International students’ identity formation in Canada (Proposal)

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Identity as an on-going and changing part of one’s character/self plays an important role in second language acquisition (Norton & Toohey, 2011). With respect to the relationship between second language learning and social identity formation, Miller (2004) mentions that there is an interactive relationship between second language learning and identity formation. A language learner’s identity is a matter of change due to his/her relationship with others (Ortaçtepe, 2013). Ortaçtepe (2013) pointing out the shortcomings of previous research studies addresses three issues in her research: “second language socialization, international students, and social identity” (p. 216). In her research, she tackles language and identity issues as related to international students, employing a case study research method. Following the definition of international students discussed in Ortaçtepe (2013), as an individual immigrating to another country to study for a long time with the potentiality of residing there afterward, the issues related to international students’ identity formation from linguistic and social perspectives will be explored in this research. Therefore, this research is concerned with the potential effects that linguistic accommodation may have on international students’ social-linguistic identity formation in Canadian society. International students’ linguistic experience with native speakers will be investigated regarding two aspects of communication accommodation theory, convergence and divergence. The idea of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) will also be explored in the light of participants’ linguistic experiences.

The basic linguistic platform theory for this research will be communication accommodation theory. According to Communication Accommodation Theory, language speakers accommodate their conversational interlocutors depending on their interlocutors’ language abilities (Giles &
Coupland, 1991). This accommodation can be realized through divergence, that is maximizing speech differences, or convergence, that is minimizing speech differences (Gallois et al., 2005). In second language acquisition, communication accommodation can be realized through different strategies such as use of fewer phones (Scarborough et al., 2007), or vowel hyper-articulation (Uther, Knoll, & Burnham, 2007). In a master’s thesis, I discussed in detail the potential facilitative effects of communication accommodation for second language learners (Rahimian, 2013). With respect to the potential positive and negative effects that communication accommodation may have on second language learners’ linguistic development as well as social integration, I want to investigate the effects of accommodative attempts by native speakers on the second language learners’ social-linguistic development in Canada.