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### Opportunities to speak

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# Chapter 1

Introduction



*In my culture we don't even call like this names ((stepmom, bonus-mom))... we are always saying mom or, if you can't say that you call her auntie or something... I'm coming from a totally different, thing, and I told my husband that I don't wish Emma to call me "my mom" or whatever but, I just want to be part of this thing cause I feel I'm not part of it... I'm still learning the language and then when you are so involved in your discussion I don't know what's going on. I feel like I'm cut off, there's so many feelings I'm feeling ((laughs))*

This is the voice of Mulenga, a 32-year-old Zambian woman who is the focal participant in this dissertation. The above quote is from a conversation between Mulenga and myself in her home back in December 2005. Leading up to this excerpt we had talked about what it was like for her to be a new stepmother in a divorced family. We had discussed her expectations and how these compared with the everyday realities of family life in Denmark. And we had considered how these experiences differed greatly from what she was used to in her home country of Zambia. Just within this one brief excerpt, as she attempted to explain what she was feeling, she referred to: "my culture" as "a totally different thing" compared to the Danish culture; she brought up a wish "to be part of this thing" in reference to both her new family and Danish culture; and she mentioned her language limitations as adding to her confusion because it left her "cut off". This complicated intermingling of a rich and complicated set of sociocultural factors and individual circumstances shaping her experience may seem extraordinary at first glance but is, in fact, far from unique. Indeed, the more we think about it, the more we realize that such complexity is actually quite commonplace. For Mulenga, being accepted in the role of stepmother was central to becoming part of her new family. But this task was understandably interwoven with previous life experience and sensitivities and was thus one which required her to bridge large cultural differences. Furthermore, the process was complicated by her limited ability to speak Danish. This corresponded to social isolation – not only in her new family but within Danish society and culture more broadly. Though she had been part of the Zambian middle-class, she felt the differences between her home country and first world Denmark were enormous and she struggled with social integration, as do so many others who undergo international migration.

In essence, the confusion and frustration Mulenga was experiencing and trying to come to terms with in the conversation above is the focus of this dissertation. In particular, this research addresses the interface between language learning, motivation, international marriage migration, classroom dynamics, and family relations. The broader contexts of global inequality among different regions of the world and the growing practice of marriage migration help to more clearly interpret Mulenga's motivation to learn Danish and to be in Denmark. These issues are further explored in micro-analysis of communication in the domestic sphere, specifically

focusing on family talk within the home. The home represents a context that is both central to human experience but also one that is difficult to access and therefore rarely studied. Mulenga is motivated to become a part of her new family and a part of Danish society. Learning the Danish language is a critical first step to achieving these goals, an achievement she believed could be enhanced by participating in this study.

The aim of this dissertation is to help broaden our understanding of second language (L2) use and learning in the domestic sphere and to explore the nature of L2 motivation as a function of participation in these intimate and family communication contexts. Through four case studies focusing on a primary participant, Mulenga, and a secondary participant, Yuko, two central research questions are addressed:

- 1. How do individual, contextual, and societal factors relate to the motivation to learn a second language?*
- 2. How does language competence interrelate with negotiations of identities in L2 use in the domestic sphere?*

These questions are addressed in multiple contexts, including ethnographic and micro-interactive analyses from the domestic sphere, the classroom situation of the participants, and the broader global contexts that pertain to their life situations. Taken together, the analyses in this dissertation incorporate a number of different communication contexts, such as those of formal classroom instruction and conversation in the home. It situates these within larger political contexts such as international relocation, nation state politics, immigration policy, and marriage migration.

In terms of its main scholarly contributions, this research expands knowledge on L2 use and learning in two key areas: It supplements existing case study research on learner agency, motivation and identity with micro-analyses and it enlarges the L2 development database to include narrowly transcribed data from the intra-family communication sphere. Typically, case studies of foreign and immigrant language learners rely on data from classroom observations, interviews and/or self-report (see for example Kinginger, 2004; Lantolf & Genung, 2002; Menard-Warwick, 2009; Norton, 2000, 2001). In contrast, this research focuses on issues of identity, agency and motivation by utilizing both participants' self-reported agency and motivation and their immediate negotiation of identity and agency in actual interaction. Correspondingly, these micro-analytic studies of family talk also add to existing research on L2 use and learning in informal settings, an area that remains infrequently studied (Firth, 2009; Firth & Wagner, 2007; Wagner, 2004). By addressing issues of L2 use both inside and outside the classroom this research further speaks to language educators, promoting the already existing call to take seriously the variety of learner backgrounds and motives for learning the L2 (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008; Menard-Warwick, 2009; Norton, 2000, 2001). Additionally, this research is situated in broader sociocultural and political contexts, which are increasingly recognized as

important to more fully understand and interpret ethnographic data in studies of L2 learning, use, and motivation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Menard-Warwick, 2009; Watson-Gegeo, 1992).

Blommaert (2005, p. 16) argues ethnography “is, and always has been, an approach in which the analysis of small phenomena, is set against an analysis of big phenomena, and in which both levels can only be understood in terms of one another.” This acknowledgement in turn suggests the potential usefulness of recognizing how small phenomena, such as activities of the individual, are fractals of big phenomena, such as larger societal and global trends. In the ecological view, which is elaborated upon in Chapter 2, fractals are understood as “patterns of activities and events which are self-similar on different scales” (Kramsch, 2008, p. 392). Teasing out these connections allows case studies to be relevant and valid beyond the individual, especially in terms of clarifying processes of interaction between different analytical levels and influences. Including larger historical contexts, in this case family patterns in the West, Danish immigration policies, and global inequalities, makes this study relevant not only within the field of applied linguistics but also to a number of disciplines outside it, especially policy studies in the area of immigration politics and services, and family studies focussed upon non-traditional formations.

To frame the empirical chapters, chapters 2 and 3 present the conceptualization and operationalization of the study. Chapter 2 highlights two key conceptual discussions related to debates in contemporary research on L2 development. The first is how studies of the L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009a) and case study research inspired by poststructuralism and sociocultural theory can inform each other. The second is the ongoing debate regarding theorizations of language learning as language use. These discussions are framed within an ecological metaphor of language learning that builds upon Kramsch (2002a, 2008) and Kramsch and Whiteside (2008). An ecological perspective provides an overarching relational framework that accommodates the complexity of integrative, multi-method approaches. This dissertation’s use of ecology as a structuring metaphor, as well as a discussion of how initial research questions and interests developed during the course of the data collection, is outlined in greater detail in Chapter 3. This chapter also expands on practical issues and decisions such as the identification and selection of research participants, data collection procedures, and other similar considerations.

The four case studies focusing on Mulenga in chapters 4 to 7 form the dissertation’s key scholarly contribution, namely a set of detailed, qualitative, empirically-driven investigations examining factors impacting L2 learning and use. These studies emerged out of an interaction between prominent factors discussed in chapters 2 and 3, namely the perception of L2 learning processes as inseparable from L2 use; the understanding of L2 emergence as an interaction between individual, situational and societal influences; an initial academic interest in individual factors influencing L2 use in formal and informal settings; the study’s participants and the data generated; as well as various incidences and developments during the research process that drew my attention as a researcher. The empirical chapters share an emphasis on multifaceted analysis that attempts to move beyond the immediately obvious site of L2 use to encompass additional

dimensions and broader contexts. This becomes quickly evident in Chapter 4, in which routines and learner actions inside a traditional classroom, a setting common to much L2 research, acts as the initial starting points of analysis. However, rather than simply remaining within these familiar confines, this chapter demonstrates how necessary it is to move beyond them to understand L2 motivations and practices. It illustrates how learners' opportunities to speak within this context are mediated by the interaction between language ideology in the classroom and individual experiences and aspirations both inside and outside it. This leads usefully to the focus of Chapter 5, which concentrates more intently on the factors that lie beyond the classroom. The focal point of this chapter is the connection between Mulenga's L2 motivation, self-construction, and experiences in Denmark. It demonstrates a clear relation between her future hopes for her life and her actual lived experiences with learning Danish and social integration in her new adopted country. Chapters 4 and 5 combined can thus be seen to explore how integrative frameworks that take a broader contextual and societal lens augment more narrow understandings of L2 motivation, learning, and use to advantage.

While attitudes, motivations and the view of the L2 self are dependent on such broader contexts, these contexts are also actualized and made relevant during micro-level, face-to-face conversations. The analytic emphasis in chapters 6 and 7 shifts to explore these processes more closely. These chapters focus on the negotiations of social roles in the domestic sphere when one is dependent upon an L2 as a medium for this purpose. For Mulenga to take part in the social life of the family, she requires interactional support from other participants – her husband and 9-year-old stepdaughter. Her opportunities to engage within this sphere are limited not only by a struggle to get her meaning across but also in terms of being listened to as a legitimate speaker on family matters. This legitimacy to participate as a co-parent on family matters is the pivotal focus of Chapter 6. It furthermore demonstrates how fluent language users face choices which entail supporting the non-fluent language user during disagreement, making issues of intersubjectivity pertinent. Chapter 7 builds on this theme, picking up where Chapter 6 ends. It offers a closer investigation into how intersubjectivity is maintained and negotiated during the social positioning occurring in, and established through, family talk. It does this specifically by focusing on issues of complaint and repair in L2 conversations, showing how participants in a conversation depend on the willingness of co-participants to help maintain intersubjectivity.

The empirical chapters each address issues of Mulenga's actual and experienced opportunities to speak in various settings of her everyday life. Each chapter's analytical focus and findings are designed to stand on their own and the empirical chapters (4-7) have each been either published or submitted for publication as independent articles. Therefore, in the final chapter, I discuss how the various analyses and arguments within these chapters transverse and complement each other to provide an in-depth case study of L2 motivation and use in the field of L2 research. I also make the case for why this study is especially relevant for language educators as well as expanding upon its value to areas outside of L2 research such as marriage migration, Danish immigration policies, and studies of family talk.

In summary, the analytic trajectories in this work are encapsulated by the diverse possible meanings encompassed in its title, *Opportunities to Speak. A qualitative study of a second language in use*. In other words, the interpretations of both *opportunities* and *speaking* in relation to L2 learning and use are highly dependent on the context. Speaking, for instance, is a multifaceted idea that in some situations – such as in the language classroom – often implies producing correct utterances in the L2. However, in other everyday situations it is more critical to produce meaningful utterances in order to make oneself understood, listened to, and taken seriously. Whether or not a person decides to speak in the first place greatly depends on the opportunities they see for themselves, both in relation to other participants as well as to the specific context. Thus, the terms *opportunities* and *speak* are analytically interdependent and relate to individuals' self-construction and personal aspirations in addition to situational and broader societal factors. Because of this complex interaction of factors, what might look like an opportunity to speak or act in a particular setting for one person may not be viewed as an opportunity by another in the same setting. In this regard, the use of the preposition “in” within the subtitle is also quite deliberate; while “language use” might imply an emphasis primarily on talk, “language in use” expressly foregrounds the significance and prominence of contextual influences. Understanding this complexity is a valuable step forward toward comprehending L2 motivation, learning, and use.

