other* was certainly taken to the extreme, it might be argued that these two desires underlie the social construction of English language acquisition in Japan (Seargeant, 2009).

Of course, individuals decide to learn foreign and second languages (hereinafter, L2) for diverse reasons, and the conditions in which they undertake this task are just as varied. Moreover, the experience with acquiring the target language has numerous developmental and social implications. A learner who acquires a language at the same time he or she learns his or her first language will certainly have a different experience than a learner who takes up learning the language in his or her teens or during adulthood. And just as one's first language is intimately connected with one's social identity, so too learning an L2 is bound up with the construction and maintenance of that identity.

The question of how one's identity relates to the motivation to learn a foreign language has been directly and indirectly addressed in a number of important studies (see, e.g., Norton, 2000; Norton & McKenney, 2011; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). For theorists and researchers working in the mainstream of L2 motivation, the answer to this question in the past decade has increasingly been that the two are intimately related, so much so, in fact, that they are one and the same or that identity and motivation are so bound up with each other that it is not possible to separate them (Dörnyei, 2009). This realization by L2 motivation researchers is something that has been central to the work of psychoanalysis, namely that what motivates people to do things cannot be separated from their identities (Mitchell & Black, 1995).

In this paper, the way in which students construct their identities during the predeparture phase of study abroad (SA) will be discussed in regard to how subjectivity and masculinity are approached in the psychoanalytic work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. In the first section of this paper, the shared origins of social psychology and psychoanalysis and the divergent paths they took from the 19th century to the present will be discussed with the implications that this has had upon how they view consciousness and the subject. The insights that psychoanalysis can give to the question of how desire to acquire an L2 impacts upon an individual's identity will then be examined. In the second section, I will discuss some of the shared ideas about identity and the acquisition of English expressed by male participants in the predeparture stage of SA.

Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity, and Masculinity

While both psychoanalysis and social psychology emerged from Western philosophy, the way in which they have approached questions of identity, motivation, and human behavior are radically different. Social psychology is an Anglo-American project that fully embraced the rationalism of the Enlightenment. It seeks to discover through empirical methods the influences that others and the social environment have on individual thinking and behavior (Kruglanski & Higgins, 2007). Dominated by researchers in English speaking countries, L2 motivation research developed from this tradition. This, combined with the cognitivist bias of SLA, has led to the broadly held notion of the individual and his or her behavior and motivation as functioning within a computer-like information-processing system (Doughty & Long, 2003). The self and its consciousness have an inviolable border that separates them from other selves and their consciousnesses. Ever adaptable to the changing social situation, the self can be seen as ruling autocratically over the development of its consciousness and maintaining its social identity according to its autonomous and completely self-aware free will.

Psychoanalysis has, on the other hand, never rejected its philosophical roots. Beginning with J. G. Fichte and running

through the work of F. W. J. Schelling and G. W. F. Hegel (Ellenberger, 1970; Ffytche, 2012), the self-assured Cartesian cogito was placed into doubt, centering upon the following key ideas that are at the core of psychoanalysis. First, the *I* (Ich or Ego) is constituted not only by the knowledge of one's own mind, but is equally constituted by the existence of the "not-I," or the *I* that is other or its negation (Feldstein, Fink, & Jannus, 1995). This, then, means that consciousness is just as much a part of our own minds as being external to ourselves. Second, the divided psyche is continually evolving within a dialectical process with other psyches, all of which are situated in a specific historical moment. The mind, consciousness, and the psyche, therefore, not only are a synthetic product of the internal and external worlds, but are always changing according to the socio-economic, political, and cultural milieu in which the individual is historically situated.

Freud argued that it is the *I* that coordinates all of the mental processes in the individual (Freud, 1923/1961). The *I* synchronizes the conscious and unconscious processes, and, as the locus of one's social identity, it attempts to mask the fundamental fracture inherent to the individual. The balancing act by the *I* is a delicate performance in which the influence of the unconscious is revealed (in the dream work, parapraxes, jokes, etc.) through displacement, condensation, symbolization, and dramatization (Freud, 1900/1953a). Malintegration of the unconscious and the conscious becomes apparent in the symptoms of psychosis and neurosis, the latter of which is manifest to a greater or lesser degree by "normal" individuals. Underlying this psychic structure is the motor of behavior: the *libido*—a sexual instinct that is aimed reflexively at the individual in its genesis and then turned outward toward an external object with psychosexual development and socialization (Freud, 1900/1953b). At the same time, instinct is fundamentally conservative in that it seeks to maintain stasis, and thus repression (or trauma) via the unconscious is preserved by

the *I* (Freud, 1920/1955). The individual is not naturally inclined to a forward-looking, teleological development. Instead, present behavior and the constitution of self or the *I* is just as much, if not more, a product of our histories, and our future is, in great part, dictated by a past that can at any moment slip beyond our conscious control.

The idea of a fractured being and Otherness of the psyche was built upon and interpreted within the framework of structural linguistics by Jacques Lacan (1966/2007) who explored how subjects and their desire are produced through language and social structures. Lacan began by reminding us that the human child is unique in that it is born helpless, requiring the mother or other caretaker to fulfill its every need, which she does even before the child asks for it. At a particular moment in the child's development (*le stade du miroir*, the mirror stage) it recognizes that it is separate from the mother, and this realization produces a split, an enduring sense of lack (*manque*) and a want to fill that hole in the self. The desire is, therefore, both for the Other as well as desire to be desired by the other (*le desir de l'Autre*, the desire of or for the Other).

In order to become social beings, an individual must take up a subject position. Language, Lacan (1966/2007) argued, allows the individual to do so by giving it an *I*, but at the same time this *I* is alienated from itself. The meaning of this *I* can only be retrieved by linguistic and pragmatic contexts; it is merely a symbolic placeholder for the human in a web of significations that never singles out one unique individual. Though human beings grasp at the possibility of being unique and complete, this is never possible because it is language that has already constituted the way in which humans can interact with others in society even before birth.

Gender and subjectivity have been controversial concepts within psychoanalysis itself as well as among its detractors. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, sexual difference is defined by the re-

lationship of the subject to the Other and the symbolic, and this difference is psychical rather than biological (Ragland, 2004). For Lacan the two neuroses, obsession and hysteria, represented the prototypical masculine and feminine structures, respectively. In the most extreme form of the masculine structure, the obsessive-compulsive, Fink (1997) argued, "*Desire is impossible in obsession*, because the closer the obsessive gets to realizing his desire . . . the more the Other begins to take precedence over him, eclipsing him as a subject. The presence of the Other threatens the obsessive with what Lacan called 'aphanisis,' his fading or disappearing as a subject" (p. 124, emphasis in original). For the obsessive-compulsive, the urge is to remove or annihilate the Other, thereby removing the Other as an impediment to appropriating the object. Although when taken to excess, obsession will become debilitating to the individual, even for the normal individual there will always be the tension between the underlying structure of desire and societal rules and norms setting limits upon behavior.

What does this imply for the acquisition of foreign languages? Psychoanalysis maintains that fundamentally all desires have their root cause in the double alienation that comes first when we realize that we are not whole and second when we become an *I* in the symbolic realm. A foreign language is an object like any other object that we desire to possess in the hope that we can fill the sense of lacking in our being. All of these objects are infinitely interchangeable and thoroughly unsatisfactory. Though we may be tempted to think that we can set up our *ideal L2 selves* and strive to become them, these ideal selves that we as subjects work to maintain are just as much, if not more, backward-looking toward the prehistorical unity of subject and Other. Likewise, the mastery of an L2 also includes mastery of the Other's desire. Thus, desire for an L2 is social: It emerges within the web of relationships between the subject and the Other, culture, social structures, and the institutions that promote and reinforce it (Althusser, 1971).

Data Analysis
Participants and Methodology

Over the past 10 years, my research on the SA experience has included participants from a variety of contexts that include a predeparture English for academic purposes (EAP) program for students preparing to enroll in 4-year universities in North America, a 1-year program integrated into the home university's 4-year curriculum, and a one-semester program that was part of a departmentally sponsored English minor program. Participants were recruited during a short introduction at the beginning of classes. The intention of the research was to investigate whether an underlying structure of culturally constructed Japanese masculine subjectivity could be identified while at the same time considering how different social and economic factors came into play among students of different social statuses and educational backgrounds. Therefore, the data presented here serve to illustrate some of the common characteristics of Japanese male students who participate in SA programs.

In the case of the first and last groups, I had much greater contact and interaction with the participants inasmuch as I was working as a full-time faculty member at the institution and, in the case of the first group, as the Dean of Students. In addition to classroom observation, I conducted structured interviews, gathered narratives at several points during all three phases of SA, and set up small group structured discussions during the pre- and post-SA phases. The focus of this paper is the predeparture phase. Pseudonyms have been used to protect students' anonymity.

The Gaze and the Desire to Acquire English
Shinya

Shinya voiced a typical sentiment that was repeated by the majority of male SA participants in the predeparture phase.

When he was asked in an interview to explain what his current motivation for studying English was, he had a hard time expressing his interest. "It's not an interest in the language itself," he finally admitted, "but rather it's that foreign things are cool and I really have an admiration for them (*akogareru*)" (Interview, July 2005). Like many of the other predeparture students, what he appeared to be longing to acquire was expressed in terms of English language skills, but when urged to explain in greater detail, his (and their) desire diffused into vagaries and lodged itself into the gaze of the foreign which is then turned back upon themselves. "The reason why I want to master (*mi ni tsukeru*) the language is so that I will be recognized by others (*mitomerareru*). I want to look cool" (Interview, July 2005).

Yasunari

Like, Shinya, Yasunari also considered being seen as cool through proficient English ability as his primary goal for learning English. During a small group, semistructured discussion task, Yasunari summed up his goal for acquiring English by saying, "People said [bad] things about me . . . rather a lot. If I am able to do it [being able to speak English], it would be really cool and if they took a look again at that idiot [me], they would be sorry [for what they had said/thought before]" (Group discussion, September 2006).

While Yasunari's ideas about acquiring English to make himself look cool echoed what Shinya expressed, the former's desire took on darker dimensions. As it became clear in the discussion, Yasunari harbored a great deal of aggression toward his father, whom he saw as directing and trying to control his behavior. Yasunari stated that his father forced him to enroll in the predeparture program and constantly pushed him to study; yet at the same time his father frequently made deprecating comments about Yasunari as one who always gives up on everything he does.

This object of desire, English, was then appropriated by Yasunari as a way of taking power away from his father. As Yasunari continued in the discussion, he described how his father was also studying English but was not really acquiring native-like ability and mockingly ventriloquized his father using stereotypical Japanese-English pronunciation:

> Two or 3 years [ago] he started [studying English], somehow, for his job. It's that he uses English. But it's not that his English is good. Like Indians, somehow, and Arabs. Normally, he's speaking in Japanese, Japanese, "*ai amu a suchuudento*," like that. It's like that. You can't understand it. If you only hear that kind of English, you can't come to understand it. It's not perfect, and as he speaks like that I'm laughing at it. He's thinking, "I'm really cool," like that. (Group discussion, September 2006)

Yasunari and his father both wanted the same object of desire, English proficiency, but his father's attempts to achieve it were portrayed by Yasunari as incomplete: His father would only ever be able to speak English as if it were Japanese and therefore his father's effort to acquire their mutual object of desire was undermined. Thus, Yasunari was caught in a bind between desiring what his father wants (Lacan reminded us that assuming the desires of the Other is an inevitable aspect of the formation of desire) and denying that object to his father. The unresolved rivalry between Yasunari and his father and Yasunari's inability to separate his desires from his father's led Yasunari into a cycle of failure (conflict with father figures such as his bosses at part-time jobs and his teachers) and violence. Eventually, Yasunari left the school, dropping out of the SA program before leaving Japan.

Takayuki

> They have a great impression, the posters that you gaze at, like that, and movies, the trailers for movies, the trailers, there are movies that you feel, "Wow! I really want to see it," aren't there? That kind of movie, I want to make them and communicate with people. . . . My final objective is to make the things I want to with Japanese sensibility and make foreigners say, "Wow!" (Group discussion, September 2006)

Takayuki draws our attention back to Lacan's portrayal of desire as "the desire of the Other," and the complementary ways in which this formulation captures the relationship between the subject, the object, and the Other. First of all, Takayuki expressed his desire to acquire English, an object that is possessed by the Other, the foreigners. Second, he inverted his own desire to acquire English into a desire to capture and control the attention of the Other by forcing their gaze upon himself. Takayuki's explanation of his desire fit together perfectly with how Lacan developed his idea of the gaze (*le regard*) by highlighting that the cause of the subject's desire originates in the object—at a blind spot from which the object is gazing at the subject. The gaze further undercuts the security of the subject: The subject's feelings of self-possession and omnipotence are fractured by the Other which turns the subject into an object of an Other's scopic gaze, something expressed by all three of the participants discussed in this paper.

As Lacan (1973/1981) said, "You never look at me from the place I see you" (p. 103)—which was expressed in Takayuki's goal of making theatrical trailers. The complex nature of the relationship between the subject, object and the other is summed up in the idiom that Takayuki uses to summarize what his goal for learning English is: "It is like killing two birds with one stone (*isseki nichō*)." The object of desire is never simple, nor is it ever capable of being completely satisfied. Desire merely reproduces itself. Moreover, desire is located not in the subject, but rather in the object itself. Just like Takayuki's dream of making film trailers, the object is, on the one hand, a simulacrum (the trailer not being the film itself but only a representation constructed to create desire) that postpones satisfaction, and on the other hand, it is always (and for Lacan, by definition) infinitely replaceable.

Conclusion

Dörnyei (2001) clearly articulated the bias of the field by summarily dismissing the influence of any psychical matter that is not available to consciousness on the motivation of the learner, saying, "most of the significant thoughts and feelings that affect learning achievement in prolonged educational settings are conscious and known by the learner" (pp. 9-10). As a result of biases such as this, the role of the unconscious as a source for individual motivation for L2 acquisition, in terms of learning goals and means of learning, has been largely ignored or held in contempt by researchers in mainstream SLA. This position, I believe, not only forces us to gloss over many underlying structural elements of human desire and subjectivity, but is also not beneficial to many learners who, like Shun and Yasunari, may need serious help in dealing with emotional problems which could lead to disasters in an SA situation. But even for students will less serious issues, conducting pre- and post-SA counseling and group discussion sessions could be beneficial for working through questions they might have about why they have decided to participate in an SA program.

Bio Data

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