Transportable Identities in Conversational Interaction among Batna 2 University Students of English

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Abstract
The relationship between language and identity was an issue of huge debate over the last few years. It is observed, mainly in educational institutions, that the interrelation between identity and language does exist in various conversational interactions to portray modes of thinking and venues of interacting with knowledge. This issue has gained momentum among researchers and experts. This paper endeavors to shed light on the feasibility of transportable identities that engage and motivate learners of English. It aims to showcase how transportable identities can generate genuine discourse in classroom settings. The current study might enrich the existing literature, especially in the Algerian context, knowing that transportable identities were not addressed before in Algeria. The data gathered will provide empirical evidence of the viable impact of transportable identities within conversational interaction. Hence, this study is a reasonable attempt to improve the quality of both English as a Foreign Language learning and teaching. To equate with research objectives, an exploratory study was conducted to address the following research question: “To what extent can English as a Foreign Language conversational interaction, supported by transportable identities, generate authentic classroom discourse and, by extension, enhance learning?” Research findings obtained confirmed that conversational interaction that engages learners’ transportable identities engendered genuine discourses and impacted their proficiency positively.

Keywords: Authentic classroom discourse, Batna 2 University, English as a foreign language, English as a foreign language learning, Conversational Interaction, Transportable Identities

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Introduction

The relationship between language and identity remains an issue that still generates a controversial debate among practitioners. A pivotal element linking language with identity is discourse. It is perceived as a means via which words best portray values, norms, ways of individuals’ thinking, and venues of interacting with knowledge. In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, the interplay between language and identity reflects the nature and effects of interactions between learners and learning contexts. Hence, the notion of Conversational Interaction (CI) that generates genuine discourses is relevant to the discussion about the importance of identity in EFL learning.

One of the focal issues that gained momentum over the last few decades within the EFL context is conversational interaction. The assumption held here stems from contextualizing EFL learning using a broader sociocultural perspective of language teaching and learning (Brooks & Donato, 1994; Donato & Lantolf, 1991; Ellis, 1990; Ellis, 1999; Gass & Varonis, 1994; Hall & Walsh, 2002). Learners are perceived as active collaborators of the communicative act, where they construct their understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Educational Broadcasting Corporation, 2004). It has been claimed by Emerson (2015) that we may deduce in great measure about the nation's character from its language, which functions as a kind of monument to which each forced person for many centuries has added a stone. Thence, the poetics of language and discourse is the blood of the soul into which thoughts run and out of which they grow.

Consequently, this paper endeavors to highlight on the feasibility of transportable identities in institutional contexts such as EFL classrooms, where transportable identities are assumed to bridge the worlds inside and outside the classroom, and extend beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom and those of teacher-student roles and relationships (Murray, Gao, & Lamb, 2011; Ushioda, 2011). Thus, this research paper looks at classroom conversational interaction as a means of engaging, constructing, and negotiating identities.

According to research practice and experience, there is a difference between speaking, which refers to the mere sending and receiving of a given message, and communicating which implies this social act that engages two or more interlocutors in a process of purposeful mutual exchange of ideas, feelings, and thoughts. To engage in meaningful comprehensible communications using the target language, learners need to master means of conversational interaction. However, what has been observed in the EFL context at the department of English at Batna 2 University is entirely the opposite. EFL learners do not showcase a good command of the target language despite a great deal of exposure to the target input. Again, little attention was paid to how learning could result from language use. Therefore, learners in an EFL environment face a real impediment to achieve communicative competence. Henceforth, the current study attempts to investigate the liability of the concordance between language, identity, and conversational interaction that might engender an appropriate intelligible communication using English.

Genuinely, this study aims to bring about evidence of the impact of Conversational Interaction on learning English. This paper’s core purpose is to investigate how EFL learners can make use of their transportable identities in the EFL context in a way that facilitates the mastery of the target language.

This research paper addresses two overarching research queries:

1. How discourse and language can be a reflection of one’s culture and identity?
2. To what extent can EFL conversational interaction, supported by transportable identities, generate authentic classroom discourse and, by extension, enhance learning?
The current paper is structured as follows: the introduction comprises the statement of the problem, the research objectives, and the research questions. The second section is devoted to the literature review wherein a definition of the critical concepts related to transportable identities, conversational interaction, and authentic classroom discourse have been highlighted. The third part focuses on the research methodology design. The fourth part attempts to present the core results obtained with the discussion. The paper ends with the most prominent recommendations and conclusion.

**Literature Review**

**Defining Key Concepts**

Key concepts related to the use of language within interactive contexts and communicative events. In the following treatise, there is an attempt to clarify what is meant by discourse, situational and transportable identities.

*Discourse*

Cook (1989) defined discourse as “Stretches of language perceived to be meaningful, unified, and purposive” (p.156). Starting out from a narrow definition of discourse, one could describe this discipline as Scollon and Scollon (1995) have done: “Study of grammatical and other relationships between sentences” (p.95). Discourse is defined by Crystal (1992) as “a continuous stretch of especially spoken language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit, such as a sermon, argument, joke or narrative” (p. 25).

*Discourse, Situational, and Transportable Identities*

Discourse, situational and transportable identities are concepts first used by Zimmerman (1998) as a categorization of *identity in talk*. They refer to:

1/ Situated identities, which are explicitly conferred by the context of communication, such as doctor/patient identities in the context of health clinic or teacher/student identities in the context of the classroom;

2/ Discourse identities, as participants orient themselves to particular discourse roles in the unfolding organization of the interaction (e.g. initiator, listener, and questioner);

3/ Transportable identities are latent or implicit, but can be invoked during the interaction, such as when a teacher alludes to her identity as a mother or as a keen gardener during a language lesson. (Richards, 2006; Ushioda, 2011), cited in Pinner (2015, p.1)

According to Zimmerman (1998), discourse identities are conceived when participants engage in multiple sequentially organized communicative tasks like “current speaker, listener, storyteller, study recipient, questioner, answerer, repair initiator” (p.90). For situated identities, he contends that they are concurrent within specific situations; whereas, transportable identities “travel with individuals across situations and are potentially relevant in and for any situation, and in and for any spate of interaction” (p.90).

*Conversational Interaction*

For many years, conversational interaction is considered to be a vital variable for the learning process. It is viewed and conceptualized to refer to any interactional practices that include...
“routines and exchanges that involve repair and subsequent meaning negotiations” (Guerza, 2017, p. 92).

Towards Understanding EFL Conversational Interaction/Discourse and Transportable Identities

To understand the contribution of classroom conversational interaction to language development, there should be a need to search the effectiveness of the different teaching approaches, classroom dynamics, as well as the relationship between the teacher and the learner, and how far their roles would impact the quality of the language produced in the EFL context. It has been conceived through the current project that what contributes to a meaningful conversational interaction that yields a good command of the target language is the one that is grounded in a way that engages all participants in the communicative acts, and the one that encourages purposeful communication. Within this respect, EFL communicative ability, discourse, or conversation entails two or more interlocutors engaged in an active process of sending and receiving comprehensible and meaningful messages. The two agents make use of their knowledge of the world and strategies necessary to apply language proficiency to contextualized situations. This capacity helps learners to use language to fulfill either social or personal purposes within an interactive context. Besides, it is the knowledge, the ability to use it, and the ability to create that knowledge for communicative purposes. Consequently, it is the capability of the learner to exchange, create and use the acquired and, or innate knowledge. In reverence to this, Ushioda (2011) contended that:

We as teachers invoke and orient to students’ transportable identities in the classroom and engage with them as ‘people’ rather than as simply ‘language learners’; to the extent that we encourage and create opportunities for them to ‘speak as themselves’ and engage and express their own preferred meanings, interests and identities through the medium of the target language; the more likely that students will feel involved and motivated to communicate and thus to engage themselves in the process of learning and using the target language. (p.17)

From this stance and adding to that, it has been claimed by Februansyah & Aeni (2019) that “identity and motivation are interconnected constructs […] when teachers were able to understand their students’ transportable identities, their rapport was better” (p.110). Furthermore, Taylor (2021) in a different context contended that transportable identities may have a positive and valuable impact in teacher-student classroom interaction. Though the studies reported in this account all emphasize the importance of transportable identities in creating supportive conditions for learning, those studies are carried out in contexts different from the Algerian one. Henceforth, this study, and because of the absence of empirical research in the Algerian field and where no study to date has been found on this topic, it attempts to consider the issue of transportable of identities in Algeria.

Method

Researching conversational interaction requires careful consideration of both data collection and analytical procedures. To address the after-sought research queries, the current project adopts a mixed-method approach for data collection and analysis. Both classroom observation and focused group interviews were used wherein Van Lier’s (2008) Interactional Scheme, Walsh’s (2006) Self Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT) Framework, and Schegloff and Sacks’s (1973) were deployed for the analysis of data. In classroom observation, classroom conversational interaction has been
recorded and analyzed according to Van Lier’s scheme. To interpret the meanings and purposes of EFL learners' actions, interactions, their use of transportable identities, and by extension learning, the data analysis primarily takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis at most playing a minor part. With respect to the use of the focused group interviews, it permitted the researcher to get in-depth data concerning students’ personal identities, and try to understand how the latter would impact the way they interact in the classroom and, more importantly, they learn. The mixed-method approach is deemed beneficial for the current study as it enables the researcher to corroborate between different data sets. The mixed-methods approach was conceived appropriate for this study because it captures the essence of conversational interaction and examines its subtle and varied intricacies since it allows us to recognize, emphasize, and interpret the type of interaction occurring in the EFL context. It scrutinizes conversational interaction from both the teachers’ and students’ perspectives. Henceforth, classroom observation and focused group interviews would fit the research objectives, and using multivariate models would enable us to reach valid and reliable results.

**Participants**
During one specific semester course that lasted eight weeks, a sample of thirty-five (35) undergraduate students of English at the English department at Batna 2 University randomly selected, with a mean age of 23, were exposed to intensive instructed sessions. The selected sample included the researcher’s enrolled students in 2014.

**Research Instruments and Procedures**
Data were collected through classroom observation and focused group interviews. Data are primarily analyzed using Walsh’s (2006) Self Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT) Framework, Schegloff and Sacks’s (1973) Conversational Analysis, and Van Lier’s (2008) Interactional Scheme. Classroom observation is one of the research methods that were used to gather important information on conversational engagement in EFL classrooms. The usefulness of classroom observation has been recognized for its capacity to record in-depth information about the discourse, activities, interaction styles, instruction, and events occurring in the EFL classroom. Additionally, it is possible to record more significant contextual characteristics through classroom observation (Mackey and Gass, 2005). Participant observation has been employed in this study to collect data. Walsh's (2011) SETT Framework and Van Lier's (2008) Interactional Analysis Schemes have been used to code classroom interaction. To substantiate teachers' and students' opinions collected through focus group interviews and participant classroom observation has been carried out. For analysis, the checklists and observational notes were compiled.

To consider the various complexities of conversational engagement in EFL classrooms, the SETT framework has been implemented. The aim through utilizing this framework was to evaluate the key components of classroom discourse, including the management of communication patterns, elicitation tactics, repair strategies, and speech modification for learners. It was also intended to promote teacher development through classroom interaction. This approach was created to reflect on student-teacher interaction as a strategy to enhance teaching and learning (Walsh, 2011). The categories provided by the SETT framework allow us to take a closer look at our own professional growth as teachers and how we may improve student engagement in classroom conversational interaction.
The study also sought to determine the extent to which the interaction that involved students' personal meanings and identities could lead to learning, and to investigate what promotes or inhibits genuine interaction in the classroom using data from focus group interviews with students. The focus group interviews were effective tools to engage learners in selecting the learning materials and the teaching techniques. The focus group interviews were deployed to reveal the extent to which EFL learners face a significant challenge when communicating in English because, according to their own experiences and assertions, they do not have enough opportunities to practice the target language. This is more closely related to the learners' learning styles and even the various teaching techniques used, as well as their own lack of effort. Henceforth, the focus group interviews were thought more appropriate. Focused group interviews are a suitable data collection technique for this study because they mainly capture students’ attitudes, opinions, and experiences. They facilitate the discussion with students, and they engage them to speak as themselves, which is the core of this study.

The main elements of the research design are summarized in the following chart:

Figure 1. Research design framework

Results
Results obtained are of two categories: classroom observation findings and focused group interviews. In the first category, two illustrative classroom conversational interaction excerpts are displayed to showcase how classroom conversational interaction encouraged by transportable identities engages EFL learners in different communicative exchanges.
Classroom Observation

Excerpt One:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>T: What if you got lost in a walk in the woods, and you can’t see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>anything?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>S15: I will pray God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>T: it’s dark and you can’t see anything!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>S11: I will stay in my place because I know that the morning is coming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>T: you think that the morning is coming? Okay?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>S6: I will breath (mistake in pronunciation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>T: you will Breath (correcting the mistake).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>T: Good. YES who else? Others? Who wants to speak?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>S13: For me I will wait the light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>T: Sure the light is coming sooner or later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>S2: I ask God for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>T: Okay you ask God for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ss: [inaudible]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>T: you can even think of praying? UHH?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 16 | S2: Maybe yes, and uh I will take time to wait for help OOH!

Figure 2. Except One of the Classroom Observation (Adopted from Guerza, 2017, pp. 640-641)

Applying Walsh’s (2006) SETT Framework, Schegloff and Sacks’s (1973) Conversational Analysis, and Van Lier’s (2008) Interactional Analytical Scheme enabled us to confirm that conversational interaction enhanced by transportable identities procured pedagogical practices that encourage students to develop and express their personal identities, and to “speak as themselves” through enhancing autonomous and agent learning. What they learned has become part of who they are. Engaging students’ personal identities and experiences, which stimulate a much higher personal involvement, effort, and investment, are vividly demonstrated through classroom interaction displayed above.

Excerpt Two:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brilliant: I would like to talk about the culture of food in Algeria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Especially here, in Algeria, we don’t care a lot about diet. You know we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>talk a lot about flavor, meat. What is special about the Algerian Cuisine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>is that there is a lot of hybrid uhh or carbohydrates oil. There is a big</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>percentage of carbohydrates why? Because uhh a lot of food like this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>there is a lot of oil. Also, the use of a lot of spices like beans especially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Thniat El abed in my home town or in Algeria. Yeah! It’s all our country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I mean all in all this is what I think of food in Algeria. They use a lot of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>oil [inaudible] a lot of spices. Also, we have like our food to be chilly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>like uhh Mahjouba, Doubara uhh this is we like a little bit chilly. I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transportable Identities in Conversational Interaction

| 11 | mean this is uhh! |
| 12 | T: What distinguishes Algerian traditional cuisine from international dishes? |
| 14 | Brilliant: What I can say about food in Algeria? |
| 15 | T: Like features especially the Chaoui “Berber” ingredients. |
| 16 | Brilliant: Like the Chaouia ingredients? |
| 17 | T: Ingredients! |
| 18 | Brilliant: Like the Chaouia ingredients cause a lot of problems in our health, but it’s gonna uhh |
| 20 | T: How? |
| 21 | Brilliant: Yeah! It causes a lot of problems, but we really don’t care about the health of the prominent food we are preparing. The food they eat; |
| 23 | They don’t care about health [inaudible] especially Algerians it’s obvious. |
| 25 | T: In Algeria? |
| 26 | Brilliant: we Algerians especially, in Algeria yes! We concentrate a lot on flavor, a lot. |
| 28 | T: Yeah! Good! Good! |
| 29 | Brilliant: You welcome! |

**Figure 3.** Excerpt Two of the Classroom Observation. Source: (Adopted from Guerza, 2017, p. 666)

The former findings support the assumption that for enhancing communicative skills in the EFL classroom, it is a prerequisite to strive for a positive, pleasant atmosphere where every student can feel engaged, relaxed, and motivated to communicate and interact orally. Also, results displayed in excerpt two of classroom interaction demonstrate that the more students are engaged to express themselves and share their experiences, the more likely they can communicate and interact.

To support these findings and assess the feasibility of conversational interaction enhanced by transportable identities, EFL students are asked to share their perceptions and attitudes concerning the role of conversational interaction as a working factor in enhancing their communicative abilities. The following interview data set is an illustration.

**Focused Group Interview Excerpts**

In this section, separate interview excerpts were selected as an example (Guerza, 2017, pp. 877-878, 883). They are set as follows:

Teacher: How important is conversational interaction for you to master English rules?

Student One: I think uhh it’s very important very crucial. How else can I promote my speaking skills without conversational interaction.

Student Two: Of course, it is really important I think that the best way to learn any language is by practicing it orally besides reading and writing.
Student Three: Very important ummm very uhh very important umm I think we learn uncountedly grammatical rules by speaking and grasping the mistakes and the rules.

Student Eight: Conversation for me is the really crucial thing so if you uhhh and also here we are going to talk about the person himself. So the person if he uhh when he is discussing and interacting if accepts the new knowledge that is of good one to discuss with somebody who is just very uuhh hard-headed and uhh he just wanted to convince you and convince about to convey his ideas giving you no opportunity to express yourself I don’t think It’s going to work. One if he is open to discuss or given the fact given for example that we have good uhh good people or two for example good people discussing for me uhh it is going to be so useful in the way that in which we are exchanging ideas first and the way we are exchanging ideas it’s certainly going to depend upon which uhh ground we are thinking if we are thinking this that is the target language that would be so much better if you are thinking in their mother languages language and then you later on translate your point the greater is the problem. You aren’t going to express themselves respectively more than going to be able to speak with uuhhh the target language in it correct forms and ways.

Based on data obtained from learners’ interviews, the prominent techniques deployed to maximize learners’ learning potential are achieved through meaningful conversational interaction that meets students’ aspirations and needs, and which exposes their personal experiences. It has been argued that EFL conversational interaction is a means via which opportunities for participation and authenticity are provided. To sum up, these significant findings do indicate that learners’ agency is encouraged through EFL conversational interaction. It has been evidenced that EFL conversational interaction may be a liable criterion for creating “real world authenticity” wherein it allows for purposeful participation and engagement.

Discussion
To highlight the liability of transportable identities, the current account attempts to answer the research queries raised beforehand. The previous few decades have seen increasing importance of EFL learning in the Algerian environment. Algerian higher education curricula for teaching English could be described as teacher-led, with the instructor dominating most of the talk in EFL classrooms. As showcased earlier, the goal of this study is to suggest a novel teaching strategy based on students' interests and requirements while taking into account contextual and psychological elements, and especially the significance of meaningful conversational interaction enhanced by students' genuine discourse. Considering the raised query aiming at highlighting and finding about the extent to which English in conversational interaction, supported by transportable identities, could engender genuine discourse, and by extension, impact their proficiency positively, results indicate that, indeed EFL conversational interaction generates genuine classroom discourse, and engaged students to speak as themselves, and respectively developed their learning. It has been found that conversational interaction offered opportunities for meaningful communication and encouraged students to participate, wherein their discourses were a mere reflection of their culture and identity. Classroom observation revealed that EFL conversational interaction encouraged active learner initiative and created a dynamic context through transportable identities which, by extension, contributed to enhancing their proficiency level. The findings brought to evidence that EFL conversational interaction enhanced by transportable identities constructed learning instead of obstructing it. These findings were supported by the claims of Walsh (2002). In reverence with Ushioda’s (2011) claims, this study revealed that EFL conversational interaction engendered as well as prompted meaningful and authentic discourse wherein students were speaking as
themselves instead of using the language mechanically. In summary, this study confirmed that EFL conversational interaction, advanced by students’ transportable identities engaged them in generating palpable classroom discourse and positively impacted their learning.

Recommendations
The recommendations set in favor of the current study are summarized as follows:
1. Create a healthy, positive, relaxing environment where all learners feel at ease.
2. Develop a good rapport with learners.
3. Create interesting tasks that meet learners’ needs.
4. Familiarize learners with authentic target language culture.
5. Promote learner autonomy.
6. Allow students to participate in everything and every task.

From above, this will not be feasible unless the following practices are implemented:
- Enhance EFL practices by encouraging active learner initiative and creating a dynamic context through meaningful conversational interaction;
- EFL conversational interaction should be grounded in a way that creates opportunities for EFL students’ participation and engagement to invest their personal identities and experiences in classroom discourse; and
- Prompt EFL learners to generate an authentic, meaningful discourse whereby they “speak as themselves”.

Conclusion
To conclude, this study has shown how teaching pedagogies could be transformed to make them conducive to learning. It has proved that meaningful conversational interaction, liable to enhance positive learning outcomes, is the one that should be fostered through motivation, creating ample opportunities and spaces for practice, collaborative conversations, promoting conditions for socializing, and establishing a relaxed atmosphere based on building trust and mutual rapport. Teachers and practitioners are required to bear in mind that, in every interaction they undertake, they might succeed and lift people up, or fail and hold them down. Finally, this study could be perceived as a practical initiation to enhance the quality of EFL learning and teaching at the university level.

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References
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**Appendices**

**Appendix A**

**Students’ Interviews Questions (Adopted Guerza, 2017, p. 876)**

1. How important is conversational interaction for you to master English rules?
2. How important is conversational interaction for promoting your speaking skill?