Message from the guest editor

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The concept of imagined communities, originally put forth by Benedict Anderson in 1983, has had its links to language and identity highlighted from its first conceptualization. A political scientist and historian, Anderson's central concern was chronicling how nationalism originated and spread. His *imagined communities* concept explained how citizens of nations are able to conceptualize their own national communities, which Anderson (1991: 6)[1] argues can only be described as imaginary "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion". He credits print-capitalism for facilitating the creation of imagined national communities due to the profit motive for printers, who chose to print works in particular dialects since printing multiple versions in various language varieties would not have been at all economically feasible. This turbo-charged the language standardization process, with the chosen dialects emerging as the standard language varieties of power and education. Whereas different regional dialects had previously played a substantial role in preventing individuals from imagining any sort of shared identity with their fellow citizens in other regions, the existence of a common standardized language variety with which printed works (especially newspapers) addressed a national audience made a shared identity with those in other regions of a country far more imaginable.

Application of the imagined communities concept to the world of applied linguistics came largely by way of Etienne Wenger's (1998) expansions on the influential theory of situated learning that he and Jean Lave had previously put forth (Lave & Wenger, 1991), identifying imagination as a mode of belonging to a community of practice. Wenger's ideas were subsequently embraced by Bonnie Norton (2001) who, with Yasuko Kanno, edited a themed issue of *Journal of Language, Identity, & Education* devoted to examining "how the notion of imagined communities might enhance our understanding of language learning and identity" (Kanno & Norton, 2003: 242). In the articles that comprised Kanno and Norton's themed journal issue, the concept of *imagined communities* extend well beyond Anderson's original conceptualization of the imagining of people and communities that might exist *in the present* to the imagining of social relationships in communities that might exist *in the future* – communities imagined both by individuals themselves (e.g., Norton & Kamal, 2003) and communities imagined *for* individuals *by* others, such as parents (Dagenais, 2003) or teachers and school administrators (Kanno, 2003). Upon reading the articles in this themed journal issue in 2003, I was instantly stuck by the explanatory power of the imagined communities construct for issues related to identity and language learning. Learners' investment (Norton, 2001; Norton Pierce, 1995) in particular imagined communities seemed to me to be a remarkably apt

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[1] Anderson's 1991 work cited here is the revised version of his 1983 work, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism. Anderson (1991) acknowledges that in the period between 1983 and 1991, the world changed a great deal, but rather than subject the work to an extensive overhaul to reflect post-Cold War changes, he chose to keep the original work mostly intact, "as an 'unrestored' period piece" (Anderson, 1991: xii), restricting his revisions to the correction of errors (that he attributes mostly to inaccurate translations) and the addition of two chapters that did not appear in the original 1983 work.

characterization of the forces that were driving language learning for the research participants I was then working with, and when I contemplated my own language learning experiences, I realized that investment in imagined communities had been a key driver for me as well. At the time, I fully expected a barrage of research employing the concept to be forthcoming.

Although not quite the barrage I had predicted, in subsequent years, the imagined communities concept did regularly appear in applied linguistics literature, with works by Kanno, Norton, and others (e.g., Carroll, Mothra, & Price, 2008; Kanno, 2008; King, 2008; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Ryan, 2006) applying the construct in various ways. A take on the imagined community concept that especially resonated with me was the one put forth by Ryan (2006). Proposing that it is a sense of membership in an imagined global community of English users that compels many EFL learners to expend considerable efforts learning the language, Ryan contends that for young people in much of the world today, the English language is increasingly associated not with any particular geographic area or culture, but instead with an international global culture and community – one which, as citizens of the world, they are already legitimate members. I seized upon this imagined global community of English users concept and utilized it to frame discussions of L2 personas (Seilhamer, 2013a) and English ownership (Seilhamer, 2015), as well as to highlight factors preventing many of my former students in Japan from being able to conceptualize themselves as members of such an imagined community (Seilhamer, 2013b). Other scholars (e.g., Sung, 2016; Zheng, 2013) have also found the imagined global community of English users concept relevant in their various research contexts.

In this special issue of *Language, Discourse, & Society*, we seek to contribute further to the growing body of literature highlighting the relevance of imagined communities to the study of language learning and use. The four articles featured here were all submitted in response to a call for contributions that originally elicited papers on the theme of 'Imagined communities and motivation in language learning'. While language learning motivation was indeed featured, in varying degrees, in most of the submissions we received, it was *identity* rather than *motivation* that turned out to be the theme that most strongly connected these papers beyond *language* and *imagined communities*. We have, hence, re-themed this issue as *Language, identity, and imagined communities*, and I believe the four contributed articles that made the cut to be featured here represent a good variety of perspectives on connections between language, identity, and imagined communities.

The first article by Shelley Dawson is perhaps the contribution here that highlights language learning motivation (or more precisely, the more nuanced notion of *investment*) most prominently, foregrounding the very individual nature of imagined communities by showcasing two English language learners in New Zealand – learners who envisioned themselves participating in the future as members of ostensibly the same community. Yet these two learners' individual imaginings of the particular identities necessary to achieve community membership differed, and these differing community conceptualizations substantially impacted their investments. Utilizing interactional data and a discourse analytic approach, Dawson examines how the two learners attempt to cultivate the identities they individually see as valued in their respective imagined communities – identity construction in interaction in which investments are sometimes aligned with the imagined communities of interlocutors and sometimes not.

In the next article, Maloney and De Costa examine how two Japanese-American sisters envision imagined communities and the language-related struggles that they encounter at the

local, translocal, and transnational scales. For these sisters, as Japanese heritage language learners/users in the United States, the relevant imagined communities would be their conceptualizations of the local Japanese community in and around the city where they live and attend university, the translocal Japanese community (including other Japanese heritage language learners) in the U.S. more generally, and the transnational Japanese community beyond U.S. borders, which for them generally consisted of Japanese in Japan. As Kanno and Norton (2003: 243) point out, the communities people imagine do not necessarily "accord well with the realities encountered in their daily lives" and this was indeed the case for the two sisters. Maloney and De Costa, in this case study, chronicle the sisters' identification of areas in which their imagined community conceptualizations at each of the different scales were found to not mesh so well with their lived realities, forcing them to revise their imaginings of these communities.

The issue's third article by Davis, Day, Eichsteller, and Baker also deals with scales. In this case, the focus is on imaged communities at the supra-national scale – specifically the scale of a transnational 'European' imagined community. The authors examine autobiographical narrative data from the Euroidentities[2] project, attempting to identify evidence of 'European' imagined community conceptualizations in the narratives. While data related to languages and language learning was not specifically sought in the narrative interviews, these are, unsurprisingly, reoccurring themes. And in relating stories of transnational experiences in which triumphs and adversities of language learning and use are highlighted, participants reveal orientations to Europe that, the authors conclude, fall somewhat short of a European imagined community.

Finally, our fourth article and sole contribution in French is by Cyril Robelin, who takes us on a historical journey through the various incarnations of the territory of Neutral Moresnet, an area of less than four square kilometers at the borders of Belgium, the Netherlands, and present-day Germany. This tiny territory has officially been a part of Belgium since 1944, but functioned as a quasi-independent state for more than a century[3]. Towards the end of the territory's existence, efforts were afoot to make Neutral Moresnet a truly independent entity – imagined as an Esperanto-speaking state. Robelin examines the discourse of this imagining *vis à vis* vintage and more recent sociological perspectives[4].

As Ryan (2006: 42) points out, "The challenge to articulate the imagined is indeed a daunting one", but since it is not only very concrete here and now experiences, but also hopes and dreams for the future, that affect individuals' identities, affiliations, and investments, the imagined communities concept promises to continue to provide a very fruitful lens with which to view language learning and use, probing the link between identity and desire. The authors of the four articles in this issue have accepted the challenge of articulating the imagined, and it is my hope that others will continue to undertake this daunting challenge in the years to come.

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[2] The Euroidentities project is an EU Framework 7 collaborative endeavour in which the authors of this paper were heavily involved, both in data collection and analysis, particularly for the Wales portion of the project. See http://www.euroidentities.org/

[3] For those unable to read French, but nevertheless desiring more information on the curious phenomenon of Neutral Moresnet, Earle (2012) provides a good overview. Earle, however, only briefly mentions the Esperantist aspect of the Neutral Moresnet story.

[4] This article really served to underscore for us the motivations for certain disciplines typically adopting particular citation conventions. For documenting rather obscure historical references, Chicago style footnotes really do work much better than our house referencing style. This article is, therefore, presented with a fusion of our house style and Chicago citation style.

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