Second language learning for settlement and social inclusion for all: Africans in rural/regional Australia

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Outline

• Research background
• Theoretical background
• A rural/regional context
• Methods – data; analysis; preliminary findings
• Emergent implications for social inclusion
• Where to from here
Research background

- A DIAC supported PhD scholarship in the AMEP RC
- Lack of understanding of African settlement in Australia -- negative public discourses on Africans’ ability to integrate into Australian society
- My personal settlement trajectory
- An African doing research “for”, “with” and “on” Africans for a more nuanced African representation in Australia

Theoretical background

- People as social constructs (Bourdieu 1991; Holstein & Gubrium 2007)
  - ‘Africans, as any other people for that matter, are not passively shaped by their cultures. Instead they skilfully and creatively construct their identity borrowing from insights from whatever resources they have available to them’ (Kenzo 2004 p. 267).
- Identity is not fixed but negotiated in interactions – (Goldstein 1997; Heller 2006; Pavlenko & Piller 2001)
- L2 acquisition is constrained by external factors (McDermott 1993; McGroarty 1998)
“The Tamworth refugee blues”

Cathy Wilcox, Sydney Morning Herald (18 December 2006)

Source: National Museum of Australia "Behind the lines: the year's best cartoons"
Focusing on Wagga Wagga – statistics

- Area: 4,825.2 sq km
- Population: 54,841 (2001); **57,439 (2006)**
  - Mainly English speaking countries: 1,833 (= 3.2%)
  - **CLOTE speaking backgrounds: 1,993 (= 3.5%)**
  - Total overseas born: 3,826 (= 6.7%)
  - Australia born: 51,021 (= 88.8%)
  - Not stated: 2,592 (= 4.5%)


Wagga Wagga and humanitarian support

- Wagga Wagga has a history of receiving and supporting families from refugee backgrounds
  - San Isidore Project 1978-1998

Writing in English is an achievement in itself. It is hoped that the reader will appreciate that most of the contributions have not been written in the author’s first language but in English learned on arrival in Australia.

Saboisky (2001 p. 8)
Settlement provision in Wagga Wagga

Africans in Wagga Wagga

- Reasons for regional/rural settlement
  - **Primary settlement**
    - Previous Australian Government’s migrant and humanitarian settlement program
    - “Chain migration” (Price 1963)
      - “We had a family who were here, they sponsored us”
      - [Wagga_Mark_16.9.08]
  - **Secondary settlement**
    - “… it will be a bit quiet it’s not like in Sydney”
      - [Wagga_Franklin_16.9.08]
Procedures in Wagga Wagga

• Fieldwork – 15 to 25 Sept 2008 (contact maintained)
  – Participant observation
    • AMEP classroom; class excursions; participants’ homes; workplace; public forum; church

• Informal conversations
  – WAfrica members; Service providers; Significant others

• Semi-structured interviews (23 participants)
  – participants recruited through AMEP, Riverina Institute of TAFE
  – non-AMEP participants recruited through snowballing method

Participant numbers and countries of birth

• Sudan (15)
• Sierra Leone (3)
• Democratic Republic of the Congo (2)
• Burundi (1)
• Ethiopia (1)
• Zimbabwe (1)
Participants’ diverse linguistic backgrounds

- Sudan
  - Acholi, Arabic, Bari, Dinka,
  Juba Arabic, Madi, Kakwa,
  Lugbar, Luku, Moro,
  Shilluk, Tobcha

- Sierra Leone
  - Krio, Krao, Madingo,
  Mende, Pidgin
  English, Temne

- Democratic Republic of the Congo
  - Chilobi, French, Kimbol,
  Kiswahili, Licango, Lingala

- Burundi
  - French, Kirundi, Kiswahili

- Ethiopia
  - Amharic, Arabic, Dinka,
  Kiswahili, Oromo

- Zimbabwe
  - Karanga, Shona

Guiding questions

- How do Africans as L2 learners and users of English construct and negotiate their identities?

- How do Africans negotiate systemic structures for social inclusion?

- How does L2 proficiency mediate access to social networks/capital for social inclusion?
Analysis – beyond traditional SLA

Discourse analysis; CDA

“...language as discourse moves us beyond the notion of non-native speakers as deficient, and throws into question traditional SLA principles, such as age-on-arrival and length of residence, interlanguage, the ‘good language learner,’ and communicative competence. Restoring some of the sociocultural complexities and unique contextual circumstances of the interactions of second language users has become a priority ...” (Miller 2004 p. 293)

Exploring the connections between language use at the micro level - in-depth interviews and social issues at the macro level (Paltridge 2006; Fairclough & Wodak 1997)

Reflexivity – researcher subjectivities

Constructing hybrid lives
– contradictions & complexities
S: I felt like I should do a course, because my, all my papers were not recognised. Instead of doing English class I could be given something to do. A course or something which will help me to get work, yeah.

V: But you were being given Centrelink money?

S: Yeah.

V: You didn’t think that was enough?

S: Centrelink money?

V: Yes.

S: No, you know very well in Africa you want to, you want to work for yourself. You want to have your own money. I don’t, even up to now, I don’t like Centrelink money because it, you, that is, no I don’t like it because the money is like a threat. You take the money, then letter just following it, every time you are followed, what you are doing. I want to work, I want my own money. I’ll be happy with my work, I’ll be happy enjoying my money. Nobody will be, stop me with what I’m doing, and yeah I know how, yeah, it is hard.

V: So when you finished your 510 hours, did you start doing the course?

S: Yeah, last year I was, I, I start, I join a course, community welfare.

V: Okay.

S: Certificate IV. So and I didn’t actually complete it because of, it was very confusing, yeah. I’ve been doing, because I, in in Africa I do, I was a community ...

V: Worker.

S: yeah, just leader in the community and the way we do things in the camp, because I didn’t do, I didn’t work in my country, I just try to, that is voluntary in the camp.

V: So did someone introduce her sorry to you, or you just saw her on the road and you ... you brought her in?

S: No I was, you know some, Wagga is very small.

V: Yeah.

S: Which we know ourselves, and we care for ourselves.
V: Australian neighbours?
S: Yeah.
T: Because he supervisor.
V: Okay.
T: Yeah. And then one day I will stay here and then he ask me, he say why you, you Africa you stay at home and receive money from Centrelink, you don’t want the job. I tell him no because not like that, we need a job but here it’s difficult for us because we are, some people put the application and then they tell me call you back, and nothing. If you apply for [name of company] they call you immediately. Why? And then he said it’s not like this for us. And then he go, the next day he come he say, this is form, fill it, and then we’ll take you. Yeah and then I fill the form, and then they come after three days and tell tomorrow interview. And then I went to interview.
V: Wow.
T: Yeah.
V: So how, how did you feel in the interview? Did you, were you able to understand them and answer the questions?
T: Yeah I understand, because the first time I tell him I say sorry because my English is not perfect, if something I didn’t understand it I just ask, he say no worries because we have Indian here working with us, he don’t know English. And then we start interview, yeah.
V: And so what sort of job is it?
T: We do part of the car.

Making connections

Madi proverb  “Nya limi cukwa ga”
English gloss  Your riches nails in

Interpretation  Your wealth is in your nails; soil your nail and that is where the wealth is

[Wagga_Mark_26.9.08]
Implications for social inclusion

• Social inclusion to include all people in all facets of life
  – micro
  – meso – language planning by families (eg. Piller 2002 p. 133)
  – macro

• Sharing the communicative burden
  – Promotion of dialogue between – 1) Africans and mainstream;
    2) Africans, Aboriginal and other ethnic and minorities groups
    3) Intra African groups

Implications for social inclusion

• Tapping into positives in diversities not deficits
  – Bi/multilingualism as resources
  – Appreciating varieties of English identities
  – Acknowledgement of diversity of life experiences and literacies

• Making connections beyond the AMEP classroom
  – Self sufficiency and empowerment through employment
  – Social networking
  – Public education – combating stereotypes; cultural sensitivity
Thank you