

Book Review
**The Language of Adult Immigrants:
Agency in the Making¹**

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The Language of Adult Immigrants: Agency in the Making. Elizabeth R. Miller. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2014. 184 pp.

The Language of Adult Immigrants by Elizabeth R. Miller, provides the readers with an understanding of the concepts of agency, stance, and ideology by focusing on the life experiences of a small group of adult immigrants in the United States. Miller explains how these concepts can be connected with language learning and use. Given the growing population of immigrants in the United States, understanding how this population adjusts to its new living and working communities and acquire second language (L2) skills has become important for English as Second Language (ESL) teachers. Of the eighteen interview participants in Miller's study, fifteen of them are adult immigrants from Asia. Indeed, among various races of immigrant populations in the United States, Asian immigrants are one of the fastest growing populations (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008).

The book consists of eight chapters. Excluding the introduction and the conclusion, each chapter ends with a summary where the author generally reports the results of the research studies. Theories and research studies discussed throughout this book concentrate on the notion of agency and the relationship between learning and using a foreign language as a socially mediated instrument of communication.

Chapter 1 introduces the notion of performativity and agency and offers a literature review in agency and second language learning. In addition, Miller here also digs into the field of adult language learner agency by using performativity theory. In Chapter 2, the author introduces theories of agency as a socially mediation and explores how they influence readers' understanding of agency for second language learning. She first discusses Vygotsky's view of semiotic mediation, which is a concept that tries to answer the question of how humans develop their capability to act significantly in life. She then draws more attention to Bakhtin's view of interactional mediation to offer readers a better understanding of what a socioculturally constructed

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acting Self is and how agency is constantly and unendingly mediated. Next, she further considers the 'agency of spaces' and ideological mediation, and then explores Butler's notion of performativity in order to provide readers a theoretical frame for understanding the notion of agency as socially mediated. By establishing theoretical frameworks for readers and her own studies, Miller uses Positioning Theory in most of her analysis.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology of the study. By using the 'theories of agency' (Ahearn, 2010), the author emphasizes the theoretical foundation that views research interviews as discourse rather than as transparent content. Immigrant language learners can use this theoretical foundation as an instrument to socially and individually construct language meanings. In addition, by addressing the constructivist epistemology, the author then provides evidence of why she treats the interview data and the discursive practices as discourse data and as semiotic materials.

Chapters 4 through 6 are analytic chapters, which investigate particular types of interviewees' discursive constructs and why they are selected by the author for the use of 'theories of agency' (Ahearn, 2010) in discursive practice. In Chapter 4, the author mainly analyzes interviewees' subject-predicate constructs and agent-oriented modality in language learning and use. She analyzes how the participants positioned themselves as different individuals by using subject-predicate constructs in which a participant's story-world self is not expressed as an "I" but can be recovered from the discourse context. Chapter 5 focuses on evaluating the discursive performances that position interviewees as they appraise their learning actions and agentive capacity related to language learning and use. In Chapter 6, the analysis of reported speech constructs interviewees' interactional Selves, providing evidence for past agentive actions in language learning and use.

Chapter 7 addresses the definition of ideology and investigates ideologies of language learning for immigrants, ideologies of agency and responsabilization, which is referred to as responsabilized individuals. It also explains the reciprocities of discursive practice and ideological social actions and individual's capacities. The last chapter provides an overview of linguistic constructs from previous interviews and discusses implications for further second language research that considers agency as a socially mediated construction, as well as a few implications for perceiving teacher-student relationships during the language learning process. This book also contains an appendix with transcription conventions, a list of references, and author and subject indexes to the text.

One of the strongest aspects of this book is its use of discourse analysis from interview excerpts, which directly connects theoretical paradigms with realistic examples of immigrants' agency in discursive practice. Miller categorizes each discourse analytic section according to different utterance types, such as

subject-predicate constructs, stance, and reported speech in discursive practice; interviewees' perspectives on English learning and use in classrooms, in daily lives, and at work are also included in the analyses. A micro-analysis approach is also implemented to discover how the eighteen participants in this book position themselves in space, stance, and their reported speech when discussing language learning and use.

Overall, this book is easy to read because it is well organized with a similar structure in each chapter. The inclusion of exhaustive literature reviews at the beginning of each chapter provides a clear theoretical foundation for the research studies. Moreover, the inclusion of a micro-analytical approach to discourse elucidates how adult immigrant English learners (ELs) construct their agentive selves. By including research and insightful analysis using Positioning Theory in most of Miller's studies, she provides ESL researchers and teachers a better understanding of the relationship between agency of adult immigrants and their experience in second language learning. Therefore, just as Miller who was enlightened by her eighteen immigrant participants, ESL teachers who have a population of adult immigrant ELs in their classes could also be educated by this book through various language learning experiences, which may be set as examples, or even caveats for their classes. Researchers interested in identity and agency in second language acquisition (SLA) would also find this a good reference for research designs and analyses in SLA studies.

References

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