Introduction

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Identity was brought to the fore of research in the social sciences by psychologist Erik Erikson in the 1950s (Erikson, 1964, 1968). Interest in the topic since then has been and continues to be intense. According to Côté (2006, pp. 3–4), hits of the keyword *identity* in the database PsychINFO are 233 for the 1950s, 775 for the 1960s, 2,896 for the 1970s, 6,901 for the 1980s, and 15,106 for the 1990s. In the first five years of the 2000s, there are over 12,000 hits. The same is true in his search of SocAbs, a sociological abstract database. He therefore concludes that “the number of publications using *identity* as a key word is now in the tens of thousands per decade” (2006, p. 4).

Interest in identity by scholars in the humanities is no different. According to Fearon (1999, p. 1, n. 1), in the areas of history, literature, and culture studies, “The number of dissertation abstracts using the word *identity* has been growing almost three times faster than the rate for all abstracted dissertations” from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. In the general area of linguistics and language studies, the fascination with identity is no exception. At the time of writing (December 2019), a search for the word *identity* in Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstract – a comprehensive and popular research database – turned up 20,986 results (which include journal publications, PhD dissertations, papers or chapters in edited volumes as well as authored books). To put that number into perspective, we searched other popular topics in linguistics and language studies in the same database, and none came close to the literature on identity: *politeness*, 3,974; *speech acts*, 8950; and *ideology*, 6967. The only other term that generated slightly more hits was *culture studies*, 22,092; however, *culture studies* is appar-

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ently a more encompassing notion – referring to a theoretical orientation – than *identity*, a concept that refers to a particular topic of scholarly investigation.

Given this massive amount of literature on identity studies, why are we putting out yet another volume of work on it? The first reason is language. In the past decade or so, scholarship on identity studies has been a front and centre topic for Chinese linguists and has generated an impressive amount of literature, as is seen in X. Chen (2018). However, most of these works are written in Chinese and published in China. Non-Chinese-speaking readers are prevented from accessing them. This current special issue of *East Asian Pragmatics* presents our effort to improve this situation.

The second, and more important, reason is the contributions the papers included herein have the potential of making to the field, particularly in the following two areas.

The first area has to do with the stability/fluidity of identity, i.e., whether identity is pre-existing (hence stable) or emergent (hence fluid). Social scientists, by and large, view identity as a set of expectations that speakers strive to form, to develop, and to eventually obtain (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Perry, 1975; Rorty, 1976; Stryker, 1987; Tajfel, 1974, 1981, 1982). The formation of adulthood, for example, is seen as a process that a person simply goes through, with or without conscious effort (Côté, 2006, p. 5; 2000); so, too, is the process involved in childhood and adolescence. A person's growth is thus assumed to be a natural progression: he or she is moulded in and by society from childhood (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006) to adolescence and then to adulthood (Rorty, 1976; Stryker, 1987; Tajfel, 1974, 1981, 1982). The most passive view of identity finds support in aspects of identity that are decidedly biological. Our fingerprints and DNA are unique, and they are used to identify each of us. We have no choice in such matters.

The view that identity is emergent came onto the scene as a reaction to identity as pre-existing scholarship. The most direct of such challenges comes from a series of works by S. Hall. Based on research in the general area of cultural studies and subscribing to the thinking of Lev Vygotsky and of Michel Foucault, Hall declares, "identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point" (1989, p. 15). Rather, they are "points of temporary attachments to the subject position which discursive practices construct for us" (1996a, p. 19).

Cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark. It is not once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return.

(Hall, 1996b, p. 213)

It is perhaps no accident that versions of Hall's views are found in the many works on identity studies carried out by students of language (Blommaet, 2005; Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, 2008, 2010; Butler, 1990; de Fina, 2010; de Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006; Ho, 2010; Locher & Hoffmann, 2006; Zimmerman, 1998). Works in this tradition represent an empirical and interactional turn in language studies, spurred by ethnography and conversation analysis, two theoretical orientations that made their mark on the linguistic scene beginning in the late 1970s.

These researchers have been able to offer convincing evidence for their theses, as such evidence comes from nuanced analysis of real-life data. Ethnographers can uncover the subtleties of human interaction with their well-developed methodology of observation. Conversation analysts are often able to zero in on the precise point at which an identity emerges due to its well-accepted system of terminology and sophisticated analytical tools. Theoretically, researchers in this tradition are sympathetic with S. Hall's stance, although their criticisms of the identity-is-stable scholarship are much less frontal. Bucholtz and K. Hall (2005, p. 588) write, for instance, identity is an "emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices".

The tension between those who look at identity as pre-existing and those who see it as emergent, however, may have found a happy medium in an active area of research: identity indexing, by Ochs and colleagues. Like those in the emergent camp, Ochs (1990, 1993, 2012) studies identity construction interactionally, focusing on how particular linguistic devices function to index particular identities by speakers. Different from them, however, she assumes the pre-existing nature of identity: when a linguistic structure symbolically points to an identity, the latter must exist independent of the former.

It is against this intellectual backdrop that the current special issue should make its presence felt in identity studies. As we will discuss below when we introduce the five papers in more detail, while Zhuang and He's paper, on compliment response, belongs in the emergent camp, all four others offer evidence that identity is both pre-existing and emergent. Zhong and Zeng, for instance, demonstrate that con artists carefully construct the identity of someone else so as to swindle money out of their targets. There is little doubt that the intended identity emerges from the discourse. When we are called by someone claiming to be a law enforcement officer, saying that we need to pay a fine for a legal transgression in order to avoid more serious legal entanglement, we would offer that person our bank account information only when we are sure that the caller is indeed who he says he is. Our belief that the caller is a law enforcement officer, therefore, comes about from his careful constructing of that identity via a series of calculated moves.

The emergent nature of a con artist's identity, at the same time, supports the pre-existence of that identity. When we are trying to decide whether we are indeed talking to a law-enforcement officer, we are invoking our behavioural expectations of law-enforcement officers; likewise, the caller is trying to behave in such a way that fits our expectations. There is just not another way around it: the identity of a law-enforcement officer *has to be* existing, in both the mind of the con artist and the mind of the targeted victim.

We now move to what we see as the second important area in identity studies. That area is about the functions of identity construction. In the sense that human behaviour is motivated behaviour – that there is always a purpose for any human action – to consciously construct an identity must serve a purpose. In the literature, the purpose of identity construction appears to be the construction itself. This identity for identity's sake assumption is surely well founded. After all, members of a society all have expectations they should live up to and images they desire to project and maintain, and to behave in line with these expectations and construct and keep these images in public are legitimate and worthy goals.

But are these the *only* goals for identity construction, i.e., is identity construction done for other purposes than – or in addition to – the construction itself? On this we agree with X. Chen (2018) that identity *can be* constructed for other purposes. It is here, too, that the articles in the current special issue are of value.

Of the five articles, two make it explicit that the speakers they study – consultants on radio talk shows who sell pharmaceuticals to listeners through the offering of medical advice (Yuan) and con artists who attempt to get money out of others by pretending to be someone else (Zhong & Zeng) – engage in a careful construction of the relevant identity for a specific purpose. For the medical consultant, it is to sell pharmaceuticals. For the con artist, it is to rob others of their wealth fraudulently. Mao and Huang's study of female identity construction is similar. They demonstrate how the identities constructed in Chinese and American ads for women are based on how they appeal to their audience for the purpose of promoting products.

In addition, each of the five articles included has the potential to make contributions to knowledge making in its area of investigation, as we detail below.

Jensen Chengyu Zhuang and Amy Yun He, in their 'Managing multiple identities: A new perspective on compliment responses in Chinese', touch on compliment response, a topic that has fascinated researchers for decades. R. Chen (2010), for example, offers a comprehensive review of research in the area and interest in the literature has not waned since. Instead of assuming that there is only one identity for Chinese compliment responders, Zhuang and He propose four: individual identity, relational identity, group identity, and cultural identity. The compliment responders are then found to choose from this list the one that

fits their purpose in the specific compliment environment. Based on a qualitative approach – with interviews of native speakers – the authors offer a new perspective on the identities constructed by compliment responders, revealing the nuances in compliment responding that have been present in the literature (Chen & Yang, 2010). As such, it represents a new approach in the study of compliment responses, anchoring the study of identity construction squarely with the speakers themselves.

Zhoumin Yuan focuses on how identity works in Radio-Mediated Medical Consultation (RMMC) in his article entitled ‘Identity rhetoric in Chinese Radio-Mediated Medical Consultation’, a genre in which representatives of pharmaceutical companies offer medical advice and promote the selling of drugs. Yuan finds a series of identities – the identity of an expert, of friendship, and of a sales representative – that consultants strive to construct for their purpose of selling medical products. As we briefly discussed earlier, Yuan, like Zhong and Zheng, explicitly supports X. Chen’s (2018) proposal that identity construction can serve other purposes.

Yuxin Ren’s article, ‘Committee chair as a jointly constructed identity at Chinese PhD dissertation defences’, is different from the rest of the articles in this issue. The author sets his eyes on how participants of the Chinese doctoral dissertation defence work together to construct the identity for their chair. While the chair does most of the constructing, others – her colleagues on the committee, the committee organiser, the dissertation writer, as well as her audience – all pitch in cooperatively so that the identity of the chair become salient at the event. Ren’s detailed analysis of the pragmatic strategies the participants adopt and the linguistic devices they use offers evidence for the interactional approach in identity studies.

In “‘Guess who I Am’: Constructing false identities for fraudulent purposes in the Chinese context”, Xiyun Zhong and Yantao Zheng investigate how identity is taken advantage of for the socially condemned purpose of fraud. Drawing on data from 72 real-life fraud cases in contemporary China, Zhong and Zheng’s work yields the following results. First, the most often used fabricated identities are the identity of victim, of friend/kinship, of a clerk or official of an organisation, and of resourcefulness. Second, the strategies the con artists rely on to fabricate these identities are speech acts, person-referencing, discourse contents, codes, and imitation of the phonetic patterns of speech supposedly displayed by persons of the identity which they (the con artists) are trying to construct. Third, the kind of identity being fabricated results from the con artists’ adaptation to the physical, social, and mental world of their targets (Verschueren, 1999). As the authors acknowledge, their work points to the pre-existing nature of identity – if a con artist pretends to be someone else, he must have some idea how that per-

son behaves – and has the potential to do some public good. After all, fraud is believed to be quite rampant in China, resulting in part from the availability of technology in ordinary citizens' lives.

Yansheng Mao and Caroline Huang's study, 'A comparative study of female identity construction in Chinese and American advertisements', looks at how female identity is constructed in Chinese and English advertisements from a contrastive perspective. Using examples of actual ads for female-oriented products and ads for gender-neutral products and interviewing native speakers of both Chinese and English, the authors discover notable differences between the Chinese-language and American-language ads: while Chinese women are portrayed as being beauty-conscious, romance-pursuing, and child-loving, the identities of women found in the American advertisements are those of confidence and individuality. They further trace their findings to culture: women in the Chinese culture are still seen as traditional whereas women in the United States are culturally expected to be independent and goal-driven.

In sum, we present the articles in the current special issue in the hope that it will contribute to knowledge making in the area of identity studies in general and to our understanding of identity construction in Chinese in particular.

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