Reifying Language Learning: Identity and Self as Discourse in a Multimedia Praxis

Shikha Sharma

Introduction

The post-modern world is considered as a world without fixity, without any concretized notion of understanding concerning specific entities. Be it ideas related to human civilization or ideas indicating different dimensions of identity of an individual, we have significantly witnessed how there are multiplicities and multifarious understandings which have crept in. What this does is that it nullifies a structural comprehension of grasping a particular thing. Technological ramifications can be argued to be most dynamic forms of development of the current age, altering numerous ways of living of human beings. Considering a classroom, it becomes tremendously important to develop a conducive atmosphere of learning for students in which technology plays a vital role. In the same vein, it also acts as a major paradigmatic shift in relation to teachers as they can orchestrate a pathway for forming their own sense of identity, and by extension, their understanding of own self. An individual's identity easily becomes the core attribute when it comes to positioning a particular individual within various physical spaces in a society. Aligning with technological advancements, it also has to be considered that contemporary notion of one's identity is primarily fractured and fissured in nature, in that, individuals cannot come across a totalizing idea as to how identity can be put in the form of textbook definition.

Stuart Hall, the notable cultural theorist, makes a very valid argument pertaining to how human identities get created saying that interactions with one another in a society form the base for positing one's individuality. As he defines in "Who Needs 'Identity''

> I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate,' speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken.' Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. (5–6)

Multimodal forms of present-day interactions of teachers both with texts and students in a classroom have proved to be immensely beneficial-something which provides teachers with the leeway to establish their identity within broader discursive spatiality of a classroom. Technology has been significantly impactful in ascertaining that a teacher teaching language in a classroom is no longer confined within age-old methodological teachings of dictates of a particular language. In their attempts to equip themselves with technological know-how of a language, teachers excel in the process of learning a language which subsequently paves the way for establishment of his or her identity in discursive structural paradigms. Society and social dwellings appear to be two inextricable ties which appear indispensable for giving a proper shape to one's identity as different interactions of an individual with societal members subtly form different ideas as to how a particular individual is understood and taken into consideration. Simply put, in a community of humans, identity of a person becomes subject to constructions, imaginations coupled with multiple reconstructions thereby affirming that post-modern human identity is societal to the core as social dimensions appear focal. While putting forward the inherent meaning of framework of stance triangle, Du Bois opined that stance of particular individual "can be approached as a linguistically articulated form of social action whose meaning is to be constructed within the broader scope of language, interaction, and sociocultural value" (139).

He also made it vividly evident that stances come out to the forefront whenever there is a notable context or a situation within the physical space of a society that witnesses action by a person. Du Bois also focuses with various dialogues which act as notable agents for granting

identity to a person as interactions always tend to become fruitful whenever there are meaningful exchanges of dialogues. In this situational context, role of language adorns a primary function as it entails meaningful exchanges while making an individual situate himself or herself within the broader locus of human civilization. In the situation of classroom, a particular text becomes a significant means to both create and assert identities of teachers because a text not only deals with visual mode of communication related to presence of different pictures and words but also allows for a cognitive communication of teachers in terms of simplifying different concepts for students. Multimodal forms of communication pave the way for teachers to develop what can be called as texts related to identity which can be exchanged with students and other individuals. Du Bois is of the opinion that whenever these texts are exchanged, there are feedbacks received which act as strong boosters for assertion of identities of teachers. This vividly reiterates that social exchanges and negotiations act as linchpin for formation of one's identity as feedback for teachers act as validation for their identity to establish their selfhood as individuals. Simon Clarke makes a very apt comment in this same regard when he stresses on various social dealing to be sanctioning identity of an individual. In his words

> Identity is the socially constructed, socially sanctioned (or at least recognized) complex of self significations deriving from an individual's membership in such collectivities as class, race, gender, sexuality . . . it plays a decisive role in human behaviour: one acts from a certain positionality and in accordance with a certain worldview or set of values deeply rooted in identity. At the same time, identity is never 'complete'; rather, it is always under construction. To put it more explicitly, identity is not an object but a process. . . . identity is (a) representation, and the representation of identity, whether to oneself or to others, is in fact its very construction. (19)

Technological gadgets aid processes involving various representational mediums. Human beings no longer are seen to be adhering to only either written or spoken communicative stances as this makes critical analysis of one's notion of identity even more paramount. In a world where there is a widespread prevalence of different forms of measuring scales of literary competency of a person, processes of construction discursive practices in a classroom become a challenging task as teachers have to consider even dimensions related spaces of texts and classroom as well. Having stated that, it also needs to be comprehended that a multimodal world enormously facilitates communications and modes of communications which open up gateways for establishment of identities related to teachers in a classroom setting. Different constructions involved in dynamics of language are also equally important as these influence teachers to also take note of different communication away from the spoken form like that of sound and colour. Teachers also sometimes find themselves in conflicting positions of organizing meanings from different underlying layers of a text along with different pictorial organizations. It is very contextual to state that teachers acknowledge the presence of a particular group or rather, a cultural group who they generally interact with in a society as they get validated by them concerning their teaching methods and also interactions with students. Teachers, thus, become a larger group in a society which are subject of connectedness and processes of interactions and discussions with one another. Social dimensions appear to be very important in this regard as identity of a particular teacher "designates the attempt to differentiate and integrate a sense of self along different social and personal dimensions such as gender, age, race, occupation, gangs, socio-economic status, ethnicity, class, nation states, or regional territory" (Bamberg 33).

Stance triangle framework by Du Bois also focuses on different aspects of conversations of teachers both with their peers and students. As per the framework, a particular way of communication of a teacher acts as

an indicator of broader dimension of establishment of identity. Several elements that generally form a part of multimodality discourse also become elements which hint at creation of teacher's identity. Language use facilitates in this entire process in evaluating explicating positions of teachers while analysing and also critically evaluating ramifications involved in technological know-how. It can also be stated that teachers' inter-personal connections within environment of either a classroom or a staff-room can be determined by discursive traits of language.Du Bois substantiates this argument when he remarks, "the value of any stance utterance tends to be shaped by its framing through the collaborative acts of co-participants in dialogic interaction" (141). One of the fundamental arguments involved in stance triangle is the gradual development of one's self. Du Bois chiefly explicates the idea that in a larger interactive process within different societal members, an individual gradually goes through a transformative phase, one which brings in multiplicities concerning identity of teachers because it can be argued to be "dynamic as identity itself, subject to continuous refinement and reconceptualization" (Noonan 2).

The framework also critically espouses the idea that presence of a discursive model of language in the praxis of a classroom setting remains indispensable as identity begets in such an environment. If this argument is abided by, it also asserts that identities of teachers in a classroom are also dynamic in nature, in that, these would become slave to time and would attain a new outlook overtime as

> identity is never autonomous completely: it is only definable according to what it is not [and]. . . is always a construction . . . whether one believes one chooses one's identity for oneself, or whether this is constituted for one by one's family dynamic, philosophical considerations of identity in relation to the question of being, or by a broader socio-cultural dynamic. (Wolfreys 98)

Whenever a teacher attempts to communicative with his or her students, there is an indirect effort being underlined to create a personal act. This

act finds itself steeped in the discourse of language used in a society which further dictates the process of identity formation. Communication, alongside language, is of equal significance considering its role in creation of meaning of a particular contextual situation. One can argue that teachers find themselves in a public act pertaining to a systematic praxis in school environment where personal incidents, ideas, beliefs, opinions and feelings of teachers intermingle with what actually can be defined as knowledge associated with a particular disciplinary study. This intermingling of personal attributes of a teacher earn a notable dimension, echoing how teachers undergo significant changes, both at personal levels concerning their identity and at social levels concerning their constructions by other individuals. Identity of a teacher, in a classroom setting, then, can be stated to be the intelligence coupled with competence which characterize a particular teacher in accomplishing different textual and communicative tasks. This identity gets reified by self-confidence which oozes out with the passage of time after relentless studies and effortless practice. Another vital factor in construction of such kind of an identity is experiences of varied forms and structures in their interactions with students in a classroom which result in assertion of selves of teachers.

Identity of teachers, within confined spaces of a classroom, thus, becomes the pedagogical framework from which they feed off for performing better in front of students, further substantiating that development of identity aligns with what can be called as "public act by social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects..." (Du Bois 163). Sophisticated gadgets of contemporary internet-run academia also need to be mentioned in their rampant presence to be used by teachers so that dimensions of multimodality also come out to forefront. As a primary benefit, various tools involving technology greatly support teachers in self-introspecting their performances and use of tools for a better classroom teaching.

One can argue for the development of a space for interaction between teachers which also acts as a platform for exchange of thoughts and sharing of ideas with one another. It is technology which aids connections of teachers with students which further help in creation of a conducive atmosphere for teaching and subsequently, for establishment of identity related to teachers as

> identities are necessarily the product of the society in which we live and our relationship with others. Identity provides a link between individuals and a world in which they live . . . Identity involves the internal and the subjective, and the external. It is a socially recognized position, recognized by others, not just by me. (7)

Identity of a teacher in a classroom setting, as can be echoed from various arguments put forward in this research, gets itself engaged in a complex web of discourse, praxis, implementation and context. Processes related to reflections and examinations of different discursive techniques implemented by teachers to teach students become immensely beneficial in conceptualizing how identity gets structured and also restructured in a social setting. Along with teaching and implementing new forms of ideas to students, teachers also get ample scope for sharing their own knowledge with their colleagues which would further establish their selves in the society. In relation to multimodality, contemporary teachers have significantly moved away from only focusing on general conversations based on words and have embraced different communicative strategies which reiterate dimensions of non-verbal communication. Thus, identities get formed by/in society wherein teachers get situated and existentially placed in the physical environment, allowing for development of introspective spaces for construction of a valued self.

Works Cited

Bamberg, Michael. "Identity and Narration." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, edited by Peter Hühn, et al. Hamburg UP, 2013, pp. 33-34.

Clarke, Simon. "Culture and Identity." *The Sage Handbook of Cultural Analysis*, edited by Tony Bennett and John Frow. Sage, 2008, pp. 510-29.

Du Bois, J.W. "The Stance Triangle." *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction,* edited by R. Englebretson. John Benjamins, 2007, pp. 139-182.

Hall, Stuart. "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. Sage, 1996, pp. 1-17.

Noonan, J. "An Affinity for Learning: Teacher Identity and Powerful Professional Development." *Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 70, no. 5, 2019, pp. 526-537.

Woodward, Kath, editor. *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Ethnicity*. Routledge, 2004.

Wolfreys, Julian. *Critical Keywords in Literary and Cultural Theory*. Macmillan, 2004.