Overview

Used widely in anthropological research, ethnography has been used to better understand social phenomena and particular cultural behaviors in communities. Given that language is a means for understanding people’s experiences and practices (Boas, 1982), linguistic anthropologists like Hymes (1964) have called for an “ethnography of communication”, or a need to investigate how an individual’s communicative forms and competence are inextricably linked to and shaped by wider social contexts. This line of ethnography of communication research has continued to influence SLA scholars who are interested in issues involving how language users are socialized into various communities (e.g., Duff, 2012). Of particular interest to these scholars is examining the everyday lived experiences of learners and teachers. Because of the highly situated nature of ethnographic research, individual difference (ID) SLA researchers are committed to understanding the cultural origins of ID constructs and how these constructs are interpreted by social groups in cultural contexts. More often than not, their goal is not to generalize findings; rather, their intent is to have readers examine how sociocultural and socioeconomic conditions impact language learning and teaching within a given context.

From the outset, we wish to make two key distinctions. First, there is the distinction between a methodology and a method. A methodology (e.g., ethnography), as observed by De Costa et al. (2019), is linked to a theory (e.g., language socialization) and paradigm (e.g., postmodernism). In other words, a methodology is often embedded within a broader discipline (e.g., anthropology) and comprises methods (e.g., observations and interviews) that in essence are data collection tools. We make this distinction to highlight how observations are but one of many tools that can be mobilized when conducting an ID-oriented ethnography. A second, and related, distinction is between an ethnography and ethnographic methods. Such a distinction is vitally important because, increasingly, many SLA researchers adopt ethnographic methods and thus stop short of conducting a “pure” ethnography. It is equally important to note that SLA researchers often combine methodologies. For example, Talmy (2008) combined two methodologies—ethnography and conversation analysis—in his study on immigrant high school students in Hawaii. We make these points to emphasize a positive and encouraging trend in vibrant ID research; that is, the innovative ways in which researchers have continued to execute their work in order to advance the ID research agenda.
Major Tenets of Ethnography

As noted, ethnographers are often not interested in generalizing their research findings because their goal is to develop a deep and broad understanding of the social phenomenon under investigation through prolonged engagement with their research site. Given their commitment to providing a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon in question, ethnographers aim to take an *emic* (i.e., insider) perspective by positioning themselves as best as possible within the communities they are studying. As such, much effort is made to avoid a *priori* categories; that is, categories that are decided ahead of time. That is not to say that ethnographers approach their research sites without any theoretical guidance or potential research questions that may guide their work (De Costa, 2014; Watson Gegeo, 1988). Instead, they attempt to create categories that “the members of the community [under investigation] themselves would use in their observation and analysis” (Wei, 2020, p. 162). These categories “provide an orienting framework for the fieldwork and more often about how to interpret the meaning of a practice or a phenomenon which needs to be proven by the community members’ own interpretations” (p. 157).

As mentioned, ethnography as a methodology is not monolithic. If anything, ID researchers are fortunate to be able to draw on different types of ethnography to expedite their research. These types include (but are not limited to): classroom ethnography (Bloome, 2012), critical ethnography (Talmy, 2013), netnography (Kozinets, 2019), and more. However, when it comes specifically to those investigations involving IDs, much of the research that has been conducted can be classified as classroom ethnography, in which researchers explore how social boundaries are defined and how meanings are constructed in relation to learning, achievement, and social identities. This will be the primary focus of the studies we highlight later on in Section 3 (called ‘Contributions to ID Research’).

Overall Procedure of Ethnography

Given that ethnographers are committed to understanding the specific practices of community members and the significance of these practices to them (e.g., the practices of the students and teacher within a classroom community), a time commitment is needed in order for such work to be effective. Thus, rather than conducting a “blitzkrieg” ethnography (Watson-Gegeo, 1988), where the ethnographer nose-dives into a site and exits a short time later, ethnographers should invest time and effort in gaining access to the site and subsequently establishing trust and rapport with the community members, such as students and teachers in a school. Ethnographers also need to provide a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the field site, something that can only be achieved if the ethnographer spends an extended period of time (at least one academic semester) with participants in order to examine their behavioral patterns across a variety of contexts and social interactions. Such prolonged engagement allows the ethnographer to develop an in-depth understanding of the research context. In the case of a classroom ethnographer, learning about the classroom culture would be the primary focus, and hence particularity—not generalizability—would be the priority. By providing a thick description of the classroom under investigation (i.e., the focal classroom), the ethnographer would therefore expect the readers of their research to be able to compare and contrast the focal classroom and their own respective classrooms in ways that enable some level of insight transferability to take place. In keeping with the need for a thick description, many kinds of data are collected (for details, see 2.2 in this chapter called ‘Achieving Rigor in Ethnography’). Data sets would include (but are not limited to) participant observation, field notes, recordings of in-person and virtual interactions, interviews, artifacts, and descriptive surveys. Additionally, such data sources could be supplemented by think-aloud protocols to ensure data triangulation and saturation.

In light of the central and significant role that ethnographers play in the research process, they ultimately become a pivotal research tool within the larger process. In other words, they often
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cannot be divorced from the procedure, and are thus expected to describe their positionality by “explicitly and systematically account[ing] for” and placing themselves within their “histori-
cal, political, and symbolic context” (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2007, p. 918). This need to place the
ethnographer front and center in the procedure is important because it can assist researchers in
reflecting on their potential impact or influence on the study itself—for instance, to what extent
does a researcher’s continued presence, observations, and/or interactions in the classroom affect the
students’/teacher’s behaviors over time? In turn, how do the relationships formed shape how the
ethnographer analyzes data and subsequently reports the findings? Importantly as well, this practice
is part of a growing emphasis on researcher reflexivity, positioning, and the need to address ethical
concerns within applied linguistics (De Costa et al., 2020).

ID-related Issues and Questions to Which Ethnography Can Be Applied

As noted, ethnographers seek to understand specific cultural practices and their significance to
members of a community. Hence, ethnographers are often drawn to complex social settings that
warrant further investigation, aiming to illuminate certain social phenomena. In this vein, ID
researchers who have adopted ethnography have tended to apply this methodology in an evolving
educational landscape because, as observed by Collins and Muñoz (2016), we increasingly need
to account for the connections between in-school second language (L2) development and out-
of-school development. One primary concern of ID researchers, as stated, has been the sociali-
zation of L2 learners (e.g., immigrant, international, and study-abroad students) as they respond
to new learning environments and engage in new communities of practice with teachers. Thus,
ethnography is well suited to examine IDs that 1) bear a social dimension (e.g., identity, strategies,
motivation, and anxiety), and thus 2) would benefit from longitudinal investigation as opposed to
obtaining snapshots of learning and teaching processes. More often than not, and in the spirit of
innovation alluded to earlier, it is not uncommon for ethnographers to examine IDs in conjunc-
tion with related constructs such as translanguaging (i.e., how learners draw on multiple linguistic
resources to make/communicate meaning), learner and/or teacher identities, strategies, motiva-
tions, anxieties, or how other IDs may change over time (e.g., over the duration of one year) and
space (e.g., as participants move between different educational domains such as grade levels, class-
rooms, and playgrounds).

Advantages of Ethnography

While ID researchers within SLA have most often adopted more quantitatively oriented meth-
ods and tools to explore the effects of IDs on L2 learning—something that is also evidenced
by the makeup of this edited volume—ethnography has been far less utilized. However, for the
purposes of investigating phenomena situated at the intersection of SLA and IDs, ethnographic
approaches hold particular power: because researchers who adopt ethnographic approaches can
maintain extended contact with their participants, this allows for an in-depth understanding of the
individual and the particular nature of the ID in and out of various contexts.

Additionally, because of the dual emphasis in ethnography on learning about the links between
communication and the wider social context in which learners and teachers are embedded, eth-

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Finally, the versatility afforded by ethnography allows researchers to mix and match various methods and methodologies with ethnography. This is especially important because complex social phenomena such as education system-wide anxiety that trickles down into the classroom to impact language learning require a multidimensional methodological tool kit (King & Mackey, 2016) for robust investigation to occur.

**Technical Features**

As explained, ethnography requires researchers to enter into a prolonged engagement with their research site. Equally important, too, is an articulation of the ethnographer’s positionality as one is required to be reflexive about the research process, especially since a range of tools and techniques will be mobilized.

**Tools and Techniques in Ethnography**

In Section 1.2 called ‘Overall Procedure of Ethnography’, we explained that ethnographers utilize multiple data sets as they aspire to provide a thick description of the ID under investigation. Because the list of available tools is quite extensive, we focus on four main tools and techniques in this section: observations, field notes, interviews, and artifacts. Crucially, these tools and techniques can be deployed in both face-to-face and digital settings.

**Observations**

Observations are a staple of ethnographies because the ethnographer is expected to spend long stretches of time in the field, learning about the community and the culture to better understand the nature of a given ID. While it is important to note that not all IDs may be overtly addressed via observations (e.g., metacognition), many IDs can be observed in educational settings (e.g., emotions and strategies). Thus, Curdt-Christiansen (2020) has identified three types of observations available to researchers: highly structured observation, semi-structured observation, and unstructured observation. Correspondingly, a predetermined observation scheme (e.g., the communicative orientation of language teaching [COLT]; Spada & Frohlich, 1995) is employed when conducting highly structured observations. Such a scheme is generally created after extensive time is spent in the field, to the point where the ethnographer can generate clear observation categories. By contrast, someone who is just starting in the field and learning about the community and cultural practices under investigation is more likely to begin with unstructured observations before moving up the structure continuum. The researcher can also elect to adopt any one of these roles: complete participant, participant observer (partial participant), and non-participant observer. To some extent, the role chosen by the researcher will determine the type of observation that is carried out. A classroom ethnographer who decides to be a “complete participant” in a classroom will probably only be able to engage in unstructured observations because they would be involved in classroom activities with the students. Given one’s active participation in the class activities, it is less likely that they would conduct a highly structured observation because of the real-time demands. That said, audio or video recording the activities and analyzing them post-class would enable a more structured observation and the privilege of making the observation asynchronously.

**Field Notes**

Field notes are often made alongside observations even when the participants’ linguistic practices are digitally recorded. This is because not all details may be captured via recordings. An ethnographer observing an activity play out in real time might make a note on classroom dynamics that could potentially be a valuable clue later. For example, within earshot, one might hear different languages
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being used by students in an adjacent group or the teacher in the background, whose voices might not be captured on the recording. This might yield helpful insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Some field notes, observed by Copland (2018), might be subjective, impressionistic, and emotional; nevertheless, they are still open to scrutiny like other data sets, so the impressionistic nature of the notes itself is not a drawback. Depending on the social context, field notes may be written only after the site visit. Taking such a covert approach would invite less attention and thus make researchers less conspicuous, especially if they wish to blend in with participants.

Interviews

Interviews, which are generally conducted after some observations are made of the research site, attempt to verify what was observed and seek additional information from the participants. Like observations, interviews can be structured, semi-structured, open-ended, formal, or informal. Crucially, as noted by Prior (2018), a qualitative interview is not ethnographic if it does not involve essential components of ethnographic fieldwork (e.g., duration, observation, and direct participation) because the aim of such an interview is to understand and represent an emic perspective through observation and carefully developed relationships with members of the community.

Artifacts

In addition to carrying out site observations, making field notes, and conducting interviews, often times artifacts (e.g., classroom assignments, course syllabi, and participants’ journals) are gathered by the ethnographer during fieldwork. These objects often provide support and examples of the specific phenomena under investigation. Descriptive surveys may sometimes be employed also, and they can be an alternative to interviews, if the ethnographer wants to get a general picture of the specific ID or classroom under investigation.

Achieving Rigor in Ethnography

Thus far, we have explained the importance of having multiple data sources to accomplish a thick description of the ID under investigation. Equally crucial, as stated, is the need for ethnographers to enact research reflexivity by articulating their positionality. Because of the fluid and organic nature of ethnographic research, rigor in ethnography can be achieved if the researcher triangulates the multiple data sources and cycles back and forth (Hornberger, 2006) between the findings and the theoretical framework guiding the study. In other words, ethnographers will refine their understanding of the ID under investigation by analyzing the emergent data throughout the data collection process. For example, as mentioned earlier, interview questions would not be designed ahead of time. Instead, they would be created after observations are conducted. This shuttling across and between data sources and the theoretical framework is especially important as the ethnographer codes the data. As noted by Baralt (2012), coding data is interpretive in nature and often seeks to build explanations and generate theory by providing a detailed and complex picture of language learning.

Finally, rigor can also be enhanced if computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) packages such as MAXQDA, NVivo, or others are used. Because multiple data sets are often collected across a longitudinal span of anywhere from one academic semester to several years, employing such software can help ensure that “big” ethnographic data are managed effectively.

Overcoming Challenges and Limitations

While ethnography can illuminate our understanding of how IDs affect language learning and teaching, it is not without its challenges and limitations. As Maloney and Kessler (2019) have
noted, executing an ethnography can be “fraught with logistical, social, and monetary barriers” (p. 51) due to the difficult nature of conducting site-specific, longitudinal research. There is no way, however, of circumventing the demands placed on the researcher’s time, as hastening the investigative process would only result in a compromised study. For this reason, both we and others (e.g., Kozinets, 2019) recommend that ethnographically oriented ID researchers select research sites with which they are already familiar and thus would be able to gain an emic perspective on things. While one does not need to be an insider within the community from the outset, having a relative presence and an understanding of that community can be helpful in the long term as it may reduce the amount of time needed to gain access to participants (e.g., see De Costa, 2014). Trying to gain access to a new community can sometimes take years because trust and rapport need to be established first. Thus, if an ethnographer is interested in exploring a particular ID within a specific community or population, it is recommended that the ethnographer have some knowledge of (either firsthand or secondhand) or experience in (e.g., education and work) dealing with that community. Otherwise, it may prove quite difficult to gain an emic perspective.

Relatedly, being proficient in the language used in the community would be immensely helpful in gaining the aforementioned emic perspective. It might prove difficult to establish trust and rapport with participants if the ID ethnographer could not communicate directly with participants. Using an interpreter could be a barrier if the goal is to study how an ID such as motivation impacts learning because the researcher would be unable to conduct first-person interviews (plus, one runs the risk of having messages lost in translation). To avoid this problem, we recommend developing proficiency in the language of the community being examined prior to beginning one’s study.

Importantly, like any other methodology, ethnographers get better with practice. Skills such as interviewing improve over time and through carrying out personal reflexive practices (Friedman, 2020) and receiving input from relevant parties. To this end, ethnographers might want to hone interview and observation skills by conducting pilot studies with individuals who will not become focal participants in the ethnography. Similarly, novice ethnographers will be able to refine field note-taking skills with practice in ways that will enable juggling field notes with conducting real-time observations.

Contributions to ID Research

In this section, we highlight the use of ethnography in conjunction with four core ID issues that have received the most attention thus far: identity, learner strategies, motivation, and anxiety. As mentioned in earlier sections, in research involving ethnography and IDs, to date, most explorations have been classroom-based ethnographies. As such, within these four core topics above, we discuss how ethnographic approaches have been adopted for exploring each particular ID, along with discussing individual study designs, the authors’ key findings, and more.

Identity

Identity has been described as “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person’ in a given context” (Gee, 2001, p. 99) and also as to how people represent and/or understand themselves in relation to their social worlds (Norton, 2013). Within SLA, identity has been an important construct both in relation to L2 learners and to the teachers themselves, as much research has suggested that individuals’ identities often influence how they subsequently learn, interact, and/or teach in the classroom (e.g., Norton & De Costa, 2018; Poza, 2019). Although ID research typically focuses on those specific identity traits of L2 learners, because of the impact that teacher identity can have on learners’ L2 acquisition and education in general, we felt it pertinent to include a brief discussion of teacher identity research in addition to those studies that explore learner identity.
Teacher Identity

A majority of the research exploring phenomena related to identity to date has centered on L2 teacher identity. There are a number of review pieces that have provided comprehensive overviews of research exploring teacher identity (e.g., Norton & De Costa, 2018) but in particular, there are a handful of studies whose investigations adopt ethnographic approaches and whose foci also have a direct bearing on identity as an ID, as they explore various identity-related issues such as the relationship between teachers’ role identities and their in-classroom practices (e.g., Farrell, 2011).

For instance, Farrell (2011) examined the professional role identities of three, experienced ESL college teachers in Canada. Over the span of two years, Farrell investigated the teachers’ role identities, or the “teachers’ conceptualizations of their self-image and the various roles they play” (p. 55), through L2 observations of teacher group discussion sessions, each of which lasted two hours in length with the teachers reflecting on their perceptions of their various duties, workplace issues, and other topics. Farrell also conducted follow-up interviews with the teachers and other college administration officials to gain additional insights. In the findings, Farrell reported that the teachers adopted 16 different professional role identities (e.g., teacher as a manager and teacher as an “accultrator”), some of which were shared by the teachers while others were not. As Farrell pointed out in his discussion, the combination of ethnographic observations and the longitudinal or “prolonged engagement” (p. 57) of the study enabled an in-depth look into the multiple identities of the focal teachers, many of which took time to surface. Additionally, the observations provided windows into how those multiple identities subsequently shaped the teachers’ L2 pedagogical practices in the classroom.

Learner Identity

As discussed, much literature in L2 research involving issues of identity has centered on teacher identity. Despite much focus being on that of the teacher, there have been a number of studies that have focused on issues related to L2 learner identity, including various topics such as social class (e.g., Dong, 2018) and translanguaging and negotiation (e.g., Sayer, 2013), both of which are intimately connected to how individuals perceive and project themselves in relation to their peers and social worlds.

In Dong (2018), the researcher explored the identity construction and development of multiple migrant children in China who were relocated to urban areas for their education. Over the course of one year, Dong observed the children during their various classes, and she also engaged in discussions with their school teachers and parents while collecting other documents, including school-related artifacts and biographical data from questionnaires. Dong noted that not only did the migrant children claim multiple identities but also that those identities often needed legitimizing by other students and teachers in the school. Despite this apparent need, many of the school’s teachers were unaware of institutional and social biases against the migrant children, leading Dong to suggest that “various players are involved in and may have an impact on the identity establishment of these children” (p. 347). Thus, in order for those L2 learners with stigmatized social classes to succeed, Dong suggested that teachers need to be conscious that such stigmas exist, and they also need to play an active role in learners’ identity-building processes.

In a different context, a study by Sayer (2013) examined the perspectives and practices of both young students and their teachers, this time in a second-grade classroom in a Mexican American community in Texas. In particular, Sayer explored how the bilingual students and teachers engaged in translanguaging with their home language, “TexMex”, and how the language was used for L2 learning and identity performance. For two years, Sayer collected data that included classroom observations, field notes, and various interviews. Through these data, Sayer observed that both the students and the teachers often moved between different varieties of Spanish and English to engage
in learning and also to position themselves in relation to their identities as bilingual Latinos. Sayer concluded that the use of translanguaging was thus important for L2 acquisition purposes and for performing and maintaining students’ identities.

As with the study on L2 teacher identity by Farrell (2011), these studies described here involving learner identities are longitudinal in their approach. Additionally, these studies frequently involve the triangulation of multiple data sources, with the primary source being that of observations (typically, those that are classroom-based).

**Learner Strategies**

Another critical ID area in which ethnography has been adopted is for investigations involving learner strategies. Here, we highlight three focal studies on learner strategies, including ethnographic-inspired studies that examine various strategies in the areas of speaking, translanguaging, writing, and literacy (e.g., Bueno, 2006; Canagarajah, 2011; Huss, 1995).

In an exploratory study, Bueno (2006) examined the learning experiences and communicative strategies of four, intermediate L2 Spanish students in a university Spanish-composition-and-speaking course. Particularly, Bueno was interested in how new technological additions to the curriculum affected students’ interactions and speaking abilities throughout the course. Over the span of one academic semester, Bueno collected data such as audio-recordings and transcripts of students’ in- and out-of-class speaking assignments, online text-chat threads, interviews, and a post-course survey. The data showed the four learners each had various learning agendas, and due to these differences, Bueno stated that “these learning agendas influence[d] the types of strategies employed” (p. 464). For instance, depending on the learner’s agenda and the specific task (e.g., online chats vs. understanding/discussing a film), students engaged in communicative activities with different learning and speaking strategies such as adopting imitation, confirmation checks, rehearsing grammar and/or vocabulary, and more.

In another classroom-based ethnography that took place in the context of an L2 English university writing course, Canagarajah (2011) explored the translanguaging strategies of a Saudi Arabian female student named Buthainah in her essay writing. Adopting an emic perspective, Canagarajah collected data over the span of Buthainah’s writing course in the forms of artifacts (e.g., classroom assignments), multiple essay drafts, participant journal entries, and observations of peer review. Canagarajah reported that Buthainah utilized four translanguaging strategies, including interactional (i.e., negotiating meaning with the readers), voice (basing communication on her own strengths), textualization (adopting process-oriented composing strategies), and recontextualization strategies (determining whether she could code-switch in certain parts of the writing project). These findings led the researcher to conclude that not only do L2 learners possess individual strategies when approaching writing tasks, but also that, to some extent, these were strategies that teachers could subsequently teach and raise awareness of with their multilingual student populations.

Whereas the two previous studies addressed learner strategies involving speaking and writing, other researchers have adopted ethnography to investigate L2 learners’ literacy-building strategies. In a study by Huss (1995), over the span of one year, the researcher examined the literacy-building strategies of five young ESL learners between the ages of five and six. Huss investigated the students’ strategies in their classroom environment, and in both their home and community settings as well (e.g., a mosque), collecting data sources that included artifacts, audio-recordings, interviews, and observations. Huss noted that the children adopted many strategies in attempts to build literacy, which consisted of important strategies related to speaking prior to reading or writing, strategies that were teacher reliant, and also those that were peer reliant (e.g., using their peers as a model for performing a task).

In reviewing these studies on learner strategies that adopt ethnography as a methodology, it is again important to note that such studies collect a multitude of data sources in order to triangulate
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findings and to examine those strategies from different sources (e.g., students’ texts and journals) and perspectives (e.g., those of the students and teachers). Likewise, all of the studies were longitudinal in nature, with the shortest study discussed here lasting one academic semester. As with the ID of identity, the longitudinal nature of these studies is integral as the emergence of learners’ strategies may take time to surface, and those strategies may also be dependent on various other IDs or factors such as students’ goals and/or motivations, the nature of the specific task itself, and more.

Motivation

Another important ID for which ethnographic approaches have widely been used is motivation. Like other ID studies, most research on L2 learner motivation has taken a quantitative approach. Among the limited research in which ethnography has been used, we have selected to showcase three studies (i.e., Canagarajah, 1993; Henry, 2019; Judge, 2011).

In a critical ethnography conducted in a Sri Lankan university, Canagarajah (1993) explored how students’ motivations and attitudes towards learning English were conditioned by conflicting sociocultural values. Canagarajah first used a questionnaire to collect students’ background information, and he then observed and interviewed students to identify their attitudes towards English and the cultural content of their course’s textbook. Both the questionnaire and the interviews were conducted in Tamil—a first language (L1) both the participants and researcher shared—to create the space for students to express themselves. During the course, Canagarajah reported that students gradually lost motivation because of an “oppositional response to the threats posed by the discourse inscribed [in Sri Lanka in the English] language, pedagogy and the textbook” (p. 605), thereby illustrating how such discourses permeate multiple (i.e., micro, meso, and macro) levels of learning, impacting outcomes. Although students desired to learn English, they did not want to immerse themselves in the culture that came with the English language. Instead, these students alternatively desired a “grammar-based, product-oriented learning” (p. 622). Consistent with the longitudinal nature of ethnography, a key aspect of Canagarajah’s data analytic process was the comparison of students’ attitudes and opinions towards English at the beginning and the end of the course, as Canagarajah sought to explain the complexities of student motivation.

In a netnographic-inspired study conducted both online and in the classrooms of 16 English language teachers in Sweden, Henry (2019) explored how teachers connected L2 learning opportunities in the classroom with out-of-school experiences, as students engaged in a blogging project during the school year. Data included field notes of observations of students working in groups, students’ posts on online blogs, and a focus-group interview with students. While field notes were taken in English, the interviews were conducted in Swedish, the L1 of the participants. The data collection and analysis were done simultaneously. This process assisted Henry, as he put it, “to develop conceptually informed understandings of the motivational influences associated with creating the blogs” (p. 379). By engaging in this rigorous analysis, Henry reported not only how the online blog projects positively motivated many of the L2 learners, but he was also able to identify numerous motivational influences due to phenomena such as the blog artifact itself, the audience’s perception, and his participants’ desires to showcase/document their professional identities.

In another study, Judge (2011) examined the individual motivations of nine students who were enrolled in a high school extensive L2 English reading program in Japan. Over the span of two-and-a-half years, Judge followed the participants, attempting to understand what drove some students to become such avid readers in their L2. In attempting to understand their motivations, Judge collected data in the form of observations (both in- and out-of-class), field notes, interviews, artifacts, and a questionnaire. Judge noted that his own Japanese proficiency was not advanced, so he originally had considered involving an interpreter. However, after trialing this and discussing it further with some of his participants, Judge ultimately chose to forgo the interpreter as some of his subjects felt uncomfortable. In the findings, Judge touched on many IDs apart from his main focus.
of motivation. In particular, he noted that many of those participants who were avid L2 readers shared a desire to engage in autonomous activities, and this was strongly interconnected with their idealized selves. However, when some students experienced a temporary loss in motivation, Judge suggested that this was the result of the influence of other IDs, such as students experiencing social anxiety.

One of the commonalities in the three articles discussed above is the use of ethnographic interviews as the primary method of data collection. In addition to interviews, the researchers used various data sources such as field notes, artifacts, and surveys for triangulation purposes. Likewise, unlike those quantitative studies on motivation, these ethnographies do not claim to generalize their findings. Instead, they invite readers to understand the situatedness of their findings and how society and culture may impact student motivation.

**Anxiety**

Finally, ethnographic approaches have been used in researching the ID of L2 learner anxiety. In this section, we again have selected three studies in which ethnography has been adopted to study the ID (i.e., Brown, 2008; De Costa, 2015; Effiong, 2016). Brown (2008) studied international postgraduate students’ anxiety in relation to their level of English language proficiency. In the study, which was conducted with 13 students attending a British university, Brown used in-depth individual interviews and observations, which allowed the researcher to study the students in a natural setting in which they were learning their L2 over a period of one year. In her findings, Brown illustrated how the international graduate students experienced anxiety due to the stress of communicating and studying in a foreign language, and particularly, she found that a high level of anxiety was present during the initial stages of students’ academic sojourn. Brown’s findings underscore the significance of understanding L2 learners’ anxiety and the need for administrators and instructors to provide students with appropriate support systems. While some students were able to withstand their anxieties, Brown found that most of the participants “retreated into monoethnic groups” (p. 22) when they felt anxious, which affected their development of linguistic competence.

Based on a yearlong critical ethnographic case study, De Costa (2015) investigated foreign language anxiety by drawing on the notion of the social imaginary, or how individuals perceive their social existence and also fit or connect with others (Taylor, 2002). The data for De Costa’s research, which explored one student’s foreign language anxiety, was originally collected through a yearlong study in a Singapore high school. The broader study included five female designer immigrant students (i.e., highly skilled individuals) who were from neighboring Asian countries. Data sources included classroom observations, excursion observations, general school observations, and interviews. The data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. Similarly, discourse analysis was used to analyze interaction and interview data. In the findings, De Costa discussed how the focal student’s anxiety was influenced by broader societal forces, and particularly at a micro level, her anxiety was impacted by her interactions with both her classmates and teachers. These findings underscored the multifaceted nature of anxiety.

Lastly, in a study conducted in four universities in Japan, Effiong (2016) studied the anxiety experienced by Japanese students while learning L2 English. Three of the universities were public and one was private, but they also differed in geographical location and status. Effiong conducted observations in selected classes every three to four weeks for a period of four months. He also interviewed 26 students who were randomly selected, along with the four teachers in whose classrooms he conducted observations. Effiong used NVivo to code his data, and he identified patterns and themes suggesting that some students’ foreign language anxiety was caused by social factors in the classroom, such as the teacher’s age, friendliness, tone of voice, and the formality with which the teachers dressed. However, Effiong also noted that the power dynamics between the teachers and...
students often had an influence in generating anxiety, irrespective of some of the aforementioned factors.

Like those studies that explored identity, learner strategies, and motivation, researchers exploring L2 anxiety have used interviews and observations as the primary methods of data collection. These can afford a greater understanding of the complex sociocultural contexts and communities in which participants are situated.

**Future Directions**

Although IDs have most often been examined by those SLA researchers adopting more quantitatively oriented methods, as we have shown throughout this chapter, ethnography (and ethno-graphic-inspired approaches) also have immense potential. This is due to ethnography’s capacity to afford L2 researchers with unique insights into the nature of the ID itself, how that ID may surface and evolve over time, and also how the ID may interact with and/or be affected by a variety of social and contextual factors. Despite these strengths, there are some issues and areas of need involving the nexus of IDs and ethnography, which SLA researchers may wish to consider in the future. Thus, we close this chapter by discussing a few of these future directions and, specifically, the needs for: 1) increased transparency in data analysis, 2) additional attention to IDs with learning beyond the classroom, and 3) the adoption of new methods.

In the studies we selected for this chapter, we attempted to showcase many of the details surrounding how ethnographers both collected and analyzed their data. Many times, however, although the manner in which the data were collected is quite clear, the authors’ explanations of how those data were subsequently analyzed have tended to be somewhat hazy. Therefore, in the spirit of transparency—a theme that is sweeping through applied linguistics and SLA as a whole (e.g., De Costa et al., 2019; Marsden, 2020)—more needs to be done in terms of articulating how researchers have analyzed their data. In particular, we suggest that future ethnographers may wish to turn to guidance from work involving different approaches to data analysis, including (but not limited to) qualitative content analysis (e.g., Selvi, 2020), text analysis (e.g., Wang, 2020), and multimodal analysis (e.g., Pirini et al., 2018). In addition to ethnographers stating their specific analytical approach(es), although authors typically present their data in the findings section based on different themes that were discovered during coding/analysis, future researchers might also wish to provide their readers with specific examples and pieces/strings of data in their methods section in order to further illustrate how and/or why data were coded in the study.

Apart from transparency, readers of this chapter may also have noticed that, of the studies we presented, nearly all of them were situated within the context of a language classroom. This, without a doubt, is directly tied to important considerations involving researcher access and the general longitudinal nature of ethnographies. However, as scholars have called for increasing investigations into L2 learning beyond the classroom (e.g., Kessler, 2020; Kessler et al., 2021; Reinders & Benson, 2017), of particular interest to future ID researchers may be the adoption of netnography. Netnographies can help expand our understanding of IDs in a variety of internet-based social contexts, including online forums, chat rooms, and webpages, as well as arenas that are situated in between the in-person and digital classroom contexts. For instance, though it primarily took place in a classroom, Henry’s (2019) study was netnographically inspired. In the study, Henry explored the ID of motivation in relation to students’ practices both in class and out of class (i.e., their discussions in class and interactions in the school hallways) and in the digital realm, as he reported how students’ online blogging reflected their respective and collective identities. Future studies may wish to continue with this underexplored context, further delving into IDs within out-of-class social media practices or within the context of teachers’ adoption of digital media for bridging in/out-of-classroom contexts.

Lastly, as stated, the main tools associated with ethnography tend to be those of observations, field notes, and interviews. Yet, as researchers continue to venture into the digital realm to explore
IDs, this will subsequently require the collection of different types of data. Thus, when engaging in netnographies—and, even when engaging in those other types of ethnographies described in this chapter—we encourage future researchers to adopt new methods and to mix methodologies. Like that of Henry (2019), in a study by Kessler (2020), the researcher attempted to explore the intersection of students’ in/out-of-classroom practices, this time by further examining the connection between students’ existing writing strategies and how those strategies were impacted by a myriad of social and technological factors. To do this, Kessler adopted video-screen captures of L2 English learners’ real-time writing, which was followed by stimulated recalls. Both screen captures and stimulated recalls have not often been adopted by ethnographers; yet, as Kessler’s study shows, they may hold tremendous potential for delving into particular IDs both in-classroom and out-of-classroom contexts. Finally, another infrequently used method that has potential to be used in conjunction with ethnographic methods is the use of focus groups. As Winke (2017) has noted, focus groups—which are a type of interactive group discussion—can be used as a tool for understanding a variety of phenomena, including learners’ attitudes, opinions, motivations, thought processes, and more. Focus groups could prove helpful in providing additional insights into IDs that the researcher observed while in the classroom (e.g., how the teacher’s pedagogy seemed to affect students’ motivation and emotions), and which she subsequently probes by conducting a focus-group interview with several students from the observed classroom. Thus, ID researchers may wish to consider incorporating them into their future studies that may bear mixed-method dimensions.

Notes

1 While we foreground classroom ethnography in this chapter, that is not to say overlaps do not exist between this form of ethnography and other forms of ethnography. Talmy’s (2008) critical ethnography, for example, was conducted in a high school in Hawaii, while Isbell’s (2018) netnography examined the language learning experiences of individuals who joined the Reddit community, which constituted an informal classroom setting.

2 COLT = Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching.

References

Ethnography


