Multiple Perspectives and Interpretations of Learner Narratives on Multilingualism: A Case Study

Perspectivas e Interpretaciones Múltiples de las Narrativas de los Aprendices sobre el Multilingüismo: Un Estudio de Caso

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Linguodidáctica.

VOL. 6 (2025)

ISSN 2952-2013
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

Editorial Universidad de Huelva EUHU

Abstract:

The research draws on a multidisciplinary approach to provide multiple perspectives and interpretations of three learner narratives on multilingualism. The Labovian (1972) narrative structure (from the field of sociolinguistics), Kristeva's (1980) semiotic approach, complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) (Fekete, 2024; Larsen-Freeman, 1997), and an English as a lingua franca (ELF) vs English as a foreign language (EFL) perspective (Widdowson, 2012, 2022) are used to provide multiple interpretations of three learner narratives, as special cases, shedding light on the complexities and nuanced details of becoming multilingual.
This research is part of a bigger research project where data were collected from 38 multilingual English majors at a Hungarian university using the structured interview method (Dörnyei, 2007) in the form of a recording made by the participants. However, for the present research, three complex narratives were selected for analysis from multiple perspectives. Following multiple cycles of coding (Saldana, 2013), qualitative content analysis was applied to reveal various aspects of multilingualism.
The results pointed out how the complex narrative structure proposed by Labov (1972) was used to describe experiences of multilingualism. Furthermore, the narrative genre of folk tales was drawn on to create a culturally appropriate account (Kramsch, 2009), and multilingualism was associated with authentic interactions in an English as a lingua franca (ELF) context. The narratives also shed light on the complex and dynamic nature of second language acquisition (SLA) and the nuances of becoming multilingual. Finally, additional interpretations of the longest narrative are offered, including a feminist and a semiotic reading of the narrative.

Keywords:

Complex dynamic systems theory, English as a lingua franca, Multilingualism, Narratives, Ownership of English.

Resumen:

La investigación se basa en un enfoque multidisciplinar para proporcionar múltiples perspectivas e interpretaciones de tres narrativas de aprendices sobre el multilingüismo. Se utiliza la estructura narrativa laboviana del campo de la sociolingüística (1972), el enfoque semiótico de Kristeva (1980), la teoría de sistemas dinámicos complejos (CDST) (Fekete, 2024; Larsen-Freeman, 1997) y una perspectiva de inglés como lengua franca (ELF) frente a inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) (Widdowson, 2012, 2022) para ofrecer múltiples interpretaciones de tres narrativas de aprendices, como casos especiales, arrojando luz sobre las complejidades y los matices de convertirse en multilingües.
Esta investigación es parte de un proyecto de investigación más amplio en el que se recolectaron datos de 38 estudiantes de inglés multilingües en una universidad húngara utilizando el método de entrevista estructurada (Dörnyei, 2007) en forma de grabaciones realizadas por los participantes. Sin embargo, para la investigación actual, se seleccionaron tres narrativas complejas para su análisis desde múltiples perspectivas. Tras múltiples ciclos de codificación (Saldana, 2013), se aplicó un análisis de contenido cualitativo para revelar diversos aspectos del multilingüismo.
Los resultados señalaron cómo se utilizó la compleja estructura narrativa propuesta por Labov (1972) para describir experiencias de multilingüismo. Además, se recurrió al género narrativo de los cuentos populares para crear un relato culturalmente apropiado (Kramsch, 2009) y se relacionó el multilingüismo con interacciones auténticas en un contexto de inglés como lengua franca (ELF). Las narrativas también arrojan luz sobre la naturaleza compleja y dinámica de la adquisición de una segunda lengua (SLA) y los matices de convertirse en multilingües. Finalmente, se ofrecen interpretaciones adicionales de la narrativa más larga, incluyendo una lectura feminista y una lectura semiótica de la narrativa.

Palabras claves:

Apropiación del inglés, inglés como lengua franca, Multilingüismo, Narrativas, Teoría de sistemas dinámicos complejos.

Fecha de recepción: 20 de marzo de 2025
Fecha de aceptación: 22 de septiembre de 2025

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Linguodidáctica.
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

1. Introduction

Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) placed narrative identity at the center of the language learner's psychology, referring to the learner's autobiographical narratives that are integral to their self-concept (Dörnyei, 2017). As Bruner (1987, p. 692) put it "we seem to have no other way of describing 'lived time' save in the form of narrative", as "narrative imitates life and life imitates narrative"; therefore, "'life' in this sense is the same kind of construction of the human imagination as 'narrative' is". Therefore, language learners' narrative identity can be captured by their ongoing internal narrative reflecting on learning and using the second language (L2). Similarly, a great way to understand the processes of second language acquisition (SLA) is through understanding learners' narratives about their learning. Consequently, the experience of multilingualism is best captured by making sense of learner accounts of becoming multilingual.

The paper, therefore, takes a multidisciplinary stance to offer multiple perspectives and interpretations of three learner narratives on multilingualism including 1) the analysis of the narrative structure and genre based on Labov's (1972) framework from the field of sociolinguistics, (2) the context of becoming multilingual drawing on English as a foreign language (EFL) versus English as a lingua franca (ELF) use, (3) semiotics drawing on Kristeva (1980) and Lacan (1977), and (4) complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2017) pointing out how second language acquisition (SLA) including the processes of multilingualism can be examined as a complex, dynamic system (CDS).

The research was part of a bigger, unfunded research project, so only the interview question about the participants' multilingualism was considered for this inquiry. While the patterns characterizing the 38 participants are delineated in the Results section, three representative and dramatic accounts were carefully chosen as special cases to point out how the above perspectives provide different interpretations of learner narratives on multilingualism.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Narratives in Sociolinguistics

Researchers from various fields such as ethnocultural studies (Fodor, 2012, 2014, 2017), anthropology (Mattingly, 1998), linguistics (Labov, 1972), sociology (Bell, 1999), or psychology (Bruner, 1986; McAdams, 2006; McAdams & Pals, 2006) have studied narratives to explore various constructs in their fields. After the dominance of the quantitative approach in SLA, there was a need to incorporate the findings and research methods of the above fields such as ethnographic observation, the interview method, and narrative inquiry (Duff, 2015) in SLA research at the turn of the millennium to shift focus from the macro-perspective of learning to the micro-perspective of the learner and their immediate learning environment (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p. 81).

De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012, pp. 1-3) define narrative as being structured with identifiable units that contain a beginning, a middle, and an end, giving the story a sense of temporality and causality. Narratology, which is the study of narratives, focuses on narrative as a text type, distinguishing it from other genres. Narratives are thought to have universal properties that can be detected by researchers across cultures. Other foci of narrative inquiry include, for instance, what is told in a story as well as how the story is told, what constitutes its surface structure and its deep structure, or what comprises the knowledge of how to tell a good story,

Linguodidáctica.
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

and how stories are told, understood, and processed. Bruner (1986) espoused narrative as a mode in contrast with the logico-scientific mode dominated by scientific approaches such as hypothesis and testing. In the narrative mode, human consciousness, drama, plights, emotions, and intentions prevail over reason and objectivity. Consequently, this interpretation of narratives captures human experience and consciousness as interpreted and recited by narrators.

In sociolinguistics, Labov (1972, pp. 362-72) studied the narratives of his interviewees and found that six elements characterize everyday stories: abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda.

Table 1

Labovian Narrative Components

The Labovian narrative structure	Description
1. Abstract	summarizes the whole story
2. Orientation	identifies and introduces the setting, such as the time and place of events and characters
3. Complication	elaborates on the plight or the problem in the story
4. Resolution	sheds light on how the problem was resolved
5. Coda	bridges the time between the time of the narrative and the present time
6. Evaluation	the narrator discusses why the story was told and what purpose it served

Source: Own elaboration

Nonetheless, Labov (1972) highlighted that not all narratives include all six elements, pointing out that simple narratives tend to have only a beginning, a middle, and an end, and they include at least one temporal juncture. Labovian narratives are also called prototypical stories or big stories that relate "personal past experience stories of non-shared events" (Georgakopoulou, 2006, p. 123), whereas small stories that occur in ordinary conversations "are non-canonical, dynamic and ongoing, not rehearsed, composed, or told before" (Fodor, 2014, p. 74).

Kramsch (2009, p. 122-3) points out that narrators choose the genre of their narrative very carefully, and they opt for a genre that is understandable for their audience, which is a genre they all can relate to. She adds that the genre in which narrators tell their stories determines the kind of subject they construct for themselves in the story. Such identity construction influences their subject positions and their intersubjectivity in the story.

2.2 Narratives in SLA: A Psychological Perspective

In an EFL or ELF context, L2 learners' linguistic, cultural, narrative, and learner identities are constructed and shaped by their narratives about their in-class and out-of-class L2 learning and use experiences. Dörnyei (2017) placed L2 learners' narrative identity in the limelight when he adopted McAdams's (2006b) dynamic and layered model of personality in the context of SLA. McAdams (2006b) reinterpreted The Big Five Model (Costa & McCrae, 1985) consisting of openness, consciousness, extraversion-introversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism-emotional stability in his understanding of personality and labeled the redemptive self as "a narrative identity that captures important and valued life themes" and "the redemptive self is a story that

Linguodidáctica.
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

links the individual person with culture" (McAdams, 2006, p. 280). McAdams and Pals (2006) contend that human individuality can be captured by drawing on five levels of personality.

a) Evolution and human nature on the first level denote the idea that "human lives are individual variations on a general evolutionary design", and this level draws on biological sciences (p. 205).

b) Dispositional signature or dispositional traits situated on the second layer overlap with the dimensions of the Big Five Model.

c) Characteristic adaptations describe "what people want or value in life… in particular situations" involving their goals, strivings, and fears, and the methods they employ to attain or avoid them (McAdams, 2006, p. 286). While the Big Five Model was not sensitive to cultural differences, this third level of personality is.

d) Life narratives on layer four denote the meaning that people attribute to their lives, for humans make meaning out of their lives through stories. Life narratives are also impacted by the cultural context of the person.

e) The uppermost layer is the differential role of culture, which is the largest context of the individual. Practices, discourses, and accepted behaviors vary in different cultures, influencing the individual's personality and behavior. This resonates with the properties of complex dynamic systems because the five levels (functioning as subsystems) interact with one another within their own level as well as cross-dimensionally, allowing for a dynamic, changing, and situated understanding of personality (Dörnyei, 2017).

Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) adopted McAdams' personality model to describe language learner characteristics. In their framework, the L2 learner's narrative identity is situated at the center of the framework as the main organizational mechanism for the whole system (Dörnyei, 2017, p.87). In this system, narrative identity is surrounded by the other four layers from McAdams's conceptualization, along with an additional dimension labeled as the learning situation. Narrative identity reflects the way individuals construct and make sense of their experiences and memories via various narratives such as stories, complaints, excuses, and explanations, placing autobiographical narratives in the heart of the self-concept (Dörnyei, 2017, p. 89). As Bruner (1987, p. 692) put it 'life' can only be made sense of as a narrative construction in the human imagination. In this case, L2 learners' narrative identity is captured by their ongoing internal narrative reflecting on learning and using the L2. In my study, language learners' narrative identity is captured by the stories they recounted about their learning experiences and about the process of becoming multilingual through learning English.

2.3 Narratives of Multilingualism: An Ideological Perspective

There has been a shift in the field of teaching and learning English due to the many changes that have taken place in the role and status of English in the world (see for instance, Fekete, 2014; House, 2003; Jenkins, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2021; Medgyes, 2017; Seidlhofer, 2004, 2011; Vettorel, 2019; Widdowson, 2012, 2022). English, similarly to other languages such as French, German, or Japanese, was traditionally taught as a foreign language where the standards of teaching, learning, testing, and attainment were measured against the 'native speaker norm'. This practice is known as native-speakerism. According to this framework, non-native speakers

Linguodidáctica.
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

are considered deficient users of the L2; for this reason, the ultimate goal of English teaching and learning is to achieve native-like proficiency. Consequently, English speakers' non-native-like proficiency levels are judged negatively as they are compared to native speakers. Foreign languages (FLs) are typically taught for communication with native speakers, the proficiency levels of learners and teachers are compared to those of native speakers, and learners are usually not exposed to the language outside the classroom. With English becoming a global lingua franca and English-speaking cultures becoming globalized all over the world, the number of English speakers has spiked, resulting in much more non-native speakers than native speakers. Therefore, English language conversations are more likely to take place between non-native speakers than between native and non-native speakers.

In an ELF context, the standard of English use is determined by the proficiency levels and needs of local, mostly non-native, English speakers to which native speakers are expected to adapt. While the goal of EFL learning is to approximate native-like language use, the purpose of ELF learning is successful communication, even if it is far from native-like. For this reason, teachers (Jenkins, 2007) and learners (Fekete, 2018) often report conflicting linguistic identities that are split between trying to conform to the native speaker norm in the classroom and using ELF in their spare time focusing on mutual understanding rather than flawless language use. Therefore, the experience of multilingualism may take place in an EFL or an ELF context. While ELF can grant learners ownership of English (Widdowson, 2012), EFL may generate a feeling of inferiority in learners as their language proficiency falls short of that of native speakers (Fekete, 2018; Medgyes, 2017). In the same vein, while successful EFL attainment is often measured by tests and language exams or in successful interactions with native speakers, successful communication and a sense of empowerment are often measured in real-life situations such as during holidays or study/work abroad stays – mostly with other non-native speakers.

As a consequence, many learners today do not learn English only to interact with native English speakers or because they are fascinated by their culture (see, for example, Jenkins, 2006, 2021; Medgyes, 2017; Widdowson, 2022), as pointed out by Gardner's (1985) integrative motive. Concerning international posture, Yashima (2009) argues that integrative motivation may not be applicable in ELF contexts where learners learn and use English to belong to an international community where English knowledge is valued, and they use English as an international/global and intercultural language for utilitarian purposes, boosting their instrumental motivation. English speakers embracing their international posture tend to show openness to interact with all kinds of native and non-native English speakers, and they tend to take a keener interest in intercultural and world affairs rather than in a single native-speaking community.

2.4 Narratives of self-positioning: A Semiotic Perspective

From the viewpoint of semiotics, Kristeva (1980, p. 23-35) proposes that language is much more than a social code embedded in the structure of the language; therefore, she reasons that language is not to be studied in isolation from its user but as an interaction between the two. Drawing on Freud's (1920) psychoanalysis, she dubs semiotics semanalysis, proposing that the subject is split between the conscious and the unconscious levels when using the language.

Concerning learning the mother tongue, Kristeva (1984) argues that before the child develops language, it is in the realm of semiotics in which the child can signify things in the world without language. When the child learns the language, it enters the realm of the symbolic where it will

Linguodidáctica.
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

be able to make significations using the language; thereby, the child will be able to develop an identity that is different from the mother in and via language; thus, the child becomes a speaking subject.

By contrast, Lacan (1977, pp. 671-721) argued that when the child learns the language, it enters the realm of the father that is associated with the world of language through which it learns social and cultural laws, which marks the child's separation from the mother. Learning the language is a painful activity, according to Lacan, because the child learns the language of the Other along with a consciousness that comes with it (Lacan, 1977, p. 683). Entering the Lacanian world of the father is the only way for the child to become a subject. Unlike Lacan, who understood these two stages as separate ones, Kristeva (1984, pp. 19-72) argues that the subject constantly positions themselves between the world of the semiotic and the world of the symbolic, forming a continuum in the process of meaning-making and signification (Kristeva, 1984, p. 24). This is the meaning-making process that renders the individual a subject-in-process who constantly reconstructs and reproduces themselves, drawing on these two modalities.

2.5 Narratives as a Complex Dynamic System of Individual Differences in SLA

Individual differences research was traditionally characterized by three seemingly irreconcilable contradictions (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Fekete, 2023; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) that are scientifically explained by complex dynamic systems theory (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). This theory was first introduced in applied linguistics by Diane Larsen-Freeman in 1997 in her groundbreaking paper discussing how languages and the process of SLA are best understood as complex dynamic systems (CDSs).

The first contradiction is the universal and unique nature of individuals and their various functioning, including the process of and the psychological responses to SLA. A universal fact is that all learners display cognitive abilities, aptitude, personality traits, emotions, motivation, and willingness to communicate, etc., in the L2 – but to different extents and with great intra- and interpersonal variation. This contradiction is resolved by CDST pointing out that SLA is a fractal like everything else in the universe, permitting infinite variations that are self-similar based on a universal design.

The second contradiction describes the stable yet dynamic nature of SLA and individual differences. The stability of the complex system is sustained by constant adaptation to change in the process of SLA and in the regulation of individual differences such as anxiety, motivation, WTC, learning styles, creativity, learner beliefs, etc., that are needed to sustain SLA.

The third contradiction addresses how SLA is a chaotic system characterized by non-linear dynamics, pointing out a disparate relationship between stimuli and outcomes. For instance, sometimes arduous and lengthy efforts lead to minor and insignificant outcomes, while, at other times, small or subtle stimuli, such as an interaction with a person or an experience, can lead to transformative and major outcomes. This is also called the butterfly effect.

The role of the environment in shaping the behavior of a complex and dynamic system is emphasized in CDST. Interactions with the environment include conversations, events, experiences, or participation in other complex systems such as education, politics, sports, hobbies, traditions, and many more. In the process of becoming multilingual, learners interact with peers, teachers, educational systems, teaching methods, exams, and other native or non-native

Linguodidáctica.
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

speakers, as well as cultural products and practices from the media or during sojourn (Fekete, 2024). Therefore, there are constant interactions between the various subsets of the learner as a CDS (i.e., learners' IDs and identities) and the environment (Fekete, 2023, 2024).

From a complexity science perspective, learner narratives, therefore, can capture the dynamic and interacting relationship between learning and psychological processes that point out the process of becoming multilingual. Therefore, understanding learner narratives is conducive to understanding the complexities of their lives and lived experiences, including learners' ever-changing experiences of SLA and multilingualism.

3. Methods

3.1 Aim and context of research

The present research was part of a complex, unfunded research project at the University of Pécs to examine English majors' identities and individual differences from multiple perspectives.

3.2 Research questions

In this research, one complex research question is answered:

What characterizes the participants' narratives of multilingualism in terms of

- the context of experiencing multilingualism,
- ownership of English as an experience of multilingualism,
- the narrative genre and structure,
- a semiotic experience, and
- SLA as a complex, dynamic system.

3. 3. Participants

Convenience sampling was used to find participants for the research. The participants of the research were 38 first-year English majors who came from three classes of the course *Listening and Speaking Development* taught by the researcher-teacher. Pseudonyms were used to protect the respondents' identities. Regarding the gender ratio of the participants, female students (N33) greatly outnumbered male students (N9). Although there were two international students and one student with dual Hungarian-US citizenship, the narratives scrutinized in the study came from Hungarian students.

3. 4. Research Instruments and Procedures

A structured speaking task included in Appendix A was employed to collect data for the research. The task functioned as a structured interview recorded by students in their homes. Stu-

Linguodidáctica.
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dents submitted their audio recordings as a home assignment, and they received scrupulous feedback on their spoken language use and proficiency level using the scales of the speaking component of the internally organized C1 level English proficiency exam (see Appendix B) that all students are required to take at the end of their first year. However, for this research, only the data related to interview question 12 were considered, as it prompted students to share a story or an experience:

> Please tell me about the steps and events of becoming multilingual. When did you realize you were multilingual? Please recall the situation and what it meant to you then.

The stories narrated by the participants in the structured interview were big stories (Georgakopoulou, 2006) since they related non-shared, personal past events, and they had time to rehearse telling their stories before recording their answers to the interview questions. Each recording was listened to multiple times to make transcripts and to provide detailed feedback on students' spoken language use. The answers to question 12 were analyzed manually in terms of the narrative structure, genre, and content. Color coding was used to identify themes and structural components. Due to the nature of a structured interview, students' answers greatly varied in length and depth, ranging between 15-45 minutes. Given the large number of participants, three representative and detailed narratives were selected as special cases for this research.

3. 5. Research Methods

The research is embedded in the qualitative research tradition, revealing subtle, rich, and idiosyncratic details and answering the whys and hows of the research foci (Dörnyei, 2007). Given the large number of participants, using the structured interview method was the only feasible option and it also allowed for the comparability of answers.

4. Results

Since international posture is inherently linked to ELF (Yashima, 2009), using English in an ELF context enhances one's international posture. Ownership of English was another salient theme that emerged in the datasets. The participants associated ownership of English with being multilingual. Recognizing one's multilingualism, which in the study refers to the ability to successfully communicate with other people using English, grants ownership of English to the individual (Widdowson, 2012). The responses revealed that gaining ownership of English resulted from using English as a tool in three domains of life: getting by in another country (N 9), pursuing English studies at university (N 7), and being able to watch English language programs (e.g., TV channels, TV shows, and movies) (N 7). Specifically, six students connected their ownership of English with becoming multilingual in and via English.

In addition, the informants were asked when they realized they were multilingual. Twenty-nine students out of 37 associated the realization of being multilingual with talking to NESs and NNEs, 15 and 14 respectively, and six students associated this event with the ability to understand English language movies and series. The results point out that the cornerstone of becoming multilingual takes place through the use of an L2 for real-life purposes in authentic interactions instead of in-class tasks and activities. Donna's, Amanda's and Lori's testimonies

Linguodidáctica.
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

highlight that the most significant aspect of authentic L2 use comes from interacting with other L2 speakers.

> *…two years ago when I went into a photo developing salon, there was a German lady who wanted to develop some of her photos, but the employees couldn't speak German or English and I helped her to express herself and she talked to me also in German, also in English and I could translate it, both languages to the employees. And I felt pretty good and I was pretty proud that I could help. And I think that it's worth learning and speaking several languages because it makes people able to help many others in the everyday lives.* Donna

> *…when I ran into a foreign person, a tourist at the train station in Debrecen. And I, and she asked me [in English] where she should go and I tried to help her find her train. And it was, I don't know, it was so natural. And my mother was on the phone during this conversation and she heard, then she told me that how naturally I spoke to that girl. I didn't really realize it first … It was just a moment of satisfaction when I recognized that I am kind of multilingual person.* Amanda

> *For two consecutive years, my mother and I went to Italy. It was a bus trip. And, firstly, we went when I finished high school and secondly when I finished my first year in the university. And at the first occasion, my mom went out to the ladies' room in a restaurant and the waiter came to me to pick up the order. And I was shocked and couldn't say anything until my mom's returned. And at the second occasion, I had much more self-confidence because we wanted to buy some dried tomatoes in the market but mother smoked and she didn't want to come, came closer to the fruits so she sent me to buy it and I bought it successfully. I think the conclusion is that one year at the university was enough to take my confidence. And I think this story is a good example for an event of becoming a multilingual person and it was a big step to me, because previously I didn't dare to say a word for anyone who was not Hungarian and I was very proud myself for being able to do that dried tomatoes thing.* Lori

The above narratives were carefully chosen as special cases for analysis to present multiple interpretations from a multidisciplinary perspective.

5. Discussion

5.1. Gaining ownership of English in experiencing multilingualism

This section answers the first two research questions, addressing the context of becoming multilingual and gaining ownership of English. The experience of multilingualism was linked to authentic and meaningful interactions with both native and non-native speakers. Donna and Lori capitalized on their unique linguistic resources, which made them realize they were multilingual and unique, especially compared to monolingual Hungarians who could not help tourists and could not successfully conduct a business transaction in a foreign country due to their lack of L2 knowledge.

Donna's ability to speak three languages was acknowledged by her interlocutor. The positive evaluation and praise by both the multilingual interlocutors (tourists) and the monolingual Hungarians (shop assistants and the mother) confirmed Donna's and Amanda's ownership of English. For Lori, this realization came from this introspective task, making her realize how she became multilingual in Italy.

Linguodidáctica.
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

The results point out the prevalence of ELF interactions outside the classroom rather than EFL interactions in the classroom in experiencing multilingualism. This finding reflects the lingua franca nature of English and the fact that Hungarian English learners are more likely to converse with other non-native English speakers than native speakers due to the much larger number of non-native speakers in the world (Jenkins, 2021; Medgyes, 2017; Widdowson, 2012, 2022).

Studies (Fekete, 2018; Jenkins, 2007) pointed out English speakers' conflicted and contradictory identities in EFL vs ELF contexts. Learners may feel incompetent in the classroom as their proficiency level does not approximate that of native speakers or exam standards, whereas they can use English successfully outside the classroom, whereby they can experience a sense of competence and ownership of English.

Before these experiences, Lori, Donna, and Amanda had learned and used EFL in Hungary. They used English in the classroom for learning, practice, and testing purposes. In this context, they perceived themselves as learners with gaps in their English knowledge rather than successful multilingual speakers. Then, at university, they struggled to pass the compulsory, internally organized C-1 level proficiency exam and thus lacked linguistic confidence.

By contrast, using English successfully in an ELF context was their first experience of multilingualism. In Lori's case, the successful business transaction rendered her a sense of ownership of English (Widdowson, 2012) that she had been unable to experience in the Hungarian EFL context. However, her account also points out that her (EFL) education at university was crucial for her success in the ELF context a year later. Lori's experience is in line with Fekete's (2018) findings that those learners who regarded themselves as multilingual focused on what they could do in and via ELF, while those who did not consider themselves multilingual explained that they fell short of the native speaker standard. In summary, the three students associated the experience of multilingualism with authentic ELF interactions.

5. 2. Narrative genre and structure

The above narratives are versions of the Labovian story (Labov, 1972, p. 362), the elements of which are also included in many fairy tales and folk tales. Labov (1972, p. 362-72) found six elements characteristic of everyday stories that he elicited in interviews: abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda.

Donna's and Amanda's narratives include all Labovian elements save the coda and Lori's narrative contains all components. The abstract was also missing from the narratives as it was already incorporated in the interview question. Simple narratives only contain the orientation, complication, and resolution, while complex Labovian stories include additional narrative components. All three narratives are complex Labovian stories including:

- the narrator's evaluation of the story:

And I think that it's worth learning and speaking several languages because it makes people able to help many others in the everyday lives. Donna

- the listener's evaluation:

And my mother was on the phone during this conversation and she heard, then she told me that how naturally I spoke to that girl. Amanda

Linguodidáctica.
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

- evaluation and coda:

> *…the conclusion is that one year at the university was enough to take my confidence. And I think this story is a good example for an event of becoming a multilingual person…* Lori

The evaluation and the coda are important narrative elements because they point out why the story is worth reporting, justify the narrator's statement about being multilingual, create a sense of satisfaction that the story has been related, and bring the audience back to the present, providing a temporal link between the narrational present and the narrative past. Adult narrators often evaluate their narratives (Labov, 1972) when they highlight the relevance and significance of their stories. Then, the coda brings the reader back to the narrational present, providing a bridge between the past and the present.

For a story to be understandable and relevant to its readers, the audience must be familiar with the genre (Kramsch, 2009). Hungarian children early on become familiar with fairy tales and folk tales, which impacted the participants' choice in which they recited their stories. The genres of fairy tales and folk tales drawing on the Labovian narrative components are culturally recognizable and relatable in Hungary. Furthermore, Lori's detailed narrative establishes her credibility as a narrator and makes her story reportable and noteworthy about the topic of multilingualism (Gordon, 2013, p.127).

5.2.1. Lori's narrative as a folk tale

On the one hand, Lori's story is a complex Labovian narrative. In the Orientation, the characters (Lori and her mother), along with the context and the time (two trips to Italy and a year passing by), are introduced. The Complication includes Lori's (the hero's) plight: her inability to speak English during her first trip to Italy. Then, in the Resolution, Lori becomes a multilingual individual capable of using English successfully a year later.

On the other hand, her story is a traditional folk tale that is often set in a kingdom with a king and his children as princes or princesses. Lori's story is set in the symbolic kingdom of English speaking and teaching in which she has to prove her worthiness and legitimacy as an English speaker. In the Orientation, Lori is introduced as the princess and heiress to the symbolic and metaphorical throne of her English-speaking and English-teaching "queen mother" who has the tangible kingdom of a school as a principal. Her mother is an English teacher as well as a school principal. (This information about Lori's mother was explained at the beginning of the interview.) Lori is the legitimate heir to the kingdom of English (not the school), not only by birth (i.e., by being her mother's daughter) but also by deeds. She follows in her mother's footsteps to become an English teacher when choosing a major at university. Lori speaks highly of her mother in the interview and regards her as a role model of a successful English teacher and educator.

Lori, as an English major, is still an apprentice and lacks the expertise and experience of being a successful English speaker or teacher. For this reason, Lori goes through the plight of not being able to speak the language she has learned during her first visit to Italy, where she should have used English as a lingua franca. In the ELF context, successful communication is more important than flawless language use, which is often expected in an EFL context. Nevertheless, owing to her inability to succeed in English, she has to be "saved" by her mother, the other hero in the story that Lori is trying to live up to. For Lori to become a hero, she needs to

Linguodidáctica.
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

work hard and learn English for a whole year before she can be challenged again. The hero's one-year-long learning period, "quest" or "ordeal" at university is another element of folk tales that the hero must endure and learn from. Hence, a year later, due to her effort and hard work, Lori proved herself as a legitimate English speaker and a worthy "heir to the throne of English speaking/teaching". This time, she needed no saving from her mother, as she could accomplish her mission by using English successfully to buy some dried tomatoes for her mother. Apart from becoming a legitimate English speaker, she could fulfill the child's dream and aspiration to be like her mother (Lacan, 1977) while becoming multilingual following her one-year-long "quest" at university.

5.2.2. A feminist reading of Lori's narrative

Lori's use of English, as well as the narrative genre in which her story is related, is subjective and unconventional. Her story is a female narrative because the heroes of her story, unlike traditional stories featuring male characters as heroes, are, in fact, heroines, which gives her narrative a feminist reading. Even if there are heroines in traditional stories, they are usually under the protection of men as daughters of a king or an old man or later married to a prince or a male hero, so the merits and efforts of female characters are typically offset by the presence of male characters. Depicting female characters and giving voice to the needs and desires of women, which is typical of feminist literature, is an attempt to break away from tradition and subvert the conventions of the existing social order (Butler, 1997; Kramsch, 2009). Lori's mother is in a leadership position in her school and is already a successful English speaker who can get things done in the school as a leader as well as an English speaker. Lori's narrative is, therefore, not characterized by male domination and patriarchy because her mother is not a "damsel in distress" to be saved by a male hero. Instead, her mother is an independent woman who is in charge of things (school affairs), people (teachers, students, school employees), and languages (being able to switch between languages as needed). Lori looks up to her mother and follows in her footsteps. In a traditional version of Lori's story, the older hero would be a male character, usually an old man or an old king, whose son goes on a quest to prove his worthiness to his father as an heir to the kingdom. In Lori's story, the gender roles are reversed.

Lacan (1977) proposed that our language is the language of the Other, along with the consciousness that comes with it. In Lacan's understanding, to become a subject, one must leave the pre-verbal realm of the mother and enter the world of the father, which is the realm of the social and the cultural. The unfulfilled desire to identify with the mother or the father may be seen in learners' infatuation with the language (Kramsch, 2009, p. 95). Similarly, to her female narrative in which Lori subverted tradition and convention concerning heroes and heroines, she entered the realm of the father, which was the social/cultural/linguistic world of English that happened to be her mother's realm, which again goes against the conventional socialization of the Lacanian world. Her desired identification with the mother as well as her separation from the mother took place through English.

5.2.3. A semiotic interpretation of Lori's narrative

According to semiotic theory, Lori capitalized on the indexical capacity of signs, as she associated buying dried tomatoes with becoming multilingual and not answering the waiter's

Linguodidáctica.
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

question with being not multilingual (Kramsch, 2009). Kristeva (1986) put forth that the subject emerges at the intersection of two worlds: the world of the semiotic, which is a non-verbal realm that is capable of signifying things in the world without words, and the world of words, which signifies things in the world with words. The subject born out of these two worlds is perpetually positioning itself between the two worlds, making signification and the creation of the subject thus that of identity a never-ending and ongoing process. The subject constantly reflects on themselves and others, and this ongoing process is what Kramsch (2009) dubs a subjectivity-in-process.

Kristeva's realm of the semiotic is Kramsch's realm of the symbolic addressing the subjective and affective responses given to symbolic forms (i.e., language use) as well as the creative and performative use of the language (Kramsch, 2009, p. 97). Lori employed English during her second visit to Italy in a creative and performative manner (Austin, 1962), since by buying dried tomatoes, which involved saying the appropriate words to the appropriate person using appropriate English under the appropriate social conditions, she became a legitimate English speaker (Bourdieu, 1997) and she became multilingual (Kramsch, 2009).

5.3. SLA as a complex, dynamic system

All the testimonies in the study point out how SLA, including the experience of multilingualism, is a complex, dynamic system (Fekete, 2023, 2024; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). The narratives of Donna, Amanda, and Lori are examples of the butterfly effect in SLA. They all experienced short interactions with other L2 speakers, resulting in communicative success and problem-solving. However, these seemingly mundane conversations had great consequences for them. They realized they were multilingual and owners of the language, generating positive emotions in them about themselves as well as a memorable situation that could motivate them in the long run. Therefore, the smallness of the experience was incommensurate with the magnitude of the outcomes. In addition, no one could predict which L2 interactions in their many years of SLA could generate this magnitude of emotional, cognitive, and linguistic outcomes. Another disproportionate relationship between stimulus and outcome is Lori's one-year-long learning only to complete the very brief interaction of buying tomatoes in Italy. She pointed out that she needed to improve her English skills for a whole year to succeed in Italy a year later.

CDST proposes that the subsets within the system are constantly interacting with one another as well as the environment (Fekete, 2023, 2024). The narratives in the study shed light on the incessant interactions between learners' individual differences, such as their motivation, anxiety, emotions, cognitions, identities, and the environment, including interactions, learning materials, exams, activities, and tasks. The interactions described in the narratives interacted with and thus significantly impacted the participants' cognitions, emotions, motivation, confidence, and identities.

In the same vein, SLA is greatly influenced by the context of learning (Fekete, 2024). An important pattern emerged in the data. Using EFL in the classroom did not result in an experience of multilingualism for many learners, while using ELF in interactions outside the classroom generated a realization of being multilingual in many participants. Consequently, the context of English use impacted learners' experience of success, ownership, and multilingualism.

Linguodidáctica.
https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

6. Conclusion

All three learner narratives on multilingualism were complex Labovian (1972) narratives. The genre in which the longest and most comprehensive story (Lori's story) was told functioned as a folk story, making the story culturally understandable and relatable to readers. The plight of a struggling hero on a quest to overcome challenges and achieve success is a typical folk tale (or fairy tale) storyline. The evaluation and coda were key components of the three narratives, casting light on how the storyteller or the audience evaluated the storyteller's L2 performance and how the narrational present and the narrative past were bridged.

Regarding the context and the situation in which the participants realized they were multilingual, meaningful and authentic interactions with other L2 speakers in ELF or EFL contexts were found to be cornerstones of the participants' multilingualism, resulting in a feeling of ownership of the L2. Students using ELF considered themselves multilingual and associated their L2 with what they could do successfully via the language. By contrast, students reporting EFL use did not regard themselves as multilingual because they fell short of the native speaker's norm.

The results corroborated that narrative analysis is a great tool for understanding the subtle and idiosyncratic processes of SLA as well as learners' cognitive, psychological, emotional, and identity responses to SLA. There is no other way for a person to talk about their lives and lived experiences, including learning, than in the form of reported or internal narratives.

The experiences recited by the participants shed light on how SLA can be made sense of as a complex, dynamic system. The experience of multilingualism is highly impacted by the environment, including interactants and various interactional contexts. Furthermore, SLA was found to be a chaotic process where short and mundane interactions could have long-term and intense consequences while arduously long processes can have short or minor outcomes. In SLA, stimulus and outcome are often disproportionate. The narratives also pointed out how learners' psychological, cognitive, emotional, and identity responses interact with language learning and the environment.

Finally, the multidisciplinary stance of the study revealed subtle details that everyday learner narratives offer, providing more complex and nuanced insights into learners' psychology and learning experiences. The multi-disciplinary approach cast light on the many layers of learner narratives, which pointed out how unconscious meaning-making processes create narrative layers and "hidden" messages that are not easily discovered using a surface-level interpretation of the literal meaning of words.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW RECORDING GUIDE

STRUCTURED SPEAKING TASK (STRUCTURED INTERVIEW) QUESTIONS

Dear Students,

For this course assignment, I kindly ask you to answer the following questions in speaking. Please audio record your answers using a recording device of your choice. Remember there is no wrong answer. I am very interested in learning more about you and your language learning history, and this is a great opportunity for me to do so given the large number of students in class. Once you have recorded your answers, please send the recording to me via email. You will receive detailed feedback on your language use in this task and a score based on the assessment scales used in the speaking component of the C1-level proficiency exam that you will take next semester. The data you will provide will be used for research purposes anonymously, so your answers will be treated confidentially. Thank you!

I look forward to hearing your answers.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where does your first/surname come from?
2. What languages are used in the family besides Hungarian?
3. What languages do your parents speak and at what level?
4. What languages do you speak and at what level?
5. At what age did you start learning these language?
6. For how many years have you learnt these languages and where? (bilingual school, class specialized in a foreign language, subjects taught in a foreign language)
7. Have you ever been taught by a native speaker in any foreign language? Where was he/she from?
8. What does it mean to you to be a multilingual person?
9. In your opinion, in what ways are you multilingual?
10. How are you multicultural?
11. What stages do you remember in the process of becoming a multilingual person?

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https://doi.org/10.33776/EUHU/linguodidactica.v6.8497

12. Please tell me about the steps and events of becoming multilingual. When did you realize you were multilingual? Please recall the situation and what it meant to you then (e. g. when doing something, speaking to somebody, or succeeding in something important etc.).
13. In what ways have you grown as a multilingual person over the years? What stages can you recall in your own development?
14. Where would you like to get in English in the future?

Appendix B

FEEDBACK GIVEN TO STUDENTS ON THEIR LANGUAGE USE IN THE STRUCTURED SPEAKING TASK

Scales were adopted from the oral component of the C1 level English Proficiency Exam developed and used at the Institute of English Studies, University of Pécs.

Scores

Total Score	Communicative -effectiveness	Fluency	Vocabulary resource	Structures	Pronunciation and intonation
25	5	5	5	5	5

Description of scales

Score	Communicative effectiveness	Fluency	Vocabulary resource	Structures	Pronunciation and intonation
5	Communication fully effective / coherent speech / reflects on arguments effectively	Fully fluent / no unnatural hesitations or pauses	Wide range of vocabulary / effectively no inaccurate usage	Wide range of structures / effectively no inaccuracies	Little if any foreign accent / hardly any errors of pronunciation or intonation
4					
3	Communication partly effective / largely coherent speech /reflects on arguments largely effectively	Partly fluent / some unnatural hesitations or pauses	Good range of vocabulary / occasional inaccurate usage	Good range of structures / occasional inaccuracies	Noticeable foreign accent / occasional errors of pronunciation and intonation
2					
1	Communication often breaks down / largely incoherent speech / reflects on arguments largely ineffectively	Fluency lacking / frequent long, unnatural hesitations or pauses	Narrow range of vocabulary / frequent inaccurate usage	Narrow range of structures / frequent inaccuracies	Heavily accented speech / listener sometimes has difficulty understanding what is said
0	Not enough to evaluate				

Students were also given written feedback in the form of direct error correction and comments on the strengths and weaknesses of their oral performance in the structured speaking task. Furthermore, students were also given personalized advice regarding how to improve their oral proficiency in the future.

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