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## **A Reconceptualization of Identity in SLA and Writing Research**

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The concept of “identity” has gained substantial attention from researchers following the “social turn” in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) since the mid-1990s, before which “explicit calls for an interdisciplinary, socially informed SLA were notable by their absence” (Block, 2003, p. 3). This social turn was marked by Firth and Wagner’s (1997) call for a reconceptualization of SLA that problematizes the conventional dichotomy between “social and individual approaches to language use and language learning,” and that will better “understand and explicate how language is used *as it is being acquired through interaction*, and used resourcefully, contingently, and contextually” (p. 296, original emphasis).

Contemporary researchers tend to approach identity issue in SLA and writing from a poststructuralist perspective while maintaining a critical distance from a social constructionist view, acknowledging approaches that “frame identity not as something fixed for life, but as fragmented and contested in nature” (Block, 2007, p. 864) and holding a critical view of the social construction of identity that “not only recognizes the powerful influence of dominant ideologies in controlling and constraining people’s sense of themselves, but also recognizes the possibility of struggle for alternative definitions” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 13). This trend sheds light on the fluidity,

multiplicity, and dynamic nature of the concept of identity and recognizes the influence of power relations on the construction of identity. However, identity is still conceptualized as a static property that individuals possess. This conceptualization of identity fails to account for individuals' agency of not only assuming or rejecting certain identities but also creating new identities and their agency of not only being shaped by the context but also shaping the context. Therefore, in this article, I argue for a reconceptualization of identity in SLA and writing studies that would problematize and complicate the current notion of identity as a property with or without clearly-defined boundaries, which views the construction and negotiation of identity as unidirectional. Inspired by Larsen-Freeman's (2008, 2012) introduction of Complexity Theory to the field of applied linguistics, I propose to adopt the term "identifying" to capture the dynamic, ongoing, and bidirectional process of individual agents' recognizing, assuming, negotiating, and modifying existing identities, creating new identities, positioning themselves in relation to emerging contexts, and shaping and transforming the contexts. By adopting the term "identifying," I anticipate more research focusing on not only how L2 speakers and writers negotiate their identity to adapt to a certain discourse community, but also how they influence, change, reshape, and transform the discourse community and power dynamics.

I begin with a review of the literature on the issue of identity in SLA and in writing studies incorporating both theoretical and empirical inquiry by means of

discussing several concepts and constructs related to identity. I then revisit my argument, contextualize it, and elucidate and elaborate on it. I conclude with directions for future research on identity issues in SLA and writing, and writing in SLA.

**Author**

Zhaozhe Wang is a doctoral student in Second Language Studies at Purdue University. His interests include second language writing, composition theory and pedagogy, corpus linguistics, writing across the curriculum, translingual writing, writing program administration.