Chapter 3

Cultural identity

1 Introduction

In this chapter three issues are addressed. First of all, a conceptual and operational definition of cultural identity is established [§2, Chapter 3]. Secondly, the role of cultural identity in the acquisition planning context is discussed [§3, Chapter 3]. Thirdly, cultural identity and its manifestations in social approaches to L2 learning are analysed [§4, Chapter 3].

2 Towards a definition of cultural identity

Two difficulties concerning definitions of cultural identity need foregrounding as a means of an introduction to this section. First of all, the construct cultural identity is used without overt definition by many authors. Secondly, the very construct “identity” is in a crisis at the time of writing.

First of all then, the construct cultural identity is often used by scholars without an overt definition or explanation of how the construct is understood (for example Gardner, 1985: 135, 139; Lanham, 1985: 246; Carey, 1993: 31; Luckett, 1993: 38; Berns, 1995: 22; De Klerk & Bosch, 1995: 34; Bosch & De Klerk, 1996: 2). It is as if scholars assume that everyone will know what is meant by cultural identity. In a discussion about European culture, Berns (1995: 26) identifies a similar attitude: “[p]eople quite naturally and unselfconsciously speak of ‘European culture’, confident that the reference will be generally understood and will call up shared or compatible associations”. Another explanation might be that the disciplines that deal with this construct (mainly cultural and literary studies and philosophy) find the overt presentation of a definition a “vulgar” strategy. A very personal “discovery” or “construction” of concepts is the preferred strategy.

The conceptual and operational definition of cultural identity used in this study is an attempt to come to a clear understanding of what is meant by the construct. This does not mean that the construct cannot be conceptualised or operationalised differently (for example, Langley et al., 1992: 7). It simply means that readers of this text will know what is meant by cultural identity for the purposes of this study.

Secondly, current (2000) studies of “identity” are interesting because postmodern scholarly opinion maintains that the concept is “in crisis”. It is argued that the fragmented sense of self of the postmodern person/subject manifests in the notion that people have no permanent/fixed identities, but assume different identities at different times. The idea of a well-integrated (and relatively singular and stable) identity is suspect (Larrain, 1994: 15). It is argued that the various and often contradictory identities assumed by postmodern people resist a sense of “unity” usually associated with discussions of identity. The conception of the “identity project” illustrates current ideas: “[b]y identity project is meant the idea that identity is not fixed but created and built on, always in process, a moving towards rather than an arrival” (Barker, 1999: 3). The very possibility of a unified identity (personal or social) is questioned in this context.

This belief is criticised from two different perspectives: doubt about the total disintegration of a unified (albeit multidimensional) identity and a more concrete rejection of the idea owing to current manifestations of identity activities world wide. Despite his eloquent rendition of the philosophy undergirding postmodern thinking, Larrain (1994: 153) states that: “I have doubts as to whether they [changes in the postmodern world] are in any way responsible for a totally decentred subject”. His main concern with this idea is that it results in a loss of agency and purpose for humanity. If one accepts postmodern assumptions about the “death” of an integrated identity, people are rendered unable to change or impact on their circumstances, or to put forward alternative future scenarios or direction. He is of the opinion that “[i]n times of confusion and mind-boggling changes this is a most dangerous and insidious ideology” (Larrain, 1994: 154) that might lead to gross abuse. Following Larrain (1994), Schillings (1995: 10) states that this notion reduces humanity to “een speelbal van de huidige wereldmachten en multinationals”. According to Schillings, this notion is based on an underestimation of human will power.

Norton Peirce (1995) reverses thinking about the effect of “paralysis” or lack of agency assumed in accepting contradictory and multiple postmodern identity manifestations. She argues that a multidimensional identity can afford L2 learners
even more opportunities to negotiate a sense of self in a variety of social contexts (1995: 13). If postmodern L2 learners, therefore, actively seek to explore possibilities created by a multidimensional identity construct, this disposition can lead them to actively seek out opportunities to use the L2 outside the classroom. Ultimately, this exposure and use of the L2 outside the classroom can contribute to achieving higher L2 proficiency.

Fishman (1997a) also rejects the idea that an integrated identity is “dead”. In his study of positive ethnolinguistic consciousness of people who use 76 different languages, he comes to the conclusion that, “ethnicity [a form of social identity] has become a truly major (and, perhaps, the truly major) aggregational principle of the modern and even of the post-modern political world” (1997a: 58). An example of a postmodern expression of the incapability of people to act as a result of an “integrated identity” is: “we cannot be said to have an identity, rather, one is a centreless weave of beliefs, attitudes and identifications … identities are contradictory, they cross-cut or dislocate each other so that no single identity acts in an overarching organizing capacity” (Barker, 1999: 8). Fishman (1997a: 173) questions the validity of these types of statements by stating:

It is hardly the most constructive scholarly stance to downgrade the bulk of the world’s peoples merely because they do not share a widespread scholarly opinion with respect to the relative unimportance of ethnicity [one example of an aggregate, yet unified social identity construction], particularly when that opinion has recently been proven to be on rather shaky ground.

Other scholars share Fishman’s (1997a) opinion that one should rather refer to a revival of identity issues in the postmodern world that suggests that the concept of the unified identity is not long “dead” (Billington et al., 1991: 100; Friedman, 1994: viii; Norton, 2000: 5). In the postmodern context, the conception of identity as simplex and fixed, is regarded negatively. The postmodern view of identity is that it is multidimensional and complex. A positive approach to this identity conception leads one to believe that the plastic nature of postmodern identity does not necessarily result in an “unstable”, agency-less human population. Regarded positively, the postmodern complex and multidimensional cultural identity opens up a plethora of possibilities for different expressions of human agency. Positive renditions of a complex cultural identity and its interaction in the second language learning process, and ultimately, its implications for acquisition planning, is the focus of this study.

2.1 Philosophical overview of identity formation processes

A brief philosophical overview of the identity formation process is presented. This includes a focus on the historical development of the concept identity. Two themes are traced: the conceptualisation of identity as a personal/individual and as a social/collective concept; and the essentialist versus historical conception of identity. This overview further contextualises the current crisis of the identity construct.

As a means of introduction, a “layperson’s” view of identity and the development processes concerning the personal and social forms thereof, is in order. Broadly speaking, one can identify “personal/individual” and “social/collective” domains of identities. These domains co-exist within individuals and they manifest themselves or become salient in response to different circumstances.

The most famous definition of personal/individual identity is that of Erikson (1968), who “... explains identity as an integration of all previous identifications and self-images. Identity formation is a restructuring of all previous identifications in the light of the anticipated future” (in Motet, 1984: 180). It is argued that a well-balanced individual identity would, therefore, lead an observer to state: “That person is the same today as she was yesterday” and it would further imply that one could expect her to be basically the same in future. A stable personal/individual identity is, therefore, developed by a continuous process where one’s identity is constantly restructured as one gathers more knowledge/insight and awareness of one’s likes/dislikes/affinities in different contexts.

Today, Tajfel’s definition is probably the best-known definition of social identity. Within social identity theory, he defines social identity as: "... that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978: 63 as quoted in Brown et al., 1986: 275). In terms of this definition, social identity is regarded as an overarching complex construct that encompasses various forms of group identity, because it is possible that a person can experience memberships of different groups at the same time. Tajfel’s definition
further implies that under certain conditions, individuals act as members of a group rather than in their individual capacity (Tajfel, 1982: 4). The salient social identity of a person, therefore, is a function of different social circumstances (Tajfel, 1982: 5).

The following philosophical overview shows that these themes, the personal/individual and the social/collective, have dominated philosophical discussion about identity. A philosophical overview of the concept "identity" also shows that this seemingly "unproblematic" view of identity formation processes presents a superficial explanation of a very complex matter. Although it is far beyond the scope of this study to present an in-depth recollection of philosophical conceptions of identity formation processes, a brief overview of main themes in this debate provides the context for the definition of cultural identity as conceived of in this study. This discussion is required in the context of the "problematic" status of the concept identity in current scholarly debates.

The main source for this overview is Larrain (1994). According to Larrain (1994: 143-150), a historical overview of philosophical thinking about identity reveals three themes: a focus on personal identity, a consequent awareness that identity is socially determined, and finally, scepticism of the idea of a "unitary" or "integrated" identity of whatever nature.

2.1.1 Personal identity

In the philosophical context of modernity, the person/subject is postulated as the centre of the world — the main point of reference. This is in direct opposition to medieval thinking. The original conception of identity in this time is fairly abstract: conceiving of the individual as separated from history and social relations. Identity then, is seen as an inherent essence pertaining to the internal existence of the person. According to Larrain (1994: 144), the modern philosophical conception of identity is that it is "based on belief in the existence of a self or inner core which emerges at birth ... and which remains basically the same throughout life, thus providing a sense of continuity and self-recognition".

Examples of philosophers who displayed an allegiance to the idea of a personal identity or an abstract, isolated individual are, Descartes, Locke and Leibniz. Kant equated the individual to the "Idea" and added a transcendental focus. Hegel also regards the individual as an "Idea", but includes a historical component and with it the notion that the individual manifests itself in at least two forms: the abstract self and the self that expresses its folk spirit. Hegel is the first to add the concept of the individual existence with reference to the "other".

2.1.2 Identity is socially determined

Marx presents the first critique of the conception of identity as abstract and individual. He maintains that if there is something like individual existence, it exists in the essence of social relations. According to Marx, human beings can only individuate themselves in the midst of society. Identity is, therefore, socially determined. G. H. Mead adds that the self is dependent upon the social group to which it belongs. The self, therefore, arises in the context of a variety of social experiences and is conceived of as complex. Hume also criticises the conception of personal identity because he argues that the conception of an inherent, personal identity is incompatible with the notion of change. He regards the identity as fictitious and, therefore, rebukes the idea that personal identity can be introspectively apprehended. From Nietzsche onwards, personal identity is more and more conceived of as a fiction or an imaginary construct. Freud's claim that identity is determined by the unconscious and Levi-Strauss' idea that the continuity of self is a social construction, increasingly put the idea of the existence of a personal, integrated identity under pressure. However, although these philosophers criticised the "personal" nature of identity, they can still be said to agree that the "core" of the self integrates these various aspects into a coherent, consistent identity. Although identity, according to them, is socially determined, they believe in the possibility of the unity of that identity, albeit complex and constructed externally.

2.1.3 Scepticism of a "unified"/"integrated" identity

Foucault argues that identity is a product of power relations. The idea of the person as creator of her/his own identity is challenged even further with this conception. The identity is, therefore, "constituted" or "constructed" and can, therefore, not be inherent. Lyotard argues that the "self" does not amount to much and that the "self" is not an island. The "self", therefore, only exists in the fabric of complex relations or communication networks. Baudrillard states that "objects" are in control in the
constitution of identity. Debates by these philosophers result in a disbelief in "the possibility of an underlying unity or substance in human beings" (Larrain, 1994: 149).

Postmodern scepticism, therefore, renders the idea of an integrated identity as problematic or "in crisis". Current postmodern philosophy conceives of identity as incapable of unity, as fragmentable and decentred (Barker, 1999: 31-32). Criticism from the "social" opponents of "personal" identity acknowledged the existence of a variety of selves, but entertained the idea that these selves could more or less exist as an integrated unity. Postmodern philosophy acknowledges the co-existence of elementary selves, but these selves are regarded as incompatible, impossible to integrate and, therefore, incapable of unity.

Although this summary is necessarily superficial, it provides the reader with a brief overview of philosophical thinking about the idea of "identity" that provides the context for this study of cultural identity. Cognisance of this debate refuses one the luxury to conceive of identity as an "unproblematic" concept. Current definitions of identity constructs have to engage with this debate.

2.1.4 Essentialist vs. anti-essentialist/historical approaches to identity

It is also important to clarify one's approach towards the construct "identity". According to Larrain (1994: 157-166) and Barker (1999: 27-31), identity can be approached from two different angles: essentialist and anti-essentialist/historical.

The essentialist approach regards identity as an "accomplished fact" or an already "constituted essence" (Larrain, 1994: 158). The underlying assumption of the essentialist approach is that identity (individual/personal or collective/social) exists and that it is "a whole" expressed through symbolic representation. This "essence" can be discovered and is constituted by various backgrounds, for example, an ethnic, geographical, religious or language background. Another underlying assumption is that once this identity is formed or discovered, it is fixed.

The anti-essentialist/historical conception of identity emphasises the incomplete nature of identity – it is conceived of as a continuous process of becoming. There is no "essence" of identity to be discovered (Barker, 1999: 28) and, like everything historical, identity undergoes constant transformation (Larrain, 1994: 162).

2.1.5 Summary

Whenever one deals with an "identity" construct, one should be able to situate one's own conception of the idea of "identity" within this framework: does one conceive of identity as something "personal" or "social" and does one assume that the identity construct is an integrative unity or a multidimensional unit? Any definition of an identity construct should be able to provide an answer to these questions. It is also important to consider whether one's approach is essentialist or anti-essentialist/historical. Does one's study aim to discover the "essence" of an identity construct or does one regard it as a historical phenomenon that takes into account that the construct is transformed continuously?

Although a more detailed discussion of assumptions held about cultural identity in the context of this discussion is possible only after a definition is postulated, one's assumptions also to some extent determine the outcome (definition of cultural identity). The assumptions about "identity" that are reflected in the definition of cultural identity as used in this study are: cultural identity is a multidimensional social construct that can take different forms at different times; cultural identity is regarded as an aggregate of social constructions of identity, i.e., although no claim is made about discovering the "essence" of the cultural identities of respondents, cultural identity is regarded as an integrated whole that can be described (and that can "direct" the behaviour of the respondent), albeit through different descriptions at different times. This study, therefore, selects a social and anti-essentialist approach to cultural identity.

2.2 Themes in definitions of cultural identity

A survey of the relatively few explicit definitions of cultural identity reveal three general themes helpful in the construction of a definition of cultural identity as used in this study: (1) cultural identity refers to an aggregate of group/social identity and it takes various forms under different conditions; (2) it is ascribed; and (3) language is often regarded as an indicator of cultural identity.

Several authors conceive of cultural identity as an aggregate of group/social identity. Friedman (1994: 29-30) regards cultural identity as a "generic concept ... that is the basis of a kind of social identity". Larrain (1994: 154) states that: "[t]he forming their
personal identities, most individuals share certain group allegiances or characteristics such as religion, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and nationality, which help to specify the subject and its sense of identity. This is how the idea of cultural identities emerges.

Cultural identity takes various forms under various conditions, because it is conceived of as an aggregate of different types of social identity salient for the cultural identity of a person/s under certain conditions. To fully understand this notion, it is important to remind oneself of Tajfel’s (1978) definition of social identity as "... that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978: 3 as quoted in Brown et al., 1986: 275).

In terms of this definition, social identity is regarded as an overarching construct that encompasses various forms of group/social identity, because people might simultaneously experience memberships of different groups. The salient social identity of a person is a function of different social circumstances (Tajfel, 1982: 5). People use different “parameters” and boundaries within which they create their social identities. Gender, ethnicity, class and culture are regarded as examples of parameters within which social identity could be constructed.

Friedman (1994) expresses this notion as well by distinguishing between two broad “types” of cultural identity based on level of operation “in the body” or performed as acts in society. He states that:

... cultural identity that is experienced as carried by the individual, in the blood, so to say, is what is commonly known as ethnicity. In the strongest sense it is expressed in the concept of race, or biological descent. In a weaker sense it is expressed as heritage, or as cultural descent, learned by each and every individual (1994: 29-30).

Kramsch (1998: 66-67, 72, 75-76) also regards ethnicity, racial identity, national identity, regional identity and insistence on linguistic human rights as different forms of cultural identity. Kravets (1985: 289) regards race as one of the most visible forms of black American cultural identity, and Larrain (1994: 154) regards the notion of national identity as one of the most prominent forms of cultural identity in modern times. Segers (1997: 269) confirms that, “a person belongs to a number of ... indicators of identity, for instance: a national level ... a regional/ethnic/religious/linguistic affiliation; a gender level, a generational level, a social class level”.

Even authors that hold a more “essentialist” view of cultural identity see the construct as “multidimensional”. Brock and Tulasiewics (1985: 3, 4) regard cultural identity as “the internalized cultural consciousness – an identification with a distinct concept of reality ... a sense of oneselfness condensed in organizational structures” and “a pattern of life” that “pertains to norms, values, attitudes and policies”. Even though their definition seems to emphasise an “essentialist” perspective, they also see cultural identity as “a set of adaptations ranging from ethnicity, through religion, philosophy, social structure, privilege patterns and national consciousness, art and science to domestic practices, myths, games and language patterns” (1985: 7). Another notion included as one form of expression of cultural identity is that values and beliefs, institutions and behaviour form an important part of cultural identity (Freundschuh, 1979: 4).

The inclusion of several expressions of cultural identity in one’s conception of the idea raises an important methodological issue relevant to this study: is it possible to investigate “the” cultural identity of a person/group? Segers (1997: 269) is convinced that any conception of cultural identity as a multidimensional construct makes it “impossible to speak about ‘the’ identity of a person or group; it may vary according to circumstances”. Furthermore: “It is impossible to investigate the ‘complete’ cultural identity of a particular community. The best we can do, is to select and investigate some elements that are supposed to form a central part of it” (Segers, 1997: 275).

To conceive of cultural identity as an umbrella term for several other expressions of group identity seems to be supported. In this context, cultural identity could be conceived of as, for example, supra-ethnic, supra-national or supra-racial identity, while social identity would be seen as supra-cultural identity. There are two possible uses of cultural identity conceived as an umbrella term in this study: one’s cultural identity can be seen as the aggregate of the particular expressions of social identity regarded as part of the cultural identity or the dominant/most salient expressions of...
the cultural identity at a particular time could be regarded as a “main component” of a person’s cultural identity. One of the aims of this study is to determine the “structure” of the salient cultural identities of respondents at the time of testing and, after “categorisation”, correlate variations of this “type” of cultural identity with respondents’ English second language proficiency. The multidimensional conception of cultural identity resists criticism of this as an “essentialist” endeavour. The aim of the study is not to discover the singular essence of the cultural identities of these respondents, but to acknowledge that it is a multidimensional construct that might display different salient components at different times. That is also why no attempts at describing the cultural identities of Afrikaans and Southern Sotho youth cultures, in the “anthropological” sense, are conducted in this study. No attempts are made at describing youth cultures by referring to, for example, dating patterns or perceptions of art. The conception of cultural identity and use of the data aim at something different. The possible influence of cultural identity constructions on acquisition planning is the main focus of the study.

The second theme revealed by a survey of definitions of cultural identity is that it is “not achieved but ascribed” (Friedman, 1994: 30). This is the definitive notion in Kramsch’s (1998: 126) definition of cultural identity as: “[b]ureaucratically or self-ascribed membership in a specific culture”. Bureaucracies usually have a “limited range of categories” (Kramsch, 1998: 72) with which they ascribe the cultural identity of their populations. Theoretically, it is, therefore, possible that a person’s self-ascribed cultural identity can be the opposite or at least different to her bureaucratically ascribed cultural identity. Owing to the possible “illegitimacy” of bureaucratically ascribed cultural identity, it is not the primary concern in this study. This study focuses on the self-ascription and definition of respondents of their own cultural identities. Self-ascription to a particular group is regarded as the most important element of cultural or ethnic groups by some scholars (Barth, 1969: 10; Schillings, 1995: 14).

The third theme raised by several definitions of cultural identity is that language is perceived as a special component of cultural identity. Kramsch (1998: 77) argues that: “Although there is no one-to-one relationship between one’s language and his or her identity, language is the most sensitive indicator of the relationship between an individual and a given social group”. Brock and Tulasiewics (1985: 7) also regard language as “the most frequently found part of cultural identity”. Finally, Barker (1999: 16) is of the opinion that “cultural studies has increasingly turned to language and linguistic analysis as being at the heart of culture, identity and the cultural studies project”. Norton Peirce (1995) argues that language and identity are linked in a special manner, because language plays a double role in the identity formation process. It helps one to constitute one’s identity and identity is often expressed by means of language. More recently, Norton (2000: 5) has again foregrounded the role of language as “constitutive of and constituted by a learner’s identity”. This issue is explored in detail in the next section that focuses entirely on approaches that use social constructs to explain second language learning. These few quotes are regarded as sufficient in establishing this issue as an important one for a definition of cultural identity.

Linked to the finding that language is often regarded as an important component of cultural identity, is an analysis of the nature of cultural identity. Akin to Wardhaugh’s (1987: 45) discussion of ethnicity, cultural identity is conceptualised to consist of objective and subjective attributes. Objective attributes (or phenotypes) would be those “components” identified by people as essential to their cultural identities at a particular time in a particular context. This could, for example, include language, religion, race, history and origin. In different social contexts, different components might be salient features of the person’s cultural identity. Subjective attributes are those attitudes (or feelings) people have about their cultural identity, or about phenotypes of their cultural identity and the cultural identity of other groups.

2.3 Conceptual definition of cultural identity

Cultural identity is, therefore, conceptualised to be a complex, ascribed type of social identity that takes various forms (constantly changing) in different contexts. One’s cultural identity incorporates objective attributes or phenotypes and one’s attitudes or feelings towards these phenotypes and towards in- and outgroups. Understanding a person’s cultural identity, therefore, includes two related, but separate processes: (1) a declaration and description of one’s own cultural identity and identification of the phenotypes salient for one’s cultural identity; and (2) an expression of one’s attitudes towards different aspects of one’s cultural identity. Based on the survey of definitions
of cultural identity, the following phenotypes are selected for investigation as
constitutive of cultural identity: cultural values, ethnicity, racial identity, language and
attitude towards other groups. Cultural identity is, therefore, conceptualised as supræthnic and supræ racial identity, but sub-social identity.

2.4 Operational definition of cultural identity

Apart from this conceptual definition of cultural identity, it is necessary to
operationalise the definition. This need is obvious: the cultural identities of people
cannot be observed directly (Rosengren, 1984: 14). According to Nunan (1992: 47):
“Operationalising a construct means defining it in terms of observable behaviour”. It
is, therefore, necessary to define the different forms of social behaviour
conceptualised as part of cultural identity in terms of “observable acts” (Best & Kahn,
1989: 162) that could also suggest ways of measurement. In this sense, the
operational definition of cultural identity also directs the way in which data is
gathered (Ary et al., 1991: 29).

A second reason for operationalising the conceptual definition of cultural identity is
that it remains a construction in the imagination of the researcher (Best & Kahn,
1989: 6), although it has been informed by other scholarly opinion, a plethora of
operational definitions of these forms of cultural identity could exist (Ary et al., 1991:
30). In other words, other researchers could (and did!) operationalise the construct
cultural identity in different ways. For purposes of empirical feasibility and clarity, it
is, therefore, necessary to limit the meanings attached to the construct cultural identity
even further. Lastly, cultural identity is conceived of as a complex aggregate of
various attitudes and identification with different groups. This multidimensionality
needs careful demarcation to be useful in the study.

2.4.1 Cultural identity is ascribed

Ascription of cultural identity refers to self- and bureaucratic ascriptions of cultural
identity. Self-ascription is operationalised to refer to an individual’s own
identification with a cultural group/s and a description of the most prominent
characteristics of the cultural group she/he identifies with. For the purposes of this
study, this data is obtained as the answer to the following open question:

Imagine you are attending a camp where South Africans from all over the
country come together. If another South African mistakenly refers to you as
belonging to cultural group X and you want to explain that this view is wrong
by saying, “No, I am a member of cultural group Y”, to which cultural group
would you refer? What habits or behaviour distinguishes your cultural group
from other cultural groups?

This contextualisation is important because it limits answers or explanations to those
one South African will give to another South African. It excludes inferences to
contexts outside South Africa. To emphasise the importance of answers to these
questions, these instructions were discussed by the researcher with all groups that
participated. Printed instructions were kept brief (cf. Appendix A, Section A,
question 11).

Respondents’ reactions to bureaucratic descriptions of characteristics of their cultural
groups and bureaucratic ascriptions of their cultural identity, were gathered as
answers to three closed questions that followed upon the open-ended, self-ascription
questions. One question asked respondents to rate the relative importance of possible
cultural characteristics on a list (23) for their cultural group. This closed question
gave respondents an opportunity to indicate the relative importance of several
“bureaucratically” determined aspects/phenotypes of their cultural identity. The
following two closed questions required of respondents to select the one group they
identify with most from a list of 23 bureaucratically determined possibilities, and they
were also asked to indicate how strongly they identify with each group from a list of
11 bureaucratic descriptions of groups in South Africa. Both self-ascription and
attitudes/perceptions about possible bureaucratic ascriptions of cultural group were
taken into account.

2.4.2 Attitudes towards cultural values of the own group

The cultural values selected for the study include values that refer to socio-cultural
group characteristics. These values are operationalised as: “The extent to which a
person wishes, wants or needs ... [to exercise] authority, autonomy, an own lifestyle,
social interaction, social relationships and spirituality”. Answers to these questions
enabled the researcher to determine which of these values were of no or little
importance, or were very important, as aspects of the salient cultural identities of
respondents. These individual socio-cultural values are operationalised as follows (Langley et al., 1992: 7):

The extent to which a person wishes, wants or needs ...

- Authority: to have an influence over others and to encourage them to follow a certain point of view or policy. It can be obtained through position, power, expertise, charisma or seniority.

- Autonomy: to make her/his own decisions and to carry out plans as she/sees fit; to have independence of action within his/her sphere.

- Cultural identity: to have the freedom to conduct himself (sic) in public and in private life according to the habits of his/her group.

- Own life style: to have the freedom to live his (sic) own life according to his/her own standards and values, which can be defined in different ways (e.g. conventional, Bohemian, intellectual, artistic, materialistic).

- Social interaction: as part of his/her work, to give attention to other people and to converse with them.

- Social relationships: to attach value to pleasant, friendly contact with people with whom he/she associates in his/her work or in another sphere (e.g. home, recreation).

- Spirituality: to live according to religious principles.

2.4.3 Identification with ethnicity and racial identity of the own group

Ethnicity is operationalised to include attitudes towards the own ethnic group; feelings of belonging to the own ethnic group; exploration and acquisition of ethnic identity and participation in cultural practices. Racial identity is operationalised as attitudes towards the own racial group. Different attitudes, as reflective of stages of racial identity formation, are possible. Attitudes such as conformity, dissonance, immersion, emersion and internalisation are involved with black racial identity. For white racial identity, attitudes towards contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo independence and autonomy are involved.

2.4.4 Attitudes towards the own and other groups

Attitudes towards the own and other groups are operationalised as positive or negative attitudes as expressed in answers to the following semantic differential scales where respondents have to refer to the own and the other group on the same scale: fair/unfair, reliable/unreliable, dishonest/honest, boring/interesting, wise/foolish, worthless/valuable, cruel/kind, good/bad, lazy/hard-working, pleasant/unpleasant, unfriendly/friendly, cowardly/brave, hygienic/unhygienic, ungrateful/grateful, loyal/disloyal.

2.4.5 Attitudes towards the language/s of the own group

Attitudes towards the language/s of the own group are operationalised to refer to the status of the language/s (as expressed by self-reported language use and preferred language use patterns) and a positive or negative ethnolinguistic vitality. Self-reported patterns of language use and preferred language use for the following activities are included: watching television, listening to the radio, talking to friends at school / Technikon, talking to the family on the phone, writing a letter, reading a book, doing homework or writing an assignment, making notes to study, reading a newspaper or magazine and thinking. In the analysis of the data special attention is given to what one can infer about the status of the language/s of the group by analysing the language use patterns and preferred language use patterns of respondents. Ethnolinguistic vitality is operationalised as an objective measure of the status of the group and their L1, the numerical strength of the group in the region and the institutional support for the L1 of the group. Apart from these objective measures, the perceived positive or negative ethnolinguistic vitality (status of the group and the group’s language, numerical strength of the group in the region and institutional support for the group’s language) is also obtained subjectively.
3 Cultural identity and acquisition planning

The aim of this section is to consider the conceptual and operational definition of cultural identity adhered to in this study in relation to acquisition planning. In order to contextualise this matter, an overview of debates about language and culture and language and identity is presented. The discussion aims to contextualise and is consequently brief. Following from this discussion, implications for acquisition planning are discussed. This section is also mainly an abstract discussion that complements the empirical investigation of some of these matters.

3.1 Overview of debates about language and culture and language and identity

The relationship between language and culture has been widely debated and studied for many years by scholars of different disciplines (Sapir, 1929: 209; Kluckhohn, 1944: 26, 29-30; Redfield & Singer, 1954: v; Hoijer, 1954: vi, 102; Greenberg, 1954: 3; Sapir, 1964: 70; Gumperz, 1982: 6; Damen, 1987: 80, 84, 89, 125, 130; Wardhaugh, 1987: 1; Bates & Plog, 1990: 257, 275, 276).

An important impetus for the study about a possible relationship between language and culture is attributed to the work of Sapir (influenced by his teacher, Franz Boas) and Whorf (a student of Sapir). Sapir (1929: 209) says: “The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group”. Sapir postulates that language determines the way in which we observe reality. Whorf expanded on Sapir’s ideas. According to Caroll (1956: vi), Whorf “makes two cardinal hypotheses. First, that all higher levels of thinking are dependent on language. Second, that the structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one understands his environment”.

The central idea of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is “that language functions, not simply as a device for reporting experience, but also, and more significantly, as a way of defining experience for its speakers” (Hoijer, 1954: 93). Whorf argues that there is a causal relationship between language and culture (life patterns and experiences) which results in a particular world view (Damen, 1987: 125).

Whorf also coins the principles of “linguistic determinism” and “linguistic relativity” (Salzmann, 1993: 154). Linguistic determinism refers to the notion that the language one speaks determines the way one thinks and this hypothesis is not readily accepted by linguists (Fishman, 1982: 4; Salzmann, 1993: 154; Edwards, 1994: 92; Kramsch, 1998: 13). Linguistic relativity refers to the notion that language influences one’s way of thinking and consequently one’s world view. This hypothesis is readily accepted (Salzmann, 1993: 154; Edwards, 1994: 92; Kramsch, 1998: 13).

The strong version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been discredited and linguists are not enthusiastic about it any more. Brown (1980: 144) is negative towards any possible implication that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis might have for the second language learning context. According to Brown (1980: 144):

... as in every other human learning experience, the second language learner can make positive use of prior experience to facilitate the process of learning by retaining that which is valid and valuable for second language culture learning and second language learning.

He is of the opinion that possible inferences from the primary culture must simply be ignored by L2 learners, while they retain and activate only chunks of valuable prior learning to enhance the process of L2 learning. In view of the insider perspectives offered by postcolonial scholars like Ngugi (1986) and Mawasha (1987) [cf. §3.3.2, Chapter 2], Brown’s viewpoint grossly oversimplifies the issue. This could perhaps reflect a bias on the part of a L1 speaker of English towards the process of English L2 learning.

Fishman (1982: 1) states that the engagement of scholars with the two Sapir-Whorf hypotheses discussed above inhibits acknowledgement of a third hypothesis. According to him, the third Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is a positive expression that “champions ethnolinguistic diversity for the benefit of pan-human creativity, problem solving and mutual cross-cultural acceptance” (1982: 1). He regards Whorf as a champion of “a multilingual, multicultural, world in which ‘little peoples’ and ‘little languages’ would not only be respected but valued” (1982: 5). According to Fishman (1982: 9), Whorf held an anti-establishment view in that he expressed concern about Anglo-American cultural imperialism.
This third Sapir-Whorf hypothesis provides a link to a discussion of language and identity in that an acceptance of this hypothesis is related to debates about multilingual language policies, cultural democracy, language maintenance issues and additive bilingualism (Fishman, 1982: 10). All these matters are represented in debates about language as a resource and a human right. According to Kramsch (1998: 65), it is widely accepted that there is a natural connection between the language spoken by a group of people and their group identity. Research results from matched-guise experiments show that, by their accent, speakers identify themselves and are identified as members of this or that speech and discourse community. In this sense, there is a clear link between language and identity.

An important matter to consider is: is there always a categorically necessary relation between language and identity? In an overview of the research on language and identity, Appel and Muysken (1987: 15) find that there is no categorically necessary relation between language and identity. They argue that there are many examples of distinct groups with a particular language that marks their group identity, but that there are also instances of distinct groups that share a common language with other groups. They conclude that, “the relationship between language and ethnicity is accidental. Language may or may not be included in the group’s cultural bag” (1987: 15). The importance of language as a marker of identity has to be determined anew in different contexts. A rule of thumb seems impossible.

Furthermore, identities and languages are not monolithic wholes but are clearly differentiated, heterogeneous and variable (Appel & Muysken, 1987: 20). This is a view also taken by Norton Peirce (1995: 13; Norton, 2000:5). She argues that language is constitutive of and constituted by a L2 learner’s social identity. It is through language that one negotiates a sense of self and accesses social networks that create opportunities for the L2 learner to use her/his L2. The non-unitary and contradictory nature of postmodern social identities enable the establishment of creative moments of agency that allow L2 learners to use their L2 (so that they could improve) at points where traditionally, they would have been reduced to silent objects. This is particularly true of a multilingual identity.

3.2 Cultural identity and implications for acquisition planning

In this section, possible implications for two opposing views or approaches to cultural identity and implications for acquisition planning are considered. Following from the above discussion, it is clear that cultural identity can be viewed in a “singular” or in a “multidimensional” fashion. These opposing views of cultural identity roughly correspond to two L2 learning contexts and these different approaches would have different implications for acquisition planning for English as a L2.

Approach 1: cultural identity is viewed as unidimensional and simplex

In this context, L2 learning is often regarded as a transitional bilingual experience that ultimately results in the next generations of learners becoming monolingual L2 speakers. This is the typical immigrant context. This context and its subsequent view of cultural identity have definite implications for acquisition planning for the L2.

Implication 1

In this context, language is often regarded as a salient marker of a person’s cultural identity and the L1 is regarded as a barrier in the L2 learning process. Language proficiency is also postulated as separate in this context. In other words, “content and skills learned through [the] L1 cannot transfer to the L2 and vice versa” (Cummins, 1995: 109). Consequences of this assumption are that, first of all, learning the L2 is regarded as a threat to the L1. If the learner, therefore, experiences the aim of learning the L2 as threatening to replace the L1, one can postulate that L2 proficiency can be influenced negatively. Secondly, this situation can also have psychological implications. A type of linguistic “schizophrenia” could arise. The learner could harbour guilty feelings; if she/he learns the L2 too well, she/he might feel that the L1 is betrayed. Thirdly, the L2 learner’s self-image could be influenced. She/he could wonder why it is necessary for her/him to learn a L2. She/he could wonder what is wrong with the L1. This could have a profound effect on the L2 learner’s attitudes towards the L1 that could manifest itself in a definite preference for the use of the L2 in as many domains as possible. Ultimately, this could lead to language death for the L1.
Implication 2

If the L2 is used as medium of teaching (instruction), it can influence the L2 learner in many ways. The immigrant context and the postcolonial context provide interesting application possibilities for a study of acquisition planning. In the immigrant context, using the L2 as medium of instruction will speed up the linguistic assimilation process. Acquisition planning in this context does not pretend to aim for L1 maintenance. Concerning the postcolonial context, Ngugi (1986) and Mawasha (1987) argue that L2 learning influences the postcolonial child in at least four ways [cf §3.3.2, Chapter 2]. Firstly, this language context can influence the language attitudes of the L2 learner. The L2 learner has a clear idea of the importance of learning the L2 (it is, for example, the vehicle for access to school learning). If the L1 is a strong marker of the learner’s cultural identity and the L1 is highly respected, this can result in negative attitudes towards the L2. These negative attitudes may hinder the acquisition of L2 proficiency. If learners realise the importance of the L2, and they do not have a high regard for the L1, language shift may occur as a result. Learners may decide to only function in the L2.

Secondly, this situation can lead to cultural loss. Not only may the L2 replace the L1, the L2 learner may increasingly experience a chasm between the world of home and the world of school. The L2 becomes the world of knowledge and prior learning in the L1 and home culture is not activated in the school context.

Thirdly, the L2 learner may ask what is wrong with the L1. The L2 learner may start to ask why she/he has to learn the L2 to gain access to, for example, literacy. This may influence the self-image of the L2 learner. If she/he further realises that the culture of learning does not value her/his prior knowledge, mainly achieved in the L1, it can make the L2 learner ashamed of her/his background and this may influence academic achievement.

Finally, in this language context, the L2 learner is intentionally disadvantaged academically. The culture of learning is alien from prior learning and she/he faces the double burden of acquiring cognitive academic skills and learning the L2. Often, the acquisition of cognitive academic skills is only available through the L2. This necessarily puts the L2 learner at a disadvantage in the school context.

Approach 2: cultural identity is viewed as multidimensional and complex

When the cultural identity of the L2 learner is viewed as multidimensional and complex, many of the above arguments become untenable. Multilingualism (an exponent of a complex, multidimensional cultural identity) poses tremendous challenges to the conventional ideas for acquisition planning of a L2 as discussed above.

Implication 1

A learner with a multilingual cultural identity probably does not experience the L2 learning context as threatening. Learning another L2 is not regarded as cultural loss, probably does not influence the self-image of the learner negatively, and probably does not result in negative attitudes about L2s previously acquired. Assuming a multidimensional character for cultural identity implies that L2 learning is not necessarily experienced as an integration process with the target language. In this context, L2 learning is experienced as adding another tool to one’s already multidimensional linguistic repertoire. Learning another L2 is probably regarded positively in that the L2 becomes yet another means of identity expression.

Implication 2

Assuming a multidimensional cultural identity probably has implications for conceptions of L2 proficiency. In the multilingual context, bi/multilingual language proficiency is often viewed as consisting of a common underlying proficiency (CUP) that makes possible “the transfer of cognitive/academic or literacy-related skills from one language to another” (Cummins, 1995: 111). In the South African context, multilingual proficiency is probably restricted to conversational language activities. Multilingual South Africans do not learn L2s in order to access academic contexts; in other words, languages are not acquired to be used in literacy-related (academic) activities. In this respect, the position of English as a L2 is different. A multilingual citizen could, therefore, not assume that she/he would be able to use a L2 in context-reduced (academic) activities, like the higher education context. Learning through one of the L2s will still disadvantage the L2 learner academically, but because the learner probably does not distinguish between literacy-related (academic) language use and
conversational language uses of the L2, the multilingual person would probably not be aware of the influence of L2 proficiency on her/his academic achievement.

4 Cultural identity and social approaches to L2 learning

Finally, it is important to review social approaches to L2 learning and to determine whether these approaches assume a singular or multidimensional view of cultural identity. The outcome of this analysis will indicate whether these approaches are useful in contexts assumed in this thesis where cultural identity is regarded as complex and multidimensional.

Firstly, it is important to take note that the status of social theories of L2 learning is relatively low in comparison to the dominant position taken by psycholinguistic theories of L2 learning. Ellis (1994: 197) states that: "Learners differ enormously in how quickly they learn an L2, in the type of proficiency they acquire ... and the ultimate level of proficiency they reach". Researchers interested in these individual learner differences can study the psychological or the social factors that may explain learner differences. Although L2 learning research acknowledged the importance of social factors from the beginning (Ellis, 1997: 37), social approaches to L2 learning do not dominate the L2 learning research industry. Ellis (1997: 51, 37) states: "The study of psycholinguistic aspects of second language acquisition has been prominent in SLA and has given rise to many acquisition models" and "The prevailing perspective on interlanguage is psycholinguistic". The current trend in L2 acquisition research is towards "a more balanced focus on both the social and the personal nature of L2 use and learning" (Johnson, 1992: 27, 41).

A possible explanation for the scarcity of social approaches to L2 learning is that social factors are regarded as mediating variables that influence L2 learning only indirectly (Ellis, 1994: 197, 240). Norton Peirce (1995: 11-12) claims that the artificial dichotomy drawn between the L2 learner and the social world is responsible for the problematic position of social theories of L2 learning in L2 acquisition research. The cursory overview of philosophical positions on identity also makes it clear that the "social" concern followed the longer study of the "personal/individual" explanations of identity only fairly recently.

A survey of Gardner (1985) and Ellis (1994, 1997) brings six social approaches that relate to L2 learning to our attention:

- Social psychological model of Lambert (Gardner, 1985: 132-135);
- Acculturation model of Schumann (Gardner, 1985: 135-137; Ellis, 1994: 230-234; Ellis, 1997: 39-41);
- Social context model of Clément (Gardner, 1985: 137-239);
- Intergroup model of Giles and associates (Gardner, 1985: 139-142; Ellis, 1994: 234-236);
- Socio-educational model of Gardner (1985: 145-166; Ellis, 1994: 236-238); and

Another important theory that can be added to this discussion, is that of Cummins (for example, Cummins & Swain, 1986) and his associates. According to Ellis (1994: 197): "Social accounts of L2 learning have been primarily concerned with L2 proficiency" and Cummins' model of L2 proficiency is prominent in social accounts of L2 learning (Ellis, 1994: 198). The main tenants of Cummins' theory are, therefore, also discussed.

The aim of the following discussion is not to present an exhaustive, in-depth evaluation of each social approach to L2 learning. The aim is rather to identify the most important themes in each model that relate to the construct cultural identity and to relate how the construct "cultural identity" is reflected (conceived of) in these social approaches to L2 learning. This analysis should enable one to conclude how useful these social approaches to L2 learning are in the context of this study.

4.1 Social approaches to L2 learning and cultural identity

It is important to note that not one of the social approaches in the survey makes use of cultural identity as conceived of in this study, to explain L2 learning. Inferences are, therefore, made by surveying the social approaches that relate to different forms of cultural identity as defined in this study. Although all six social models emphasise the social context of L2 learning to some extent, only four of the approaches include tenets that directly overlap with that of cultural identity: social context model (Clément), socio-educational model (Gardner), intergroup model (Giles) and social
identity approach (Norton Peirce). Giles and Norton Peirce’s conceptions use more tenets similar to cultural identity and are, therefore, used as major nodes in the following discussion. References to other approaches are added when relevant to the discussion.

Two issues addressed by the intergroup model (Giles) overlap with some forms of cultural identity as conceptualised in this study: the model emphasises the self-concept and ethnolinguistic vitality of the L2 learner. Giles and his associates argue that the self-concept is the result of a continuous hedonistic process of “developing or maintaining a positive self-image” (Gardner, 1985: 139), particularly as expressed as one’s social self-concept. According to this model, a positive social self-concept, particularly one based on high ethnolinguistic vitality of the L1, results in low L2 achievement, because “some form of identification with the other community” (Gardner, 1985: 140) is necessary for achieving high L2 proficiency. Positive attitudes towards the L1 are regarded as “increasing the salience of ethnic group memberships” (Gardner, 1985: 140) and, therefore, inhibit L2 achievement. This negative view of social identity and attitudes towards the L1 becomes very clear when the five propositions Giles postulates as predicting L2 achievement are reviewed (Gardner, 1985: 140):

1. see themselves strongly as members of a group with language an important dimension of its identity;
2. regard their group’s relative status as changeable;
3. perceive their in-group’s ethnolinguistic vitality as high;
4. perceive intergroup boundaries as hard;
5. identify with few other social groups, and ones which offer unfavourable social comparisons.

If all these propositions are true for L2 learners, they are relatively unsuccessful in L2 learning, because they reach subtractive bilingualism (Gardner, 1985: 141). Stated positively, in other words restating the propositions in the format where, if they are true, the L2 learner is most likely to achieve high L2 proficiency, they read as follows: native-like L2 proficiency is possible ...

Ellis (1994: 234) concludes that, according to Giles’ model: “These five conditions are associated with a desire to integrate into the dominant out-group (an integrative motivation), additive bilingualism, low situational anxiety, and the effective use of informal contexts of acquisition”. According to this model:

Learners from minority groups will be unlikely to achieve native-speaker proficiency when their ethnolinguistic vitality is high ... [and] they will achieve low levels of communicative proficiency in the L2 because this would seem to detract from their ethnic identity (Ellis, 1994: 234-235).

The underlying view of cultural identity exposed in these approaches to L2 learning is that cultural identity is a simplex construction. The contention of this study is that conceiving of cultural identity as multidimensional and complex, renders the hypotheses above untenable. A multidimensional and complex view of cultural identity includes the valuing of the L1 and probably other L2s already acquired. Although Giles’ intergroup model, therefore, employs two similar tenets also postulated as part of cultural identity in this study, these constructs are conceived to work in opposite directions.

Reference to “integrative motivation” is required, because several of the other social models (Lambert’s social psychological, Schumann’s acculturation, Clément’s social context and Gardner’s socio-educational model) employ this concept. Lambert’s (in Gardner, 1985: 134) initial conception of this concept was that: “An integrative orientation towards language study reflects ‘a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group’ (Lambert 1974, 98)”. Gardner (1985: 11) rightly claims that the term “has become surrounded with many excess meanings which are not supported in the research literature or even the original conceptualization”. As seen above, Gardner and Lambert (Gardner, 1985: 11) initially used the term to refer to reasons for studying a L2 “which stressed either meeting and conversing with more and varied people, or as a means of better understanding people ... and their way of life”. In Schumann’s acculturation model, the term “integrative” is used differently: it refers to an active striving of the L2
learner to become like the target language community members (Gardner, 1985: 135). Without full acculturation ("the social and psychological integration of the learner with the target language [TL] group") no effective L2 learning can occur according to Schumann.

The South African context of learning English as a L2 poses tremendous problems for ideas like "integrativeness" as predictor of L2 achievement. Learning English as a L2 in South Africa cannot be conducted with an "integrative" orientation (especially as expressed by Schumann), for two reasons. There is no dominant English-speaking community to integrate with and, even more interestingly, English is learned to communicate and better understand (Lambert's expression of integrativeness) speakers of languages other than English, across language boundaries. The South African context, therefore, challenges some of the assumptions held by approaches that emphasise integrativeness as powerful reason for learning L2s.

In all fairness, one should keep the contexts for which these models have been developed in mind when criticising their use of concepts such as "integrativeness". Giles’ intergroup model explicitly aims to explain L2 learning of minority group members (probably immigrants) who have to learn the dominant group language and Schumann’s acculturation model aims at explaining L2 learning in "natural" (as opposed to educational) contexts. None of these conditions can be used unconditionally to describe the South African context and the study, therefore, suggests that the concept of "integrativeness" is not very useful when predicting L2 learning achievement in the South Africa context. Clément’s social context model is the only model that takes differences in cultural milieu into account by distinguishing "unicultural" and "multicultural" communities in which L2 learning could proceed differently. Clément (Gardner, 1985: 138), however, still maintains that the primary motivating forces for L2 learning are "integrativeness" and a "fear of assimilation". This exposes an underlying assumption that identity is "simplex", because he argues that even in multicultural (and multilingual) settings, L2 learning is dominated by "fears" of integration and assimilation. Clément fails to realise that identity can also be multiple or complex, as in the South African context.

Gardner (1985: 145) states that a central theme of his model is that "second language acquisition takes place in a particular cultural context" and that the cultural beliefs about learning languages influence the success of L2 learning. It, therefore, seems as if his model takes something like the cultural identity of language learners into consideration. On closer inspection, however, his inclusion of the cultural context focuses on attitudes "involving other" ethnic groups and the language learning situation" (Gardner, 1985: 149) as underlying motivation for L2 learning. In other words, although the cultural context is included in this model, it primarily refers to the attitudes of L2 learners towards the target language group and culture and only superficially takes into account the cultural identity of the L2 learner (i.e. the L2 learner’s views towards the own language and culture).

Norton Peirce's (1995: 11) emphasis on the usefulness of social identity in the L2 learning process, is similar to the conception of cultural identity in this study. The most important overlap is that both approaches offer a type of identity as the explanatory construct for L2 achievement. Secondly, both approaches regard identity as complex (Norton Peirce, 1995: 19), and regard positive use of different identity constructions as instrumental in enhancing L2 learning. In stark contrast to concepts such as "integrativeness" as a predicting value for L2 learning, Norton Peirce (1995) maintains that asserting different forms of social identity in different contexts is more instrumental in L2 learning than attempts to "integrate" with the target language group and culture. By setting up counterdiscourses and by resisting subject positions such as "second language learner desiring to integrate with dominant group by means of learning their language", L2 learners claim the right to speak their L2 (Norton Peirce, 1995: 23), and this leads to them using it and learning it more effectively.

The major problem with current social approaches to L2 learning is the use of the concept "integrativeness" to explain L2 proficiency and underlying that, the assumption of a simplex identity construction. If one maintains that cultural identity is multidimensional and complex, current social approaches to L2 learning seem inadequate as explanatory devices for L2 proficiency. Furthermore, these approaches conceive of the immigrant situation as the prototypical context for L2 learning. Learning English as a L2 in South Africa presupposes a very different attitude towards L2 learning.

45 My emphasis.
4.2 Conceptions of L2 proficiency and social approaches to L2 learning

An important theme in all the social models of L2 learning is an emphasis on the other (target language) group and a disregard of the L1 of the in-group. This results in the very "logical" assumption that to learn a L2 successfully, one must identify with the other group and its language and that this naturally implies a denial or valuing of the L1. An important assumption for these propositions, is that identity is simplex and usually entails the learning of only one, at the most two, languages. Citizens in multilingual and multicultural settings find this conception of identity as "simplex" strange, as their identities are necessarily complex and it involves the ability to express different identities in different contexts, usually by means of different languages. Another underlying assumption is that to learn the other language requires the acquisition of the culture of its speakers as well and that this is negative, because culture is also regarded as a "simplex" construct. There is "space" for only one language and one culture in the mind of a L2 learner according to this conception of cultural identity. Again, the experience of multicultural citizens of the relationship between their cultural identities and the languages they use to express them in different contexts questions these assumptions.

Conceptions of L2 proficiency also show these underlying assumptions that proficiency in different languages is somehow an issue of "separateness". It is argued that learning more languages affects proficiency negatively. A survey of conceptions of proficiency held by social approaches to L2 learning display many of these assumptions. In Lambert's social psychological model, high proficiency in the L2 is seen as possibly changing the "self-identity" of the language learner and her attitudes towards her own group identity will determine whether she achieves "additive" or "subtractive" bilingualism. According to this model:

Once proficiency develops to a high level, it is shown as having an influence on self-identity which, depending upon the nature of the cultural context, will result in additive or subtractive bilingualism (Gardner, 1985: 134).

In other words, "In the process of learning the second language, there is a threat to the first one, and such pressures could produce feelings of loss of cultural identity and the resulting alienation" (Gardner, 1985: 135). A multidimensional or complex cultural identity is not considered in this model.

In the context of Schumann's acculturation model, low L2 proficiency is the effect of a lack of acculturation (integration) with the target language community. In other words, "learners fail to progress beyond the early stages of acquisition because they require the L2 for only the communicative function of language (basic information exchange), and not for the integrative function (social identification) or the expressive function (the realization of personal attitudes)" (Ellis, 1994: 231). These learners, "are unable or unwilling to adapt to a new culture" (Ellis, 1997: 40) and, therefore, they fail to become proficient in the L2. A better description of Schumann's model is probably to see it as an "assimilation" model and not one of acculturation. It seems to say more for language learning in contexts where people plan to become part of a different culture and language group, and it is not applicable in the L2 learning context, where functioning in another language is regarded as valuable.

Gardner's (1985: 146) socio-educational model regards L2 proficiency as dependent upon the learner's attitudes towards other groups: "the relative degree of success in second language learning will be influenced to some extent by the individual's attitudes towards the other community or to other communities in general as well as by the beliefs in the community which are relevant to the language learning process". The emphasis on attitudes towards differences between groups is very obvious in Gardner's model.

Cummins' conception of language proficiency has been discussed in detail in §4.3.2 and §5.1 [in Chapter 2]. Cummins argues that L2 learners display two different types of proficiency: conversational and literacy-related (academic) language proficiency46 (Ellis, 1994: 198). These two types of proficiency are conceptualised as existing on a continuum that differentiates context-embedded and context-reduced situations and degrees in which tasks are cognitively demanding. Apart from these very useful distinctions between types of language proficiency, the linguistic interdependence hypothesis claims that literacy-related (academic) language proficiency in the L2 is dependent upon literacy-related (academic) language proficiency in the L1.

In other words, a strategy to remedy learning problems of learners whose language of teaching is the L2, is to more effectively teach the L1. Quite to the contrary,

development of L2 skills is often regarded in terms of “maximum exposure”. In this view, “the development of English [L2] academic skills is directly related to exposure to English” (Cummins & Swain, 1986: 80). Considering these “intuitive” beliefs about language learning and the negative views afforded the L1 in the social approaches discussed previously, it is clear that the linguistic interdependence hypothesis seems counter-intuitive to policy-makers, educators and parents (Cummins & Swain, 1986: 80). An analysis of assumptions underlying the maximum exposure position reveals a view that L2 proficiency is separate from L1 proficiency. Contrary to this view, Cummins (1995: 110) posits a common underlying proficiency (CUP). According to this view, the “literacy-related aspects” of bilingual proficiency are seen as common or interdependent across languages. This CUP “makes possible the transfer of cognitive/academic or literacy-related skills from one language to another” (Cummins, 1995: 111).

4.3 Summary

In conclusion, it is clear that none of the social approaches discussed employ the construct cultural identity fully as conceived of in this study. Even if these approaches employ similar constructs to that of cultural identity, they are conceived of differently. First of all, these approaches conceive of identity as a simplex construct. Bilingualism is regarded as a transitional phase that will end in the L2 learner eventually becoming monolingual in the L2. Secondly, these approaches attempt to account for social factors in the L2 learning process by focussing on the “other” language and cultural group – in other words the “target” language group. Integration with the target language group and culture is regarded as the underlying context for these approaches. It implies that the own group culture and language are regarded negatively, seen as operating as “barriers” to L2 learning and achieving L2 proficiency. This is particularly so, because identity is conceived of as “simplex” – the idea of multiple expressions of identity constructed by the use of different languages is not entertained. Lastly, these approaches have been devised for immigrant contexts where people want to (or are expected to) integrate into a new society. They seem impotent to explain L2 learning in multilingual contexts that result in multidimensional identity constructions among language users.

Norton Peirce’s (1995) construction of social identity and its role in facilitating L2 learning is a fresh approach in this context. Her conception of social identity as a multiple, complex phenomenon and that a learner’s changing social identities can assist her/him in the L2 learning process is novel. Although she bases her findings on research conducted in a “natural” acquisition context and although her respondents are also minority group members learning the dominant language of the majority group, she argues that an assertion of different social identities (in contrast to a “convergence” as suggested by the concept “integrativeness”) facilitates L2 learning – even in this context that aims to assimilate L2 learners. According to her findings, the affirmation of different social identities in different discourse contexts facilitates opportunities for her respondents to use the L2 and, therefore, gives them opportunities to use and learn the L2. This “positive” way of conceiving of one’s social (or cultural identity) and its facilitating role in the L2 learning process is different from previous social attempts at explaining L2 proficiency.

To some extent, Norton Peirce still conceives of her L2 learners as “victims”. Maybe their acquisition context supports this conception – they are minority group members who are acquiring the dominant societal language mainly with the view to fully integrate with mainstream society. This conception is inferred from statements such as the following made by Norton Peirce (1995: 12):

> "This ‘positive’ way of conceiving of one’s social (or cultural identity) and its facilitating role in the L2 learning process is different from previous social attempts at explaining L2 proficiency."

SLA theorists have not adequately explored how inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities L2 learners have to practice the target language outside the classroom.

Although Norton Peirce’s contention is that different social identities can assist L2 learners to open up opportunities to speak, in other words, a positive conception of social identity may enhance L2 learning, she is not at the point where these social identities are celebrated. Social identities are regarded as “strategic weapons” to be used in the L2 learning process and not yet as something natural that can be enjoyed. Once again, the acquisition context in which Norton Peirce conducts her research might explain this tendency.

Finally, the conceptions of L2 proficiency posited by social models of L2 learning elaborate on the view that the own culture and language inhibit the learning of a L2. If one’s own language and culture are not socially “close enough” to the target
language and culture, one has only one option: attempt to change one’s self-identity so that one “converges” towards the target language and culture. Proficiency in the L2 is, therefore, dependent upon a denial or change in attitudes towards the L1 and culture. This assumes that L1 and L2 proficiency are something “separate”, because no attempt is made to use possible “positive” contributions from L1 proficiency, for example. Cummins’ (1995: 111) conception of the linguistic interdependency hypothesis challenges these assumptions and he maintains that literacy-related (academic) deficiencies in the L2 can be addressed by improving them in the L1.

The most influential current learning theories are learner-centred and constructivist. This implies, first of all, that facilitators or teachers all attempt to understand their learners better so that more effective learning activities could be facilitated. Secondly, it implies an attempt by facilitators to activate the prior knowledge or experience of their learners to construct more meaningful learning experiences. If one accepts some of the insights raised in this chapter, that bilingual language proficiency is conceptualised as a common underlying proficiency (CUP) and that cultural identity is multidimensional and complex, constructing effective learning of English as a L2 in the South African context could imply the following:

• activating experiences of the multidimensional cultural identities of English L2 learners (including their prior knowledge represented as L1 learning) to help learners construct more sensible learning experiences in the English L2 classroom.

These insights could be put more forcefully if corroborated by empirical data. The next chapter focuses on the discussion of an empirical investigation in which some of these insights are tested.

5 Conclusions

The conception of cultural identity as complex and multidimensional allows for a very different view on the possible influence of cultural identity in the L2 learning context and, therefore, on acquisition planning for L2 learning in general. First of all, the acquisition of more languages is regarded as something natural to multilingual citizens. Their linguistic repertoires are per definition multilingual and they utilise different languages for different purposes. In the context of English L2 learning in South Africa, this might be a barrier to the acquisition of literacy-related (academic)