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Abstract

Kelleen Toohey earned her PhD in Curriculum and Applied Linguistics at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (University of Toronto) in 1982. Her masters and doctoral studies were conducted with Cree-speaking school students learning English in Alberta and Ontario, for which she used anthropological research methods like participant observation and video analysis. Her more recent work has concerned the learning of English by immigrant children, and has employed a sociocultural theoretical frame, and insights and concepts from new materialism. With colleagues, she developed a free app called *Scribjab* that permits users to write, read, illustrate, narrate and comment on multilingual stories. Working with English language learners using the app and with others using iPads to construct videos, she is interested in how children learn languages and literacies and how digital technologies might support such learning.

While I was pursuing doctoral studies at OISE, the hybrid field of psycholinguistics undergirded much language education research; language learning was seen as an "interface between learners' mental processes and the grammatical system of the target language" (Breen, 2001:173), and as Long (1997: 319) claimed: "social and affective factors … [were seen as] important but relatively minor in impact … in both naturalistic and classroom settings". This approach to second language learning still characterizes much work in second language education research, but it was/is not a comfortable fit for me. My previous academic training in anthropology, philosophy and education, convinced me that studying the social and cultural aspects of language learning could yield important insights in language learning. In the early 1990s I became familiar with work in cultural psychology, and sociocultural theory which sees learning as a social process in which culturally and historically situated participants engage in culturally valued activities (using cultural tools) and thus develop the kinds of behaving/thinking required for participation (Rogoff, 2003; Wertsch, 1998). Educational studies grounded in this perspective pay careful attention to the social practices provided for learners in their diverse environments and to the qualities of the physical, social and symbolic tools that learners have available to them.

Regarding language as a cognitive tool, I became interested in the political and economic practices of instructional settings that enabled and constrained access to language and other classroom tools. In the late 1990s I engaged in an ethnographic study of the learning of English by six children in public school from the beginning of their kindergarten year to the end of Grade 2, resulting in *Learning English at school: Identity, social relations and classroom practice* (2000). A second edition of this book is in press presently with a slightly revised title: *Learning English at school: Identity, sociomaterial relations and classroom practice*. At the same time, I carried out a parallel study in a Punjabi Sikh school, and found comparisons between the two sites instructive.

In later research with language learners using digital video making tools in schools, my colleagues and I were struck by how tools like video cameras, tripods, storyboards, video editing software, and so on seemed to become inextricably bound up with children's school identities and social relations, and by how these tools seemed to change classroom practices. Our research team explored concepts from actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), as ways to theorize what these material tools were changing or enacting in classrooms (Dagenais, Fodor, Schulze & Toohey, 2013). The concept of network, as assemblies of human and non-human actors seemed useful to us in conceptualizing what we called "School-as-Usual", with desks, children's bodies, teacher's bodies, distinct subjects, defined times, curriculum documents, and so on joined in very durable networks (Smythe, Toohey & Dagenais, 2014).

More recently, together with a group of colleagues, we have been what feels like *captured* by some of the recent theoretical concepts of feminist techno-science,

posthumanism, and the new materialities (Smythe, Hill, MacDonald, Dagenais, Sinclair & Toohey, 2017). This work invites us to refrain from positing *a priori* individuations between things, such as people, tools, furniture, languages and so on. Rather, things are what they are in terms of how they are in relation with other things. While recognizing that distinctions between (for example) humans and non-humans are continually made and have socio-material consequences, feminist physicist Karen Barad (2007) argued that "[w]hat is needed is an analysis that enables us to theorize the social and the natural together, to read our best understandings of social and natural phenomena through one another" (p. 25). In a recent piece, my colleagues and I analyzed the relationships or the entanglements of an iPad, a themed piece of music, space, furniture, an English language learner, children's bodies, the video script, children's memories of newscasts (stored, of course, in their bodies) and myriad other entities (which are what they are because they are in relation with other 'entities') (Toohey, et al., 2015). In a particular episode these entanglements meant that the English language learner was able to participate in the group's discussion and to persuade her classmates to adopt one of her ideas. In other entanglements of people, material things, space, and so on, such might not have been (and wasn't) the case.

This emphasis on reciprocal change and shifting entanglements aligns well with current discussions of usage theories of language. Contemporary observers of language use in super-diverse urban centres are documenting how 'translanguaging' enables people to draw on their complex linguistic repertoires and in so doing, widen the circles of people with whom they can engage. Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela (1980: 234-5) wrote: 'It is by languaging that the act of knowing, in the behavioral coordination which is language, brings forth a world. We work out our lives in a mutual linguistic coupling, not because language permits us to reveal ourselves but because we are constituted in language in a continuous becoming that we bring forth with others.' New materialists would add that the becoming occurs not only with other human actors, but also with other material and discursive non-human entities. If speakers are not maintaining the distinctness of languages that language teachers and linguists have traditionally perceived, and taught, and if boundaries between languages are coming to be seen as unclear, it may be that we will see that positing language boundaries (identification) is a social process which benefits some speakers over others. Instead of prizing speakers/writers of a standard language with no 'negative transfer' from another less prestigious language, we may begin to investigate the communicative wealth of multilinguals who have many linguistic resources on which to draw. We might also see language learners as desiring to extend their possibilities 'to language' with others, and *creating* language as they do so.

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