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# ACCESSING IMAGINED COMMUNITIES AND REINSCRIBING REGIMES OF TRUTH

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*In this article, we explore the complex and nebulous terrain between two theoretical concepts, imagined communities (Norton, 2000, 2001), that is, individuals' imagined affiliations with certain groups, and regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980), dominant images inscribed and reinscribed into individual consciousness until they become normative. Using the context of two research studies, one a critical narrative study of life-story narratives of L2 users and the other a critical feminist ethnography of beginning ESOL teachers, the researchers examine the ways in which social structures and contexts can behave simultaneously as tyrannizing regimes of truth and as liberating imagined communities. This inherent contradiction illuminates the ways in which the two theoretical constructs taken together can lead to a more complex and nuanced understanding of identity construction.*

## Introduction

In this article, we explore the complex and nebulous terrain between two theoretical concepts, Michel Foucault's (1980) construct of *regimes of truth* and the notion of *imagined communities*, introduced to TESOL and applied linguistics by Bonny Norton

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We are indebted to Lara, Jennifer, Katie, Alexandra, Margaret, and Jane for helping to develop our understandings of the various subjective and social forces at play in identity construction.

[1]Authors' names are listed in alphabetical order and do not represent any hierarchy.

(2000, 2001). In the context of two separate research studies, Sherrie Carroll's (2004) critical narrative study of life-story narratives of two adult ESL learners and users and Suhanthie Motha's (2004) critical feminist ethnography of first-year ESOL teachers, we explore the ways in which individuals construct imagined communities in relation to the regimes of truth present in their lives. We hope to show how the two theoretical constructs taken together can lead to a much more complex understanding of identity construction than can be arrived at within the framing of one alone.

Identity has come to be widely understood as socially constructed within both interpersonal relationships and larger sociocultural structures formed through institutions and ideologies. While heavily influenced by these structures and their constituting discourses, identity is not completely predetermined by them. Rather we are constantly constructing our identities in interpersonal relationships within specific communities as we appropriate certain discourses, reproducing them but also remaking them anew. Identity construction emerges from the interface of our individual agency with larger social structures; and it all happens within specific communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Norton, 2000, 2001; Wenger, 1998). We subjectively experience our identities, and the agency that drives their continuous construction is intertwined with our subjectivity or our consciousness, that is, our memories, emotions, desires, hopes, dreams, and imaginings. It is this interface between individual agency and subjectivity, on the one hand, and the hegemonic force of larger structures, on the other, that has brought many to characterize identity as not only being multiple and fluid but also as a site of struggle (Norton, 1995, 1997, 2000; Weedon, 1999). Learning, the construction of knowledge, can be seen as making meaning of the world. Transforming not only what we can do but also how we see the world and ourselves within it, learning becomes a process of identity (re)construction (Wenger, 1998).

## Theoretical Framework

As we were conducting our two studies and engaging in discussion around them, we found ourselves intrigued by the ways in

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which Foucault's (1980) ''regimes of truth'' and Norton's (2000, 2001) ''imagined communities'' worked together to offer insight into the workings of individual subjectivity or consciousness as it shapes such agency within identity construction and by extension learning. The first construct, ''regimes of truth'' (Foucault, 1980), explains how larger structures or discourses regulate an individual's thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. Foucault contends that particular images are socially inscribed and reinscribed upon individual consciousness until they are thought of as ''normal'' or simply uncontested ''truths.'' Such images, beliefs, and practices, being unquestioned and normalized, exert a tremendous force upon consciousness, encouraging compliance and making resistance difficult. In order for an assumption to become a regime of truth, it must be accepted as fact by the community in which it exists. It then becomes unquestioned and unquestionable, and its arbitrariness becomes invisible. Imagined communities (Norton, 2000, 2001; Wenger, 1998) are the groups, intangible or not readily accessible, to which an individual desires to belong. An individual's membership in a particular community of practice is at times contested either by her current situation or by the way she is positioned (or believes she is positioned) by others (Norton, 2000, 2001). Imagined communities can represent an individual's dreams for the future at a particular point in her life (Kanno, 2000, 2003). Imagined communities can also be quite large and intangible such as national communities (Anderson, 1991). The desire to belong to such an inaccessible community shapes a person's agency as she constructs her identity. Such identity work, according to Norton (1995, 2000, 2001), is the impetus behind all learning. We participate in learning, she contends, when such learning helps us to attain the identities we desire, increasing our ''value within the social world'' (2001, p. 166); it serves as an investment in the quest for such identities. Norton sees learners' investments in certain imagined communities and identities as influencing—positively or negatively—their participation in classroom learning (2001). Visual imagery is central to both imagined communities and regimes of truth as they are often captured and held in an individual's consciousness through evocative images.

It could be argued that this discussion of imagination is implicit in Foucault's theorizing; however, we contend that the

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notion of imagined communities is sufficiently generative to merit exploration in its own right. As Pavlenko and Norton (2007) argue, imagined communities can help us better understand language learning and the construction of linguistic (and other) identities on a global stage. In noting the contributions of situated learning (Wenger, 1998) and language socialization to our current understandings of second language acquisition, Pavlenko and Norton point out the importance of considering the impact of the imagined as well as the actual interactional worlds in shaping an individual's growth:

> Learning that is connected to the learners' participation in a wider world has been little explored. Yet we humans are capable, through our imagination, of perceiving a connection with people beyond our immediate social networks. Our orientation toward such imagined communities might have just as much impact on our current identities and learning as direct involvement in communities of our everyday life. (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007, p. 669)

A crucial component of our humanness is our ability, and even our propensity, to imagine, to project beyond more immediate forms of engagement, to create new images of self in relation to the world. Through imagination we appropriate meanings (Anderson, 1991). Connecting identity to hope, Simon (1992) describes ''hopeful imagination'' explaining that ''[h]ope is constituted in the need to imagine an alternative human world and to imagine it in a way that enables one to act in the present as if this alternative had already begun to emerge'' (1992, p. 4). Imagination would appear then to be essential to identity construction and to entering into new communities of practice. Yet such a focus on individual imagination, imagery, subjectivity, and agency has the potential to naively obscure the coercive and veiled role of hegemony within individual identity construction, the role played by ''regimes of truth.'' As learners construct shifting identities in a desire to belong to their imagined communities, are they actually being socialized into compliance with dominant norms? Can some imagined communities (conceived as hopeful and constructive) come to unwittingly and silently behave as regimes of truth?

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## Methodology

### *Comparative Analysis of Both Studies*

Carroll and Motha had each conducted studies in which they explored identity construction and subjectivity among, respectively, adult English L2 users and first-year ESOL teachers. In each of the studies, they drew from various theoretical constructs, including imagined communities (Norton, 2000, 2001) and regimes of truth (Foucault, 1990). Subsequently the authors systematically reanalyzed the data, explicitly examining the relationship between regimes of truth and imagined communities. They sought to explore the ways in which the two constructs, looked at together, could illuminate the intricacies of identity construction in ways more complex and nuanced than when employed alone.

### *Sherrie Carroll's Critical Narrative Study of Life Story Narratives*

Sherrie's critical narrative study examines the life story writing of two students, Jennifer[2] and Lara, in a high intermediate/advanced community college ESL course that she taught. Through examining their narratives, she sought to understand the ways in which the two women writers made sense of their personal biographies, to uncover the personal narratives they use to think about themselves. The women each wrote five compositions in response to autobiographical prompts related to course readings and discussions, then revised their compositions in response to their classmates and Sherrie's written feedback, which consisted of grammatical and mechanical corrections and questions to encourage further development. Initially Sherrie examined the data and analyzed the ways the writers positioned themselves, were positioned by others, and repositioned themselves within the narrative (Davies & Harre, 1990). She further examined the life stories for examples in which image and the imagined were portrayed within the written narratives. She sought to answer the question: What kinds of personal narratives and subjectivities do

[2]All participants' names are pseudonyms.

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the two ESL students forefront in their written narratives as they construct their lives in response to their sociocultural contexts?

### *Suhanthie Motha's Critical Feminist Ethnography of Beginning Teaching*

Suhanthie's critical feminist ethnography examines the stories and experiences of four first-year ESOL teachers, Alexandra, Jane, Katie, and Margaret, recent graduates of an M.Ed program in TESOL at a large, publicly funded institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Katie and Margaret taught at the elementary level, Alexandra taught middle school, and Jane was a high school teacher. Suhanthie had known each for two years before the study began, having taught or co-taught their classes, supported their seminar papers, provided academic advising, and supervised their student teaching experiences. Suhanthie sought to answer the question: ''What meanings of becoming a language teacher are crafted by first-year ESOL teachers?'' using a variety of data sources, including observation field notes; transcriptions of informal, unstructured interviews; phone conversations and e-mail exchanges with study partners; and transcriptions of afternoon teas sessions. The afternoon tea sessions were regular gatherings held at the end of the school day every two or three weeks in her home. During the afternoon teas, the participants shared stories from their teaching lives and personal lives and sought advice from each other. Suhanthie perceived the afternoon teas to allow the teachers to become the authors of their own experiences as they gathered together their various experiences and presented them. This meant they were active in both the construction and (re)presentation of their professional identities. To underscore the centrality of the teachers' voices in her representation, she modified constant comparative methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) by first coding the data from the afternoon teas only and then introducing other data only in relation to the themes that emerged from the afternoon tea data. She believed that in privileging the afternoon tea transcripts over other sources of data, she was allowing the teachers' voices and the meanings they made of their stories to play a more significant role in the shaping of the analysis. A more detailed discussion

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of this study's methodology can be found in Motha (2004) and Motha (in press).

## Findings and Discussion

In both studies, participants' identity (re)construction included the creation of imagined communities, often in response to the regimes of truth that held sway in their lives. An imagined community can coincide with a regime of truth, representing an imagined projection of self into a community of practice constructed in accordance with a regime of truth. Yet, while in such cases imagined communities seemed to reinscribe regimes of truth, they at other times appeared to offer a means of resistance against them. The identities constructed by participants most frequently reflected an integration of the two theoretical framings. Thus, these two quite different theoretical lenses become more helpful when used together in illuminating the complexity of identity construction within the women's stories. We will show how participants' imagined identities, nestled within imagined communities, are interlaced with regimes of truth, and how they can be seen as responding to and/or resisting a regime of truth.

### *The Life Story Narratives*

*Jennifer: "I felt liberated."* Jennifer, a Korean ESL student, was 42 and had been living in the United States for 2-1/2 years when she wrote her narratives. An MD/PhD and married with two teenage children, she had first come to the United States in the 1990s where she had worked at a prestigious university hospital before returning to Korea to work with an NGO sending food and other aid to North Korea. Jennifer's story in many ways is a story of conscientization (Freire, 1970), one in which she confronts regimes of truth, and through this is at times able to de-center them. Her narratives show that she constructs imagined communities that bolster her struggle and resistance against regimes of truth and often serve as driving forces behind her agency particularly in response to prescribed subordinated roles for women and social hierarchies she associates with Confucianism. However, as we will illustrate, her imagined communities

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and related identities are nonetheless strongly shaped by regimes of truth.

Different imagined communities and corresponding regimes of truth around the speaking of English governed Jennifer's attraction and repulsion towards learning and using the language at different times of her life. In her description of the South Korea of her youth, she tells how learning English created for her the possibility for new imaginative affiliations. As a teenager, she was swept up in U.S. hegemony as she embraced all that was American through her consumption of U.S. popular culture and media in English.

> The Korean War (1950–1953) left the country in ruins. Thousands of children became orphans and thousands of families were separated like my husband's family by the division of South and North . . . The economy and agricultural base were almost destroyed by the war. I was born and grew up during the poor post-war period. I saw a lot of U.S. soldiers and also got hold of the American magazines showing beautiful clothes, cars, foods, and households. My husband experienced following the U.S. soldiers to get chocolates or chewing gums in his childhood. Everything from the United States such as pop songs and movies provoked my envy. As a high school student, I was so proud of myself for being able to read American magazines and sing American pop songs. That was also an indication that I was a well-educated person.

Jennifer's narrative illustrates Anderson's (1991) thesis that we experience a sense of affiliation, that is, an imaginative community, with our compatriots. Yet English becomes for her a means of imaginative voyaging. Representations of the post-war devastation—ruins, poverty, and military occupation—stand in stark contrast to the images of opulence featured in American magazines full of pictures of abundance, beauty, and wealth as well as the images conveyed through American popular music. English gave her access to an imagined community of English speakers; and as such, their socially constructed attributes could also be available and accorded to her. Yet with this imagined community came regimes of truth that privileged consumerism and western popular culture, normalized neocolonial relations (Motha, 2006a) and cultural imperialism, and prescribed notions of what it meant to be an educated person.

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Once in college, however, her involvement in the student opposition movement led her to question the neocolonial relationship between the United States and her country.

> When I was in college, the anti-American movement spread abruptly, because the U.S. troops agreed to and accepted the brutal military coup d'état in Korea in 1980. The student started questioning the relationship between Korea and the United States; they began to question what role the United States had played in Korean history. As students became more radical, I was also drawn into the movement. At a study group, a student criticized me for wearing a t-shirt that said UCLA. I felt shameful for wearing it at such a sensitive time in Korean history. So, I could not imagine learning to speak English, making an American friend, and wearing a t-shirts printed in English until I graduated from college.

She resisted U.S. cultural imperial influences by rebuffing affiliation with things American, rejecting an imagined community she had desired earlier because of the regime of truth that held sway over her current community of practice, the radical student movement. Through the rejection of this imagined community, she also resists the accompanying regimes of truth, but she appears to replace them with other competing regimes of truth. It is interesting to note here the processes of shifting identification and the requisite disidentification.

Much of Jennifer's narratives were about her struggles against prescribed subordinate gender roles, which she perceives as endemic to Korean culture. In response to pressures to comply with this regime of truth around gender identity, Jennifer appears to have constructed an imagined community that opened to her new ways of living out her gender identity as a mother and a professional. She believed that in the United States, married women can be independent from their husbands and their husbands' families and enjoy career success without gender discrimination.

> [In Korea] if there were some conflicts in women's career and the husbands' family, they would usually give up their career. In the United States, every family was independent from the husbands' family and married women could work comfortably with excellent day care system. I realized that there was no limitation in hiring or promoting married women with children.

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It was largely in pursuit of this imagined community and identity for herself and her daughter that she decided to bring her children with her to the United States.

> I came to the United States again in 2000 because I wanted my children (especially, my daughter) to be treated equally in the family and work. Korea is still under the conservative cultural influence of Confucianism. I thought that Korean woman's life is more difficult, more limited than a man's in the family and society.

Jennifer's imagined community of professional mothers within the United States seems quite utopian. However, as Wenger (1998) suggests, imagination involves some degree of idealization. Thus imagined communities could be seen as simply static images of idealized, normative practice, that is images representing and reinscribing regimes of truth. As such, imagined communities can become oppressive or, at least, sources of disappointment, disillusionment or alienation when our lived experiences do not correspond to the world and the identities we have imagined for ourselves.

Jennifer's gender and linguistic identities, both ''real'' and imagined or desired, were intricately intertwined. She came to see in the use of English the possibility of a new social identity and liberation from having her daily interactions forcibly inscribed in power hierarchies that she understood to be imposed by the Korean language and reinforced by the regime of truth she associates with Confucianism and its emphasis on hierarchal social relationships.

> Korean language strongly promoted male-dominant and elderly-dominant society, so Korean language reflected social hierarchy. When Koreans meet for the first time, whether they speak using more polite language or more casual language is determined by their age, social position, and gender. For example, if a boss is a man, he usually talks to a female secretary in a condescending language, but a woman boss rarely uses nonpolite language to a male secretary.

English offers her a new way to be a professional and to interact with colleagues which fits more with her ideas about social relationships (McMahill, 1997, 2001; Pavlenko, 2001a). In English, she felt that she did not have to speak and behave def-

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erentially toward men, her elders or her professional superiors. In speaking of her work in a research hospital, she recounts:

> I found myself enjoying speaking in English in public, even though I was not fluent in English. I felt good about speaking in English especially when I was talking with my boss or elderly men. I did not sense that I was younger, in an inferior position, or a woman when I spoke in English with them. I could call them by their names instead of addressing them as ''Sir,'' and I did not have to act in my very best manner. I also did not have to make an effort to speak in a more feminine way. I felt liberated.

Thus, speaking English provided her with a way to realize her imagined identity within her imagined community in which professional women have access to the same opportunities as men. This imagined community, albeit with different norms (regimes of truth) around appropriate gender behavior, allowed her to resist those regimes of truth from her first culture prescribing how a woman is to behave and interact.[3]

However, Jennifer's narratives suggest that her imagined community extends far beyond simply speaking in English in the United States within idealized gender equitable relationships. For example, she published an editorial in a Korean newspaper calling for the use of polite forms of language in public interactions regardless of social location instead of the linguistic forms which reflect the differential status of the speakers. Thus, she was envisioning a less oppressive society through the modification of linguistic practices. Likewise, when she learned of the plight of North Koreans suffering from hunger during her sojourn in the United States in the mid 1990s, she was moved through her empathy and, one could argue, a sense of affiliation or imagined community, to leave the position she enjoyed at the research hospital in order to work with a South Korean NGO sending aid to North Korea. So, while imagined communities can simply offer static stereotypical ideas or regimes of truth about a given culture, they can also lead to concrete acts of engagement and more creative constructions of possible future communities and

[3]See Lin et al. (2002) and Pavlenko (2001a, 2001b) for ways that constructing an English speaking identity (within and across cultures) allowed the authors new social identities and kinds of relationships.

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identities, to border crossings or what Pennycook (2001) has referred to as ''preferred futures.''

*Lara: "We did not have as much hardship as people who arrived at Ellis Island."* Lara, who was 54 when she wrote her narratives, emigrated from the former Soviet Union in the late 1970s and is married with two grown daughters. Having earned a Master's degree in Chemistry in the USSR, she now works in a clerical office position in the United States.

The master narrative of immigration to the United States provides Lara with the framework through which she tells her own immigration story. As in the master narrative, a regime of truth, her story is one of fleeing oppression, and after years of hard work, finding success in the United States, manifested in good jobs, high levels of English proficiency, and educational achievement for her children. Throughout her narratives, she explicitly claims an American immigrant identity for herself and her family. By integrating her own immigration story into the cultural myth (the Ellis Island story), she positions herself in an historical imagined community (Anderson, 1991).

> Our immigration experience was not as difficult as for people who immigrated in early the 1900s, but it was still hard to take our daughter from her beloved grandpa because we lived together. We did not have as much hardship as people who arrived at Ellis Island, but we still had to wait five months in a suburb in Italy for permission to enter the United State of America. We were not as poor as these people, but when we were in Austria and my daughter's shoes wore out, we spent all of our money to buy her pair of boots (it was late October). We were educated but we could not speak English and therefore we could not apply for well-paying jobs.

With her narrative, she tells what Pavlenko (2004) has called ''a tellable story'': One easily received, one which does not challenge and in fact reinscribes a regime of truth. Lara positions herself as a legitimate American in a long line of Americans. It is interesting, however, to note which discourses around the master narrative about U.S. immigration she appropriates and which she rejects. Here we see a desire to dissociate herself with images of poverty and lack of education. Her narrative suggests that she is subtly resisting the patronizing aspects of this cultural myth

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around immigration, this regime of truth, by stating that she and her family were not as destitute and unfortunate as those who had passed through Ellis Island.

Lara embraces and employs images of cultural pluralism as she writes about her life bringing up her children in a diverse metropolitan United States. She appears to resist a regime of truth which depicts as inevitable alienation between immigrant parent and child as the child becomes ''Americanized'' into the ''melting pot'' and the parent is ''left behind,'' impotent, obsolete, isolated and unable to communicate with the child. In contrast, she positions herself more powerfully among other immigrant parents, finding similarities in the ways in which they parent and live out a central identity, that of mother.

> I found a lot of similarity between our culture and the other cultures, for example, Korean mothers are very strict with their children and so are Russian mothers. They teach their children work hard to become the best and so are Russian mothers. But the most important, we teach our children to live with different people in harmony, and that what makes the United States a very special country.

Within this pluralist culture, her imagined community (and some might argue a competing regime of truth), she is able to both maintain her identity as a Russian mother and adapt her parenting to an American context. She delights in her daughter's friendships with young people of other cultural backgrounds. She is able to share her knowledge of other cultures and at times act as a cultural broker of sorts. For example, she writes of helping her eldest daughter navigate through an adolescent right of passage.

> When she was fifteen she experienced her first love; he was from India. It happened that in USSR I use to watch Indian movies and loved the music and songs, also I knew a lot about Indian culture. I was able to share my knowledge with my daughter and that helped her to understand her friend better.

Thus, though she does write about the frustrations during the early years of immigration of not being able to help her oldest daughter with her homework due to her limited English at

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that time, she also positions herself powerfully in her narratives, within a community of other immigrant mothers, within a pluralist culture in which through her openness and knowledge of other cultures, she can actively support her children as they navigate multicultural relationships, and this creates a bridge between herself and her children.

Lara's narratives depict struggles against regimes of truth around what it means to be educated, bilingual, and a legitimate speaker of English. Throughout her compositions, Lara asserts her own and her husband's identity as educated people, an identity which has often gone unrecognized. When they applied to emigrate from the Soviet Union, they experienced the symbolic erasure of their identities as educated professionals when their university diplomas were taken from them.[4] Lara writes that in the midst of second thoughts about leaving, she was refused a job as an economist because she was Jewish. The couple experienced the refusal as a denial of Lara's socially constructed identity as an educated person and for that reason finalized their decision to emigrate. Yet once in the United States, this identity, she feels, is still contested because her English proficiency has limited her access to ''well-paying jobs'' to which her education would have normally entitled her. Though she and her husband have been able to secure increasingly better paying jobs, she spoke on a number of occasions about how frustrated she was that everyone with whom she worked was ''uneducated,'' having only high school educations (in contrast to her graduate degree). This was not the community of practice she had imagined for herself. Lara's narratives, classroom contributions and e-mails suggest she very much wanted to be recognized as an educated person, belonging to a community of intellectuals. Unfortunately, her imagined community of intellectuals appeared to be governed by a regime of truth prescribing criteria to be considered ''an educated person,'' not all of which she could meet. Within this regime of truth, an educated person or intellectual appeared not

[4]Note that our focus is not on describing how agents and events are constructed but rather on how these events are subjectively experienced and lived by our participants. For example, the details of how government agencies confiscated university diplomas are less relevant than how Lara experienced the confiscations as an erasure of her and her husband's identities as educated professionals.

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only to need to have an advanced degree but a well-paying, professional job and needed to speak English eloquently, accurately and without an accent.

Lara explicitly claims ownership of English as her second language yet still struggles with ideologies around the nature of bilingualism, which prescribe that one must be equally proficient in both languages, with second language abilities mirroring the first language.

> I have been speaking English for 27 years. Sometimes I feel as a different person when I speak English. I feel as a less intelligent, a less intellectual and a less educated person, especially when I talk to another educated person. When I have to talk to an English speaking person, I think in English while talking. I am still intimidated by some English speaking people and sometimes hesitant to respond immediately. I am intimidated by the people who are deliberately pretending not understanding me.

While stating that she speaks and communicates in English routinely and with ease, she is, nevertheless, aware that her success in communicating in English depends not only on her language proficiency but how she is regarded (and how she perceives she is regarded) by her interlocutor, how she is positioned by this person. She knows that while she is understandable, people may pretend not to understand her. Moreover, she sometimes is intimidated by certain English speakers, particularly those (perhaps as Norton [2001] suggested, members of her imagined community) to whom she attributes the identity of educated person which she wishes to claim for herself. As Norton (2000, 2001) has pointed out following Bourdieu (1991), Lara is struggling to impose reception, that is, struggling for her unique voice to be heard in English.

It is this imagined identity, the hope to become incontestably like a native speaker, to express herself freely and completely in English that drives her in her pursuit of greater language proficiency. Lara describes her differing facility and uses of English and Russian in accordance with conceptualizations of bilingualism (Cook, 1999, 2002; Grosjean, 1998; Pavlenko 2001b, 2003; 2004, 2005), characterizing an adult bi/multilingual as someone who routinely uses more than one language albeit with different levels of proficiency. Yet, her images of what it means to be bilingual, the regime of truth demanding that first language

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abilities are equivalent to those in the second, prevent her from comfortably claiming ownership of English. Unfortunately, the imagined communities in which membership appears to figure prominently in her (desired) sense of self—a community of intellectuals and a community of articulate adult bilinguals—are reinscribed with some of the same ideologies as the regimes of truth that she is resisting, rendering just out of reach these communities and identities for which she longs.

### *The Afternoon Teas*

The identities that the first-year teachers in Suhanthie Motha's study imagined for their ESOL students shaped their pedagogies and ultimately complexified the professional identities they assumed for themselves as TESOL professionals. As Yasuko Kanno (2003) has shown, it is not only individuals who imagine futures, identities, and communities for particular groups of learners. These imaginings are also shaped by institutions, including schools. In her study, Kanno showed how imagined communities, imagined future positionings within society for their learners, manifested in particular institutional policies and practices. Building upon this notion Suhanthie, through her study of first year teaching (2004), illustrated how teachers participate in this complex imagining of learners' identities and futures and how such imaginings shape the construction and negotiation of their own professional identities as teachers. The construction of teachers' professional identities happens on multiple planes alongside the constructions of their students' identities, occurring simultaneously and influencing each other. While they happen independently, they do not happen in isolation.

*Grammar and identities: "Grammar's a way to access yourself to power."* As the teachers imagined desirable identities for their students, they negotiated images surrounding grammatically perfect spoken English, such as in the following example, the identity of a competent and intelligent potential employee. For Katie, the connection between grammar and power was related to identity. She was reluctant to teach grammar directly to her elementary school-aged children or to focus too heavily or too explicitly on

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their grammatical errors, but at the same time she saw grammatical accuracy as providing to students the tools they needed to construct an identity that could procure power, giving them access to their imagined communities. She explained that:

> ''Grammar's a way to access yourself to power because the way language is structured, people will see you in a certain way, and if you can have access to the language, then you can have the power that comes with the language.''

She provided an example:

> ''So for instance, if you go into a job interview wearing a nice suit and you sit down and go 'Me four years school' and start talking in broken English, their perception of you will be very different than if you went in and said: 'I went to school and I have taken this many classes.' ''

Just as Katie saw a ''nice suit'' as a marker of an identity of power, she associated the social ignominy of what she termed ''broken English'' with the identity of one who operates outside a culture of power and was concerned about the ability of her students to escape its associated stigmatization. Notice that these imagined identities can also sometimes function as regimes of truth by reinforcing the supremacy of grammatically pristine English and depriving second language learners of a space that acknowledges the developmental nature of language learning. Katie, however, did not unquestioningly accept that a focus on grammatical instruction provided unproblematic access to imagined identities or communities. She was critical of regimes of truth that associate developing English proficiency with lower intelligence: ''I think unconsciously, people associate intelligence with language. If you know how to speak a language very well, you're very intelligent.'' Her assertion is well supported; others, including Lindeman (2003), have found ideologies about nonnative English speakers to assume lesser intelligence, particularly for certain linguistic groups.

Katie flirted with the line between embracing imagined communities and reinscribing regimes of truth. She recognized that regardless of her own language ideologies, her students would eventually be facing native-English speakers in the context of inequitable power relations, including potential employers who

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might subscribe to regimes of truth about language learners. As she made decisions about the extent to which she was willing to focus explicitly on grammar, she observed:

> ''That's why I think grammar is helpful. Because it'll get you from one point, where people see you as uneducated even though you may be very educated, to the next point, which is, this person has a good command of the language.''

Katie explicitly deplored the direct teaching of grammar to her young students, but she saw it as necessary in the social context of her practice, in which the associations between correct grammar and intelligence had become a regime of truth. For Katie, to resist a heavy focus on teaching grammar would be to challenge the assumption that knowledge about and usage of correct grammatical forms is the primary goal of English language instruction for young children. However, confronting this regime of truth presents a complication for even the most idealistic and transformative of teachers; Foucault tells us that a whole community, and not a single person, must participate in order for regimes of truth to be altered. Resisting grammar-based teaching methods for small children is therefore not a straightforward and facile choice available to teachers. The dilemma that the teachers face can present a threat to their own professional identities because it can require them to redefine their meanings of teaching language minority students and of teaching English, compelling them to privilege the direct teaching of grammar above development of students' own voices.

*Constructing ESOL identities: "You can't speak English."* The imagined communities that students desire for themselves become salient in teachers' imaginings of their students' identities and sway their pedagogical leanings. All four of the teachers in the study noticed that their students often sought to belong to the imagined community of ''mainstream students,'' a category that was juxtaposed oppositionally with ''students who were associated with ESOL.'' The regimes of truth surrounding the school category of ESOL were directly connected to those associated with the broader societal category of NNES. Many of the ESOL students in the study wanted to exit ESOL, which they

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understood to be constructed as shameful and deficit (Motha, 2006a). While all four teachers tried to redefine the category ESOL, highlighting associations between ESOL and bilingualism and sometimes renaming their students as ''multilingual'' rather than ''ESOL,'' it was impractical for them to blindly ignore the shame associated with ESOL and NNES. It became necessary for them to take this stigma into account as they attended to the powerful imagined communities at play in the lives of their students. In the context of a school and larger societal context that normalizes monolingualism (Blackledge, 2002), refocusing students' identities toward multilingualism was of limited use because within their academic and social milieux, it was their proficiency in English, not in their additional languages, that was of interest and concern.

For instance, Alexandra told us that students who had never been in ESOL classes taunt her students from the hallway:

> ''They pass the door and shout: 'You can't speak English' into the classroom and play with the light switch at the door.'' (Alexandra, Afternoon tea, 04.10)

Jane, too, told us of high-school students who had exited from ESOL who mocked current ESOL students for their supposed inability to speak English. The taunt ''You can't speak English'' reinforces the regime of truth of NNESs as deficit and inferior. Alexandra perceived a relationship between the taunts and the shame that many of her students experienced about their ESOL standing, adding: ''These are kids who *do* take it personally. . . They pull the shades in the windows so that no one across the courtyard can see them because everyone knows [this classroom] is ESOL'' (Afternoon tea, 04.10). As ESOL students internalize (Vygotsky, 1978) the voices of others and the shame associated with ESOL status, they come to accept their status as inferior.

Accompanying the taunt ''You can't speak English'' with the flicking of the light switch could be interpreted as having the symbolic effect of unconsciously leaving ESOL students in the dark, with their identities as legitimate language learners potentially erased (Derrida, 1967/98). It is, after all, almost impossible to learn while sitting in the dark. The absence of light

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calls into question the legitimacy of the classroom—no English, no light, no possibility for learning. The ESOL students then adopt this symbolism, asking Alexandra to pull the shades. If she draws the shades, they are protected from an unwanted gaze, a negative positioning, and a stigma. In this way they create a protective cocoon around themselves, but their request could simultaneously be read as their complicit participation in their own negation as they unwittingly engage in the symbolic erasure of their ESOL class.

Alexandra faces a difficult situation. Agreeing to draw the shades could potentially reinforce the portrayal of her classroom and consequently the community of ESOL students as shameful and interrupt the teacher's attempts to challenge a regime of truth by transforming the image of ESOL within the school. However, forcing students to open the blinds could disrupt her attempts to make the ESOL classroom a safe and comfortable space and impede their access to their imagined communities. A simple choice was not available because the terrain was made multilayered by, *inter alia*, the complexities of ethics and caring.

The communities that teachers imagined for their students were sometimes inaccessible to them. For instance, the imagined identity of ''non-ESOL'' is in reality not achieved when students exit ESOL. The same regimes of truth that construct ESOL as deficient ensure that former ESOL students will always be fraudulent speakers by virtue of other markers: an accent that detracts from native-speaker speech, race—because whiteness and NS status are integrally linked (Motha, 2006b)—or institutional memory of their ESOL status. The institutional meanings of teaching ESOL students necessarily included imagining NS identities for them (Motha, Jain, & Tecle, forthcoming). Katie, Jane, Margaret and Alexandra were therefore required to tease apart whether their pedagogical practices were liberating their students (by helping them to access imagined communities) or oppressing them (by reinscribing regimes of truth). We argue that the answer does not lie in such dichotomous terrain.

*Constructing teaching identities: ''That's when you pull the professional façade.''* The last of Suhanthie's examples examines the identities that the four teachers in the study imagined for themselves. As they gathered together at the afternoon teas and

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constructed their ideas about transformative practice, Katie, Jane, Alexandra, and Margaret struggled against school-based regimes of truth about what it means to be an ESOL teacher. The narratives they encountered represented teachers as ''all-knowing'' (Katie, Afternoon tea, December 6) and ''authoritative'' (Jane, Afternoon tea, November 15), as uninvested in developing emotional rapport with new students (Margaret, Afternoon tea, November 1), as familiar with complicated technical terminology (Katie, Afternoon tea, December 6), as always knowing what they're talking about (Alexandra, Afternoon tea, January 24), and as having a flawless knowledge of grammar (Jane, Interview, June 25). In reality, the teachers often sensed that they offered none of these characteristics and, furthermore, they themselves placed a low value on developing or possessing these traits.

To gain access to their imagined communities of veteran teachers, Jane, Alexandra, Margaret, and Katie needed to perform identities that were acceptable to the school community they worked within. However, the identities deemed legitimate within their school culture at large were not always compatible with those that the teachers sought to construct for themselves. Katie saw a clear division between who the teachers wanted to be and who they were expected to be, and she perceived the distinction to be constructed discursively:

> I do think you have to know how to say things. It's all how you present it to the teachers or to the faculty. You can do what you want, then cite a name or cite a study. Or you can pick out a philosophy and say, this is why I'm doing it, even though your purpose may be something completely different. You can front it that way. It's kind of deceitful, but you tell people what they want to hear so that you can do your work. (Afternoon Tea, 11.15)

She was responding to a regime of truth of teachers being omniscient, struggling to forge a space that accommodated her need to impose reception (Bourdieu, as understood through Norton, 2000) while maintaining her own voice.

> ''That's when you pull the professional façade. My boyfriend Chris told me if you don't know the answer you do the pause. Hmmm. Well, let me think about that.'' (Katie, Afternoon tea, 12.06)

and later:

> . . . My first year when people asked me what to do, I would BS and make things up. It sounds horrible, but that's how I survived, talking out of my butt pretty much. (Katie, Afternoon tea, 12.06)

The terms ''façade,'' ''BS,'' and ''talking out of my butt'' all imply that Katie is offering an identity that she is not actually embracing. While not truly believing that teachers should be expected to know everything, she feels the need to construct this image in order to gain access to her imagined community. The terrain between identity and image therefore becomes murky. The teachers appear to be resisting a regime of truth surrounding the omniscient teacher, but they still operate within it and its discourses because as they construct the image of being all knowing, some amount of performance becomes identity. In this context, the identities the teachers seek to embrace are always contested. However, while she disidentifies with some aspects of the identities offered but adopts others, considering which ones she chooses to appropriate sheds light on the ways in which Katie and her study partners understand the space between their images and their identities. When we appropriate discourses, we appropriate images. The teachers' embracing of desirable imagined communities can never be uncomplicated acts of liberation because their imaginings are necessarily rooted in a world that privileges certain representations of teaching, including many that do not coincide with those that the teachers espouse.

## Discussion

As we teach language and prepare teachers to teach language, it is helpful for us to recognize language learning as inseparable from identity construction—not merely a simplistic and essentialized understanding of identity construction but rather identity construction as comprising desire and image and as a terrain of struggle. Our data illustrate the ways in which our multiple identities, replete with imagined communities and regimes of truth, color, shape, enhance, and constrain each other. Multiple (and at times competing) regimes of truth were tangible in the participants' lives as they moved through different communities of practice and experimented with different identities. These different regimes of truth and related imagined communities

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around different themes or aspects of identity were often quite intertwined with one another, coloring the way each individual experienced the regime of truth and shaping the imagined community she created in response. Taken together, these two theoretical framings, imagined communities and regimes of truth, help to map out the terrain of struggle that often characterizes identity.

Our work has raised for us several further questions: questions about identification, disidentification, knowledge, and the importance of image. Why are certain images and their associated discourses (whether viewed as an imagined community, a regime of truth, neither, or both) selected and allowed to enter into dialogue with what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as inner voices? What is the relationship between appropriating an image and crafting an identity? Interestingly, data from both studies show examples of how semiotic representations of self in the form of dress (Katie's ''nice suit'' and Jennifer's UCLA t-shirt) can serve as nonverbal forms of communication alongside the linguistic. These act as factors in accessing imagined communities or in co-constructing such access when this access is denied by others (for instance, by Katie's imagined job interviewer, by the student who criticized Jennifer for wearing the t-shirt, or by the mainstream students at Alexandra's school taunting and turning off the lights). The semiotic power of such imagery is unmistakable as these visual images seem to crystallize in the minds of Katie and Jennifer elaborate imagined communities and regimes of truth. They have the power to communicate to others and represent for themselves entire identities. The stories of our participants portray multiple and shifting affiliations, processes of identification and disidentification with master narratives, images, and identities offered up to them. While embracing some, they try on and take off others: articles of clothing (a t-shirt, an interview suit), Ellis Island imagery, Katie's professional façades, and the erasure of Alexandra's students when they render themselves invisible in the dark by drawing the blinds.

Neither regimes of truth nor imagined communities are easily discernible, the former because they are by nature naturalized discourses, the latter because they are idealized and often heavily structured by image and representation. Both rarely lend themselves to being spoken aloud because they frequently take the

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form of discourses that could be perceived as irrational or naïve, for instance: ''I am a racial minority but I strive for an imagined identity that is white.'' However, although our reasonable side may interrogate them, imagined communities nonetheless have power over us, particularly when they remain unquestioned.

Misidentifying students' imagined communities is a trap that well-meaning teachers can easily slide into because it is tempting to essentialize students and then consequently to essentialize what we imagine to be their expectations, dreams, and desires, for instance to assume that a nonnative English speaker would like to pass for a native-English speaker. One way in which teachers and teacher educators can avoid making assumptions about their students' unspoken goals while still tapping into learners' imagined communities is through such activities as asking students to imagine their lives in 10 years. Collages are another way of helping educators to access the images that are powerful in their own and their students' imaginations and to deconstruct unconscious and unseen ideals. When conceptual space is created in which teachers and learners can develop awareness of the discourses shaping them, they can gain power over those images. Imagined communities that are potentially in conflict could be made explicit. For instance, a middle-school-aged language learner experiencing ambivalence toward her heritage language and culture because she desires the identity of *assimilated American* could be asked: ''If you could learn to speak native-like English at the expense of a close relationship with your home culture and your family, would you do it?'' By becoming consciously aware of conflicting images that shape desires and the identities they aspire, too, students may see that there can be a danger in forgoing one image in the quest to achieve the other. Through such consciousness-raising activities, students can then be guided to craft new images that can accommodate the multiplicity of their desires, for instance the image of a competent bilingual who both is extremely proficient in English and has maintained high proficiency in her heritage language, and thus ties to her ethnic community, culture, and family.

Together, teachers and learners can look at representations that are influencing them and can ask: Are they as desirable as I thought? Are they in conflict with my other dreams? Are they even accessible? For instance, Lara was motivated by the

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explicit image of an imagined community of educated Russian intellectuals. While she may have known such a community in her youth, in her current U.S. context it might not be reproducible the way she imagines or remembers it.[5] She similarly seemed to be seeking native proficiency, including a native-like accent. An examination of her imagined communities could stimulate her awareness of the images and imagined communities that are fueling her desires, leading her to problematize them, to ask herself how achievable they are, and furthermore to question how desirable they really are. Examinations such as these are significant in structuring how individuals subjectively embody their identity from an interior space. While desires are constructed within an individual, they also emerge from a landscape of consciousness that is replete with images and discourses taken from social context. Individual desires are informed by contexts, which are shaped by imaginary social worlds (Caughey, 1984).

## Conclusion

We are, of course, not making an argument for rationality or for destroying all imagined communities but rather for greater reflection and understanding and therefore ultimately greater agency for learners whose identities are being formed within a contested social terrain. Constructing new identities involves acts of imagination. Through imagination, new meanings are appropriated. In this way, imagination is an essential component in the process of becoming and belonging. Yet, through this exploration we came to understand the process of identity construction as embedded in subjective, unsettled terrain that could be characterized as neither a supportive and idealistic framing nor as a purely coercive environment. Social structures and contexts can behave simultaneously as powerfully tyrannizing regimes of truth and powerfully liberating imagined communities, an inherent contradiction that illuminates the ways in which the two theoretical constructs taken together can lead to a much more complex and nuanced understanding of identity construction.

[5]We are grateful to Aneta Pavlenko for noticing and calling our attention to this point.

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