A Socio-Semiotic Analysis of Latino Migrants' Metaphorical Conceptualizations of Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

The present study is aimed at unpacking Latino migrants' metaphorical conceptualizations of their language learning trajectories as sites for construction and negotiation of their complex identities throughout the process of transnational migration. In particular, our work intends to describe and interrogate three adult Latino migrants' personal, linguistic and cross-cultural journeys as they experienced their English language learning in Australia. Informed by a qualitative approach, three data sets were gathered: (i) written narratives of personal, linguistic and cross-cultural challenges experienced throughout their trajectories in Australia; (ii) visual metaphors produced by the participants depicting metaphorically their language learning experiences; (iii) face-to-face interviews. The findings revealed the complex personal, cultural and linguistic processes, which have all contributed to re-shaping and negotiating their personal, social and professional identities over time. The metaphorical analysis of the respondents' spoken narratives and of their metaphorical visual images evidenced the presence of pervasive metaphors of 'disability" and "impairment" in their discourse.

Introduction

It is beyond doubt that migration has been a global phenomenon for millennia. Fisher (2014) comments that some early forms of migration took place as far back as 100,000 years ago when Homo sapiens migrated within Africa. In today's world, however, this mobility trend has become increasingly more prevalent as a result of the rapid flows of people, knowledge, information and communication technologies, all of which have been driven by economic, cultural and political processes of globalization (Dingle, 2014).

Just like most Western countries, the transnational nature of migration flows in Australia has witnessed not only growth but also ongoing tension. A 2010 report published by the Department of Parliamentary Services indicated that the overall rate of Australia's population growth had increased significantly over the last five years largely driven by an increase in net overseas migration. Nevertheless, despite the widely acknowledged benefits associated with, for instance, labor and skilled migration (Jalilian, 2012), much of the contemporary discourse on migration has brought the word "problem" into recurrent discussions, thus questioning whether or not immigrants should be allowed to enter countries with great technological, industrial and economic prosperity like Australia.

Avoiding all possible vexed questions of whether or not migrants should be allowed entry, question which is certainly beyond the scope of the present work, what is unquestionably clear is that once migrants have settled in to a new country, they would embark upon an incredibly challenging task of dealing with and overcoming numerous linguistic, social, cultural, emotional

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and psychological barriers in order to successfully integrate into their new country. Without under-mining the central role of several other factors, the development of effective language skills plays a significant and indispensable role in the process of socio-cultural adaptation of migrants (Nunan & Choi, 2010; Portes & Mozo, 1985).

Language, as has been defined by many scholars, is "an essential instrument and component of culture" (Langacker, 1999, p. 69). Indeed, Palmer and Sharifian (2007) stress that language is a cultural activity and an instrument through which other cultural domains are organized, which suggests that successful adoption of the the target language (TL) would enable migrants to partici-pate effectively in a range of socio-cultural practices. Nevertheless, it is clear that, for a variety of reasons, not all migrants succeed in acquiring sufficient language proficiency for effective participa-tion in and integration into their new country. Talking specifically about Australia, Hewagodage and O'Neill (2010) point out that it would be naturally expected that non-English speaking background migrants who have lived in the country for a considerably long period of time would have better English language proficiency. However, this is not usually the case, which results "in some migrants being isolated and marginalized, and thus prevented from reaching their full potential as active citizens in the new country" (p. 23). Tapping into this issue, our present study intends to explore and examine migrants' metaphorical conceptualizations of language learning experiences as sites for understanding their complex identity construction as active participants in the Australian society. The research questions that have been formulated to address these issues are as follows:

RQ1: What do migrants' metaphorical conceptualizations of language learning reveal about their self-image and identities?

RQ2: How do the migrants' metaphorical framings of language learning facilitate an understanding of the factors that enabled them to or prevented them from active participation in sociocultural practices in the Australian community?

Context of study

The participants of this study have all been living in Australia for over 20 years. Although they all originally come from different Latin American countries, their past and present histories share a great deal of similarities. Firstly, all of them emigrated to Australia in times when their home countries were going through intense socio-economic and/or political unrest. Whitehead (2006) points out that most Latin American countries evidenced different forms of asset inequality and political turmoil between the period of 1970 and 1990. Secondly, each of the participants' country of origin represents clear examples of societies where English has never played a major historical, governmental or educational role. Although the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) has now gained centrality and popularity in the school curriculum and society as a whole, back in those days when the participants completed their primary and high school studies English was either not taught at all or minimally taught in private schools through the medium of Spanish. As a consequence, the participants' English language learning experiences prior to coming to Australia were limited to little or no exposure to the English language. While in Australia, some of them sought different opportunities through churches or community centers to start learning the first rudiments of English to be able to function successfully in their daily life. Others, on the other hand, had to cope with the demands of raising children in an unknown country, finding employment opportunities to support their families, and finding ways to help their children adjust and integrate into a new school system.

Migrants' L2 identity in construction

Norton (2013) defined identity as "the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 4). This definition applies perfectly to migrants as they are compelled

to deal with changing geographical, cultural, and linguistic contexts. Migration has been found to have a profound effect on identity construction as contextual factors change and the position of the individual with respect to such changing contexts is in a constant state of flux (Fazel and Stein, 2002), comprising issues of race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity, amongst others. Therefore, the migrant's language identity is shaped, at times, amorphously and arrhythmically, through a complex process of situated negotiations of meanings.

Because language and language learning deal not only with linguistic forms and structures, but with a continuous process of negotiation of language learner identities, shaped by the contextual factors (Norton, 2016; Norton, 1997; Norton & Toohey, 2002), Kinginger (2013) suggested that identity and related conflicts could interfere in global quality of language learning experiences – and vice versa. The author explained, for instance, that host speakers can acknowledge foreign language speakers with foreigner identities, which may hinder learners' access to language proficiency improvement. Such an issue represents, as Kim (2003) put it, a typical foreign language learner struggle considering all sorts of interactions between identities and sociocultural meanings. As Darvin and Norton (2016) argued, "the conditions of power in different learning contexts can position the learners in multiple and often unequal ways, leading to varying learning outcomes" (p. 37). This is evident in a study conducted by Kanno (2018). She found in her ethnographic, longitudinal study that some of the factors inhibiting foreign-born immigrant English language learners (ELLs) from a Pennsylvania school from accessing four-year college were linguistic insecurity and an institutionalized habitus that underscored the ELs' deficit orientation. In other words, the ELs's deficit-oriented vision of themselves was greatly impacted by the very school's deficit-based cumulative institutional habitus and the ELs' limited language proficiency.

Identity and language learning interact with each other (Yoshimoto, 2008). Ebtekar (2012), for instance, explored how a migrant's experiences in language learning and her identity construction process affected each other. Through life history narratives of an Iranian immigrant woman, identity negotiation and complexities of her English language learning experiences were investigated. The woman had joined a revolutionary movement in Iran in the pursuit of boosting social change so that she could have major access to social and intellectual opportunities. Unfortunately for her, her experience in political activism denied her the opportunity to continue postgraduate studies. Thus, she decided to migrate to Australia looking for a better-quality life for her and her child, in a desperate attempt to escape from pressures as well as constraints from the Islamic regime. After some years she experienced a desire to help the community and became a migration agent. Her experiences as an immigrant helped her to reshape her desired self-image. Ebtekar (2012) explained that "it is clear that the nature of Marjan's [the participant] imagined identity underwent a process of gradual transformation throughout the course of her life history narrative" (p.9). The study showed how the participant's identity options "related to her language learning experience" (p. 2) and, perhaps, most importantly, her "aspirations to invest in her language learning" process. Put differently, the language learning experience is greatly shaped by the way the dynamic identity construction process unfolds. The level of investment in language learning (Norton, 2016), understood as the "learner's commitment to learn a language, given their hopes for the future and their imagined identities" (p. 476); the depth and breadth of the language learning experience; the affective attachment to the language learned, all seem to hinge upon the various contextual (and individual) factors affecting language learners' identity construction process, as was the case of Marjan in Ebtekar's (2012) study.

Another study of female migrants was reported by Hewagodage and O'Neill (2010) in Australia. In this country, English competency must be demonstrated by all migrants in the pursuit of achieving economic and social nation goals. In order to foster English language competency, the government sponsored a program called the Australian Migrant Education Program (AMEP), whose main objective was to help migrants so that they could settle and have more work opportunities. Hewagodage and O'Neill (2010) examined the English language learning experiences of a small group of non-English speaking background female adult migrants. Five women participated in this

exploratory case study; they had all lived in Australia for at least eight years, yet they did not participate in the English-speaking community. Regrettably, in spite of the program's attempt to help migrants improve their language proficiency levels, several sociolinguistic and sociocultural barriers were found such as migrants' settlement in rural areas and the ensuing difficulty in accessing the language centre, disregard for the participants' actual language needs, the participants' own religious and cultural value system, and failed past language learning experiences. Women participants in the study seemed to be "held back by an apparently unsupportive or insensitive home environment because of different cultural and religious values with respect to education and gender roles and responsibilities" (p. 36). In the authors' view, a truly learner-centered, sociocultural perspective to language learning is capable of accommodating specific needs, desires, aspirations, which can ultimately boost the learners' confidence and self-image, in a context of daily social struggles that face migrants.

Visual metaphor: a socio-semiotic resource for meaning making

Semiotics, broadly defined as "the study of signs" (Chandler, 2007, p. 2), lies at the heart of any discussion on metaphor as realized either in language or in any other modes. Charles Peirce, a renowned semiotician, made some, albeit limited, reference to the intersection of signs and metaphor. Although the notion of metaphor is not often found in Peirce's writings, its appearance often alludes to how it relates to images and analogies (Anderson, 1984, p. 453). This is a rather interesting relationship tempered by a relatively recent approach to communication under the name of social semiotics. Social semiotics, as a form of enquiry, concerns "the way people use semiotic resources both to produce communicative artefacts and events and to interpret them" (van Leeuwen, 2005, p. xi). This means that rather than creating separate accounts of symbols or semiotic resources, namely images, analogies or metaphor, independently, social semiotics foregrounds a logic of "integration" to find out how they operate in an integrated multimodal environment.

Partly fueled by the rise of technology and heavily influenced by Halliday's (1994) systemic functional theory of language, the field of multimodality deals with the ways in which different semiotic resources such as language, visual images, colors, gestures, space and architecture are used for the construction of meaning (Hodge & Kress, 1988; O'Halloran, 2004b). This is more specifically evidenced in, for instance, that multimodal analysis, along with considering the linguistic choices printed on a page, takes into consideration the various meaningful functions of visual images as well as the derived meaning from the combination of these two semiotic resources (image and text) (O'Halloran, 2004a, p. 1). Although the co-existence of image and text in discourse is by no means a recent phenomenon, the affordances of the interplay of multiple semiotic modes as meaning-making resources have only been studied systematically since the 1990s when work on visual communication was published by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen.

Regarding the study of metaphor, it is important to make some brief reference to a relatively recent influential metaphor theory in language and philosophy developed in the 1980s. Before then, metaphor was generally viewed as a literary device mainly used to beautify language. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980a) put it clearly, metaphor was deemed "for most people a device of poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish" (p. 453). By way of reacting against this traditionally reductionist view of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson postulated, primarily on the basis of linguistic evidence, that our conceptual system is essentially metaphorical (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a, Lakoff & Johnson, 1980b). Much, if not all, of the early research into conceptual metaphor was limited to one of its most powerful realizations: "language". More contemporary research scholars, however, have paid considerable attention to non-linguistic manifestations of metaphor, as is the case of, for instance, metaphorical gestures (e.g. Roth & Lawless, 2002), and metaphorical images, usually referred to as visual or pictorial metaphors, (e.g. Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009).

Visual metaphor is deemed a powerfully pervasive semiotic resource used to represent and construe reality for certain purposes. It has been the focus of attention and object of study in a

variety of media and genres such as print advertising, newspapers, cartoons and picture books (Forceville, 2002). Irrespective of the medium or genre, the analysis of metaphorical content of visual elements is often conducted through the lenses of "source" and "target" concepts; two key constructs used in metaphor theory to analyse the mapping of properties across two different conceptual domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a; Forceville, 2002). To exemplify this, a traditional metaphor in the form of A is B such as "LOVE is a JOURNEY" depicts not only the way in which an abstract entity (target) like "love" is understood in terms of another more "concrete" concept (source) like 'journey, but also the ways in which certain conceptual properties are common to both distinct domains. In linguistic realizations of metaphor, the direction of this mapping is generally from concrete to abstract whereby the latter is understood in terms of the former, a process which becomes fundamental to interpreting metaphor. However, in visual metaphor the directionality of the mapping is not always constant or predictable (Forceville, 2002; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). In fact, the direction of mappings can be reversed (B is A), or, in the presence of novel or creative metaphors, we may easily find metaphors in the form of A is A or B is B. One immediate implication of this dynamic structure of visual metaphors is in relation to the versatility of the interpretations and, therefore, analyses of the metaphorical content embedded in a visual image.

The study of metaphor, and, to a certain extent, of visual metaphor, has been at the heart of studies in political discourse on migration. However, most research has been particularly oriented towards the examination of how migration is linguistically and/or visually represented in main-stream media coverage in Western societies, specifically within the UK and the United States. For example, Petersson and Kainz (2017) investigated how migration issues are framed in the discursive patterns of two national and two regional newspapers in Sweden and Germany. The authors found several commonalities across the newspapers in terms of how migration is metaphorically concep-tualized. Some of the common source domains that occured in all four newspapers were "migration as natural disasters" and "migration as wars" (Petersson & Kainz, 2017, p. 59). These, as the authors point out, not only reinforce and reproduce the political ideologies of migration as a destructive phenomenon to a society, but also frame peoples' general mental schemas about migration, which generally result in negative perceptions of and reactions to the process of migration. Specifically related to the analysis of images, Bleiker, Campbell, Hutchison, and Nicholson (2013) analyzed newspaper front pages to explore the political representations of asylum seekers in Australia. Analysis of visual depictions revealed that visual discursive messages tend to dehumanize those who seek asylum by not depicting the individuals with recognizable facial features, thus centering media and political attention on the threats of asylum seekers to sovereignty and security.

Methodology

The research design of the present study is fundamentally framed by principles of qualitative research. Broadly defined as an approach that attempts to "explore attitudes, behaviour and experiences" (Dawson, 2009, p. 16), qualitative methodologies comprise a range of complex methods of inquiry which aim to explore, understand and interpret an array of particularities, processes, dimensions and phenomena of the social world (Mason, 2002). Among the various types of research that rests on epistemological principles of qualitative research are photographic inquiry (Butler-Kisber, 2017) and autobiographical research (Kasper & Prior, 2014). The former argues that visual images are never "innocent" in that they are always constructed through a variety of practices, technologies and knowledge, which act as powerful social tools to represent reality (Butler-Kisber, 2017, p. 123). The latter rests on the "epistemological status of stories as sense-making practices, as representations and constructions of events in the lives of tellers and their communities" (Kasper & Prior, 2014, p. 227). These two approaches inform the analysis of images and of spoken and written narratives.

Eight participants agreed to take part in this study. Nevertheless, due to the large amount of data gathered through the different instruments, data pertaining to three are reported on and discussed in this

study. Participants were accessed and recruited through a Community Migrant Refugee Centre in a Southeastern suburb in Melbourne. A large group of Latin American adult migrants attend weekly gatherings at the center. A general invitation was extended to the entire group to participate in the study, and contact details of the researchers were given to them so that those with an interest in the research could request further information, and potentially consent to participate. During the course of four weeks, eight contacted one of the researchers to express their interest in taking part of our research. These adult migrants received and voluntarily signed a consent form to partake in the study.

For issues of confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms have been used to refer to participants in the study.

Methods used in the study

All data sets were elicited in Spanish, the participants' first language (L1). Although most of the subjects can get by well in English, talking and engaging with them in their L1 would narrow possible social distance gaps, and generate more confidence in them. All the Spanish data were translated into English by the researchers, and representative samples of the Spanish-English translations were sent to two bilingual academics who kindly checked them for meaning, coherence, and consistency.

Data in our research were elicited by means of three methods: (i) a written narrative; (ii) a visual metaphor produced by each of the participants; and (iii) semi-structured interviews with four of the participants. At our first meeting, the participants were asked to write a narrative on how they metaphorically conceptualize their language learning experience in Australia. Before everyone began to write, it was suggested to them that we would like to hear about their language learning trajectories; the difficulties they have faced and the resources they've used to enhance their learning experience. The short narrative was prompted by a statement written in both English and Spanish (see Appendix 1 for details).

In this first encounter, the participants were also given an A4 sheet which contained a prompt statement for them to draw a visual metaphor (see Appendix 2 for details).

They were allowed to take the blank sheet home so that they could draw the visual metaphor at a convenient place and time. Participants were asked to return them to the researcher at the second meeting. At this second meeting, the researcher also met with the participants who had agreed to be interviewed. This instance was a great opportunity to further explore issues that had been raised in their written narratives in the first session.

Apart from the interview data from the three selected participants, the visual metaphors along with the written narratives produced by them have also been used to address the research questions in the present study.

How data were analyzed

In our present work the term "social semiotics" is used broadly to refer to what Jewitt and Oyama (2001) and van Leeuwen (2006) describe as the way in which different semiotic resources such as language, gestures and images, to name a few, combine to construct meaning. Although participants' written narratives and visual metaphors were not produced on the same day or under the same conditions (narratives were written at the first meeting in presence of the researcher while the visual metaphors were produced at participants' convenient place and time without the researcher being present), they were both aimed at tapping into the participants' metaphorical conceptual structures through the use of two different meaning-making resources (language and images). In the present study, we acknowledge that "the writing may carry one set of meanings and the images another" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 18), and have therefore analyzed the (metaphorical) content of these two modes as connected, but in no way one being dependent on the other. The analysis of the images is informed by some of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) principles underpinning visual communication, particularly the ways in which various semiotic means such as colors, layout,

shapes, design patterns, participants involved in the semiotic act, etc. are brought together into a coherent construction of the structure of the image (Kress, 2010).

The analysis of the written and spoken data is partly informed by Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) motivations to explore the cultural-cognitive elements of metaphor use. In our research, we searched for specific linguistic realizations of metaphor used by the participants to describe their different domains of language learning experience, and how these have shaped the construction of their identities. In discussing the identified language instantiations of metaphor, we would attempt to pinpoint possible dominant generic conceptual metaphors in the form *A is B*, where *A* refers to the target domain, or the abstract entity being understood in terms of another, while *B* refers to the source domain, or the more concrete concept in terms of which A is understood (Evans & Green, 2006; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a, Lakoff & Johnson, 1980c).

Analysis and discussion

The written narratives produced by the participants provided remarkable insights into our understanding of their lived experiences of language learning and their identity construction, and how these are metaphorically construed in the participants' mind and uses of language. In addressing the first research question, the following participants' narrative comments are worth exploring:

RQ1: *What do migrants' metaphorical conceptualizations of language learning reveal about their self image and identities?*

On analyzing the written narratives, the researchers were most surprised to find extraordinarily interesting metaphors produced by the participants. Sandra uses a metaphor in the domain of senses, particularly sight, a domain that has generally established metaphorical correlations between sight and mental activity (Grady, 1997; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). In the written narrative Sandra writes:

"I really feel **visually** and **vocally impaired**, like someone with a **disability**. When you can't speak the language it's like you're in the **darkness, no direction**, and **don't know where you are**" (Sandra, Written Narrative)

The words in boldface allude to possible language instantiations that relate to the metaphor *"UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING"*. The mapping between physical sight onto knowledge has been explored by various researchers (e.g. Sweetser, 1991). This cross-mapping domain structure is evident in Sandra's narrative as she relates her difficulty or inability to speak English with physical vocal and hearing impairment. It is of great interest to see how features of physical, spatial domains are transferred to knowledge and intellectual structures. The absence of "light" (darkness) and lack or loss of direction have been widely used in religious discourse (e.g. Erussard, 1997) to metaphorically construe ideas about "lack of understanding".

Sandra further elaborated on her metaphor during the interview. On this occasion, she makes the following remarks:

"Well, that metaphor, yes, I think that no speaking English is not having vision, hearing, arms, legs or ears, understand? This is really how I felt and sometimes feel. Someone without legs or arms is very limited to doing things. I can't watch movies in English or go to places in English" (Sandra, Interview)

Sandra's metaphorical conceptualizations of herself as a language learner are clearly shaped by her understandings of the impediments and limitations of people physically disadvantaged. She now includes other body parts to further stress how constrained she feels about not speaking English. This is to a great extent depicted in the visual metaphor (Figure 1) she produced.

In the above visual representation, we can see the image of a face of person located at the center of the picture surrounded by short written messages in English and Spanish. The silence/mute icon right next to the represented individual seems to be complementing the bodily expression depicted by the right hand, especially the upright index finger on the mouth of the individual. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) point out
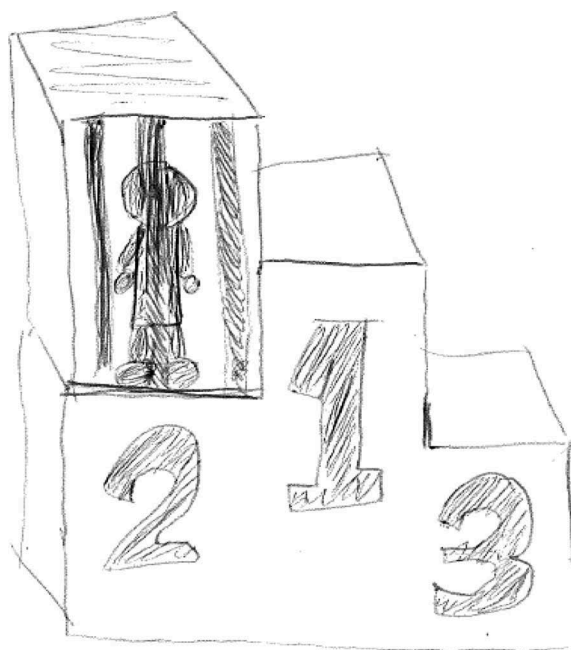
Figure 1. Sandra's visual metaphor.

that "images represent the relations between the people, places and the things they depict" (p. 181), thus establishing a complex set of relations between the represented individual, Sandra in this case, and the social-cultural context of language use. There are interesting pictorial elements in the image through which the metaphor of impairment in the written narrative is clearly depicted. The eyes covered by the individual's hair, the "silence" body expression and the mute icon are clear visual representations of Sandra's metaphorical conceptualizations of the complex and conflicting experiences of language learning she has had to grapple with. The simplicity observed in the short written messages seems to be voicing the shallow levels of socio-cultural interactions and practices in which she has got involved over the years. The "no English" and "no Spanish" messages evidence Sandra's constraints to use Spanish in an English speaking environment, and her inability to use English to engage with the wider community.

As depicted in Figure 2, the second participant, William, commented on his written narrative that he sees himself as a competitor in an exhausting, yet rewarding, marathon. As an active sports man, William stresses on different occasions that just like in any sports activity, constant, regular practice is pivotal to achieve one's desired outcomes. He observes that:

> "learning a language is, for me, like **preparing** for a **competition**, a **tournament**, or something like that; it's not easy, it's a **race** or like a **marathon** where you need to **prepare** your **concentration**, your **body**, your **capacity** to **endure** high or low temperatures, and be ready to **win**. I love sports so this is what I think" (William, Written Narrative)

The narrative and, in particular, the words in boldface are clear linguistic realizations of William's understanding of learning in terms of a rather salient and familiar domain to him, that of sports, thus pointing to the presence of an underlying generic conceptual metaphor: "*LANGUAGE LEARNING IS A SPORTS ACTIVITY*". This is indicative of what metaphor scholars (e.g. Lakoff & Johnson; Evans & Green, 2006) have affirmed regarding the experiential basis of our conceptual structures. It becomes clear that the role of and experiences with sports activities in William's life have contributed to not only his reasoning and talking about language learning in terms of sports, but, most importantly, to how he has involved himself in a constant, systematic, and "competitive"

Figure 2. William's visual metaphor.

process of identity construction through which he convincingly expresses feelings of pride and achievement. This was evident during the face-to-face conversation with him:

> "I think now I feel like a winner, you know. It's not easy to come to a new country, new people, no family, friends, new language, no job, etc. I really felt like a big loser at the start when I didn't speak any English, but it's been a long, tiring, and sometimes embarrassing race throughout the years. The drawing I did is what I think about my learning journey, and where I am now. I still have to learn more, that's why I am not number 1, but one day I will be there" (William, Interview).

As can be observed in the visual metaphor he created, the image of a podium showing the position on which the represented individual stands is a clear metaphorical representation of what William feels he has achieved, and where he positions himself as an active participant in the language learning "race" as he points out.

His position on the second place (see Figure 2) is indicative of how far William feels he has gone up to, and how much he is yet to achieve as far as learning English is concerned. William sounds quite confident with the skills he has already developed as he visualizes further improvements in his language abilities "(… but one day I will be there [number one])". Nevertheless, he also comments somewhat disappointedly to the researcher that "his English has got stuck".

The last pictorial metaphor analyzed in our work was produced by Pamela who, as reported earlier, described vividly the work environment in which she learned the first and basic rudiments of English. In her written narrative she reminisces about her past and present experiences in relation to the domains of light and darkness, which she uses to conceptualize her learning trajectories.

> "The first days when I was in contact with English at the factory I felt like I was **locked up** in a **dark** room; I couldn't really do anything, understand or communicate with people. That was very frustrating. But, now I have more **light** in my life; I understand more and can communicate more in different situations" (Pamela, Written Narrative)

This short narrative is another clear example of how our bodily experiences motivate metaphorical meanings (Gibbs, 2003). Pamela's possible experiences and understandings of "enclosure" along with the affordances of brightness and the constraints of darkness seem to have influenced Pamela's mental imagery for conceptualizing her struggles in terms of darkness and success in terms of light. This is indicative of changes in not only her language abilities over time but, most importantly, in her identity construction and the ways in which she has come to see herself as a language learner. Later in the narrative, Pamela briefly comments on how her membership in a religious community greatly contributed to "brighter" stages in her life:

> " … also my experience as a language learner was much better when I joined the christian church I go to. This was a very important part in my life where I started to find more motivation, inspiration and see a **light shining** in my mind" (Pamela, Written Narrative)

The reiteration of the "light" metaphor affirms the ways in which her participation in a religious group has framed her understanding of success and failure, notions that are firmly rooted in religious metaphorical conceptualizations of good and evil in terms of light and darkness. Pamela's sense of belonging to a new community that has instilled motivation and inspiration into her learning experience is reflective of what Deaux (2001) calls "social identity". To her, social identity "refers specifically to those aspects of a person that are defined in terms of his or her group memberships" (Deaux, 2001, p. 1).

The pictorial metaphor produced by Pamela illustrates the overall idea put forth in her written narrative. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Jewitt and Oyama (2001) point out, one of the functions of images is to present or translate an argument carried by the written word. A dominant visual element that stands out in the image below (see Figure 3) is the Christian cross right at the center of the image backgrounded by other visual elements.

Figure 3. Pamela's visual metaphor.

The central position of the cross evokes semantic features that account for Pamela's greater sense of motivation and inspiration driven by her membership in the Christian community, and therefore represents the significance of the Christian faith in a process of identity construction.

During the interview, Pamela attempts to explain her use of "light" metaphors to refer to stages of language learning success in her life. She comments that:

"I see my life in Australia divided in two. The first years here were very obscure because I couldn't really understand much or communicate with people, not even do the basic things like going to the doctor's. But, when I had more opportunities to practice my English in Church and other places I felt that a light was turned on inside of me" (Pamela, Interview)

These comments come as timely revelations to any subjective interpretation of the two colored halves in the visual image. The dark shadowed half depicts the social, cultural, linguistically troubled times when Pamela was unable to socialize or engage meaningfully and successfully with the community, thus creating great feelings of frustration as she indicated earlier. The light-colored side is a visual expression of how not only new social memberships but successful learning experiences have revitalized Pamela's life as depicted by the vivid red color in half her heart. The word "Inglés" [English] written in the speech bubble is reassuring the positive identity changes that Pamela has experienced.

RQ2: *How do the migrants' metaphorical framings of language learning facilitate an understanding of the factors that enabled them to or prevented them from active participation in socio-cultural practices in the Australian community?*

Reflecting on their experiences upon arriving in Australia, most participants commented that although English was, and still is, a basic necessity for them to function successfully in daily activities, the need and desire to have a financially stable life was favored over other choices.

"We had very little money in our pockets when we came to Australia so the first thing that we really needed was a job … we had two kids and needed to bring home the bacon, and didn't really want to have poverty in our home again" (Sandra, Written Narrative)

" … All I wanted was a better place for my family and my kids, and for this I really needed to find a job as soon as possible, and this is how I learnt the first things in English, just factory English" (Pamela, Written Narrative)

These narratives reveal interesting aspects of the migrants' shifting identities throughout their life trajectories, particularly upon settling into their new country. Their willingness to give their children a better place, and the desire to achieve a different social status seem to be clear indicators of emergent features of new membership to social and cultural practices (Aneja, 2016). It is interesting to note that although they did recognize the significance of learning English for day-to-day living, their strong impetus for a financially stable life was probably fueled by what Sandra voices as an apparently profound desire to stay away from scarcity.

At the second meeting, some of the issues raised in the narratives were further explored in a face-to-face conversation (interview). On this occasion, Pamela, who picked up the first rudiments of the language at factories, elaborates on this by saying that:

"I was working as a cleaner in big factory; sometimes I did day shifts, sometimes night, but there were very few people around me, and not even Australians, all migrants. The first day there was someone doing like an induction but I didn't understand a word" (Pamela, interview)

It seems that the need for a job to support her family prevented Pamela from undertaking formal English lessons, relegating her learning opportunities to limited exposure to other workers' input whose first language was not English. Despite there being few people from and with whom to learn and practice English, Pamela reminisces about her early language learning experiences at the factory, with which she appears to be happy enough in terms of how it all started.

A rather similar sentiment is shared by William, who stresses the need to "make money as soon as possible" as a way of leaving poverty behind.

"There was a civil war in my country, many innocent people died, there were no jobs, no food, just in the black market, and then living in a country that was so rich, we just wanted to make money soon, so no time to learn English" (William, Written Narrative)

Several scholars (e.g. Kinginger, 2013; McKinney & Norton, 2008; Norton & Toohey, 2011) have argued that the dynamic and multifaceted nature of identity must be understood in relation to particular social, cultural, historical, political contexts within which it evolves. William's narrative gives insights into how the economic and socio-political events taking place in his home country at the time of emigration seemed to have infused willingness, desire and motivation into his pursuit of better socio-economic conditions which would enable him to project himself into the future, thus "leaving scarcity behind".

During the interview with William, he reiterated some of the ideas expressed in his written narrative, and elaborated on others.

"Although me and my wife never had time to go to a college to learn English, our children were learning the language very quickly. They were feeling more Australian than we were, I guess. I had a good job but I was always thinking: I wish I had this job in my home country, wow! But, I think that after the years, when you know the country, know more English, you identify more with the Aussie culture" (William, Interview)

William's story is a clear example of the Iranian migrant woman's experiences reported on by Ebtekar (2012) who explores the interface of language learning and identity construction. Through the analysis of life history narratives, the study unpacks the complexities that arose from her involvement in political activism, which prevented her from undertaking postgraduate studies. In an attempt to escape from the oppression of the Islamic regime, she migrated to Australia in search for more opportunities, and for a life without political turmoil. In the same way, William and his family's pursuits for a better life in Australia were also driven by a profound desire to be away from the socio-political havoc in their home country. One could imagine that their social, cultural adaptation process was certainly not easy. However, as William observes, having already acquired more English competence, a great sense of belonging and identification has emerged. These are clear signs of identity construction, and of how a new self has been shaped by the capacity "to do more things in Australia" and the enhanced language ability to communicate with others. West (2006) asserts that identity is connected with a desire for affiliation, security and safety. These are elements that have contributed to William's heightened sense of social identification throughout his life trajectories.

Sandra remembers that when she began to feel a little more confident with some vocabulary, she changed her perception of Australians' attitudes towards immigrants.

"I realized that when you can speak the language, you are more accepted, and this is marvelous, because you don't feel like a rat, like you're worth nothing. So, when we arrived here I always had a lot of Spanish friends but every day I tried to learn new words, and practice them at the shops or something because I didn't want to feel discriminated" (Sandra)

Sandra's comment reveals interesting aspects of how she views the role of English in her life, how she saw herself positioned in the Australian community, and the extent to which she was investing in her own learning. It may be the case that Sandra is trying to establish what Morita (2004) calls "desirable identities" which relates to what individuals aspire to be in the new environment. Coming to the realization that speaking the language of the new community is certainly an important step forward in the process of adaptation and participation suggests that Sandra was determined to get involved in the activities and practices of the new community to feel more accepted, and therefore not face issues of marginalization or discrimination.

Overall, the above extracts from the written narratives and interviews provide rich insights into the participants' learning experiences, their perceptions of language, and how their participation and investment in socio-cultural practices of their new community contribute to emerging features of

shifting identities that are rooted in the interactions with other community members during the course of their lives.

Conclusion

This paper has explored migrants' language learning experiences through the lenses of metaphorical conceptualizations and written and spoken narratives as critical sites for understanding their construction and negotiations of identity. Migrants' metaphorical conceptualizations have revealed that despite the pervasive language barriers that continue to prevent them from fully integrating into the target language community, continuous affiliations with Spanish-speaking community groups and improved socio-economic conditions have allowed for the emergence of positive self images and hybrid identities, which lie at the intersection of a strong sense of belonging to the Latino community, an imagined self that wishes to become a more active member of the Australian community, and a great sense of achievement as far language learning is concerned.

The visual representations along with the representative samples of participants' written narratives and interviews have provided interesting insights into developmental changes in participants' language learner identities. The diverse and complex ways of constructing and negotiating their new identities have been motivated by not only their profound desire and necessity to have a financially stable life in Australia, but also by successful attempts to establish networks and relationships with the wider English-speaking community. Both the negative and positive experiences lived throughout the participants' life trajectories have framed their metaphorical conceptualizations, thus ratifying the experiential of our conceptual structures.

This study has shown that the primary drive for the participants to migrate to Australia was the pursuit of better life opportunities and the need to escape economic scarcity and/or political unrest. Learning English did not come across as vitally important at the outset as long as the participants were able to secure steady work. However, somewhat incidentally, the participants seemed to gradually come to the realization that increased English language proficiency allowed them to better appreciate their host country's values, which in turn resulted in an increased sense of belonging. Also, the second major finding was that the participants' discourses and metaphorical conceptualizations appeared to revolve around two complementary notions: (i) the inability to use the English language equates with rather debilitating impediments; conversely, using the language successfully is perceived as liberating and as a stepping stone to a better sociocultural appreciation; (ii) English language learning calls for perseverance, stamina, and effort, which – if applied successfully – is eventually rewarded.

While this research does not offer a conclusive answer to the question of how migrant language learners' complex conceptualizations of their own selves are exactly mediated by the interplay of transnational acculturation and language learning, largely due to both the individual complexities and the diverse and ever-changing contexts surrounding individuals (Yang & Yi, 2006), the study does offer rich insights into how personal desires and expectations interact with personal sociocultural and linguistic experiences in a group of individuals. Thus, the current study findings add to a growing body of literature emphasizing that language learning entails and is shaped by an identity construction process (Norton & Toohey, 2011) and contributes to gaining a better understanding of one of the areas that, according to Firth and Wagner (1997) called for further research, namely: The notion of "foreignness" and identity construction in second language learning, from a sociocultural perspective. Similarly, this study provides additional evidence with respect to the need to adopt a learner-centered, accommodating, sociocultural perspective to language learning, considering migrants' daily struggles and sensitive identity construction process (Hewagodage & O'Neill, 2010).

Lastly, due to the processual and dynamic nature of identity construction, it would be fruitful to pursue a longitudinal research study aimed at unravelling the relationships amongst the diverse individual, contextual factors, and metaphorical conceptualizations of self interacting in the identity construction process in migrant English language learners.

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