

**Martyn, J. (2022). Discourses, identities and investment in foreign language learning. Multilingual Matters**

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Martyn, J. (2022). *Discourses, identities and investment in foreign language learning*. Multilingual Matters.

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Two prominent language-related discourses permeate contemporary society: females are more talented in learning foreign languages, and competent English speakers are more competitive in the job market. Through accurate observations, detailed records, and vivid descriptions, Jennifer Martyn brings readers first-hand data to exemplify these beliefs in an Irish secondary school, where the students negotiate their micro-investments in learning foreign languages within macro-discourses. Her timely seven-chapter book sheds light on the social turn in second language acquisition (SLA) and benefits policymakers and language practitioners.

Opening with the preface and Chapter 1, Martyn guides readers to learn contextual information about Irish language policies, secondary education systems, and decreased enrollment of language programs in universities. In addition, she provides a comprehensive summary of the social turn in SLA, which enables readers to understand how language learner identities are shaped by diverse social factors.

People are not only language learners per se but are grounded in different discourses during language learning (Block, 2007). To unpack multiple language learners' identities embedded in these discourses, Martyn introduces the main theoretical frameworks in Chapter 2: the investment model and elite multilingualism. The investment model positions language learners at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology, suggesting that individuals can project legitimized identities only using symbolic capital recognized by dominant ideologies. From the perspective of elite multilingualism, languages become economic resources to allow language learners to achieve a prestige lifestyle or upscale their social classes by learning a new language. Through contextualizing these two notions in her study, Martyn showcases what foreign languages are valued as symbolic capital to help Irish students to acquire their desired identities.

In Chapter 3, Martyn provides an overview of gender discourses in language education, which systematically traces back different relationships between gender and language use from deficit theory to performativity theory. Bringing theoretical frameworks and gender ideologies together, Martyn illustrates that Irish students' investment in foreign languages and their gender identities should be viewed as embedded in other complex discourses, such as social class, heritage identities, teachers' expectations, and textbooks.

In Chapter 4, Martyn outlines the methodology from data collection to analytic framework and illustrates how two female students align with and resist binary gender discourses. By combining approaches of linguistic ethnography and community of practice, her epistemic stance is first stated that students take an active role in discursively constructing their membership, despite being influenced by the discourses of communities. The author then demonstrates detailed collection procedures through participant observation, class observation, and semi-structured interviews in the middle school. The feminist-poststructuralist discourse approach is employed as the analytic framework to position the key participants who can resist and are influenced by dominant discourses simultaneously. The second part of this chapter explicitly displays the identity negotiation between two female students and the binary gender discourse embedded in school. Immersing herself in this school, Martyn reports that gendered boundaries persist, even

though separated-sex schooling has been replaced by mixed-sex schooling in secondary schools. Specifically, male and female students are arranged in different scheduled activities and distribution of campus facilities. However, two female students construct their alternative identities to flout and transgress binary discourses by dressing alternatively to mainstream girl images, creating their online communities, and decoupling languages from gender preferences (e.g., females for French vs. males for German). Their alternative practices, however, are challenged by teachers and peers in classes, which implies that the community delegitimizes their non-mainstream identities.

Chapter 5 maps out what factors influence the students' choices of second language learning by presenting interview data. It seems that students can choose foreign languages willingly, but such free choices of foreign languages are influenced by two kinds of discourses in Ireland: binary gender discourse and language "usefulness". For instance, two male students position themselves as STEM people, opposite to language-y people. The polarization between science and language disciplines reflects the binary gender discourse implicitly, as language-related jobs, especially language teachers, are mainly feminized in Ireland compared to male-dominated STEM areas. Martyn also illustrates the dilemma of language learning in this middle school. The interviewed students work hard to learn foreign languages to pursue the symbolic capital as "good students" in class, while they dismiss foreign language learning after entering universities. Students fail to connect their investment in the foreign languages provided by the school and their aspirational future. It is deemed that Spanish and Chinese are more valuable in the job market compared with the only three options in this school: German, French, and Irish.

Chapter 6 connects the findings and Ireland's reality. Positioned as a paradise with low taxes for international companies, Ireland faces national needs for multilingual human resources, but students are demotivated to continue learning foreign languages in universities. To improve and maintain the national competitiveness of Ireland in the globalized market, Martyn calls for several implications for language practitioners and policymakers, including learning about the background stories of language learners and providing more "useful" foreign languages in Irish secondary schools.

In sum, this is a thought-provoking empirical study from Ireland that expands the landscape of language investment studies. It provides suggestions for further SLA research. First, Martyn provides detailed considerations and procedures about each stage of method choices, which is a clear guideline for novice ethnographic researchers. This pioneering study introduces a spatial perspective to investigate how physical space influences language learners' identities and vice versa, which navigates SLA studies in a new direction. Though Martyn states that this book is also appropriate for language educators, they might be unprepared to read complex theoretical frameworks. However, language educators still benefit from this book by reading the authentic voices of students embedded in gender and social class discourses. The decreased enrollment of language programs is not only an Irish issue; this book can provide valuable insights into solving this problem to some extent. Policymakers can learn about the hidden obstacles to investment in language learning and encourage students to project their aspirational language identities supported by institutional incentives.

### References

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