

Practical activities to enhance L2 identity

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Practical activities to enhance L2 identity

Wednesday 10th April IATEFL Liverpool workshop

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The following activities are some of the original methodologies I have devised for my research in Identity in Second Language learning. These activities can be used in the English language classroom, on a one-to-one basis or as a stimulus to further discussion in the context of an interview.

1. **Mind-mapping the self** (~20 mins for drawing ~20 mins for sharing)

Instructions:

Use the piece of paper to draw me a mind map of your brain. You can use words and/or pictures. The picture can be of any shape or form, it doesn't have to look like a real brain, but it should act as a container.

Refer to who you are, what you are good at and what you like. Someone who knows you well should be able to recognize you from your mind map.

You can refer to your present, past and future selves.

After your participants have finished this activity, they can either present them formally to the class, swap with a neighbour or meander round looking at other drawings and asking questions.

You will notice that every mind-map is unique and that they are an excellent starting point for further discussion.

2. Hol¹ mind map (~ 5 mins to categorise and ~10 mins to discuss)

The following activity is one that may appeal to some participants who feel overwhelmed with the creative and personal aspect of the above mind map.

After collecting over 100 mind maps, I coded all the words or ideas which were included and put them into main categories. I decided to create the *Hol* mind map as my participants tended to create unprompted hierarchies of '*what was most important in their lives*' when describing their brain drawings. The subsequent 150 *Hol* mind maps (collected in 2012) revealed 'relationships' as the favourite category. Will yours show the same preference?

Instructions:

Hierarchical Mind Map

The box below represents your mind. Divide the box into separate sections using the main categories below (in capital letters). Give more space to the sections which are most important to you as a person. This is not a test. There is no expected format, feel free to organise your categories as you please.

Use the following categories (listed alphabetically):

<i>CULTURE</i>	<i>(society, nationality, cultural gatherings)</i>
<i>LANGUAGE</i>	<i>(native tongue, other languages, communicating)</i>
<i>LEARNING</i>	<i>(studies, school, university, education)</i>
<i>LEISURE</i>	<i>(playing, TV, reading, Art, cinema)</i>
<i>MEMORY</i>	<i>(memories, the past)</i>
<i>MOVEMENT</i>	<i>(sport, travel)</i>
<i>PROJECTION</i>	<i>(the future, plans, projects)</i>
<i>RELATIONSHIPS</i>	<i>(friends, loves, family)</i>



¹ I have integrated the theory of the *Hierarchy of Identity* (Ominiya 2006) into my own mind map experiment.

3. 10 words to describe 'English' (~ 6 mins for word list and ~ 20 mins for sharing)

I created this research tool after meeting David Crystal at the Edinburgh Book Festival in August 2012. Crystal was presenting his own 100 words of the English language, which struck me as a reflection of *who he was* as much as a description of the English language itself. It also gave me the idea of trying out such a word list with my own participants on a smaller scale. I was interested in finding out what words they would choose.

This exercise explores the images or signifiers that we associate with the L2 language and culture. I asked my participants to list 10 words that they associated with the word 'English' so that I could analyse how my participants related to the objects or concepts they had voiced. I have carried out this test with French participants learning English as well as English participants learning French. This exercise is useful in exploring the advantages and disadvantages of stereotypes and clichés associated with L2 learning. Interestingly, when the French participants were asked to list 10 words they chose the same clichés as those of other nationalities.

Instructions:

Make a list of 10 words that you think of when I say 'English'. Try not to think too much about it, just note down the first words that come into your head.

The participants then read out their words and you can tally the most popular. Participants may develop on why they chose certain words. Then ask the participants to do the same thing with their own country/language, e.g:

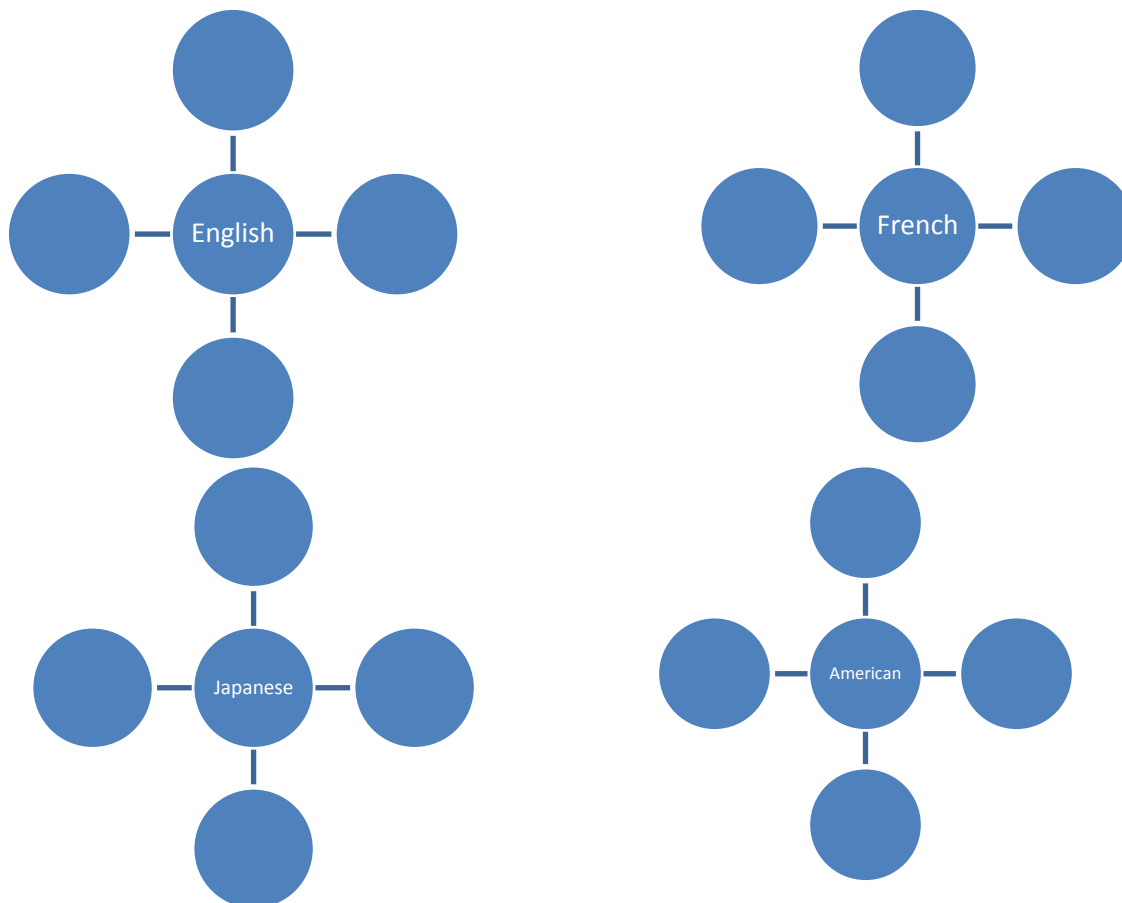
Make a list of 10 words that you think of when I say 'French'². Try not to think too much about it, just note down the first words that come into your head.

Tally the favourites again and ask them which word list they found harder. My participants said that the word list associated to their own L1 language and culture was the most difficult to create.

² Vary this for whatever your participants' own nationality is. If you have a mixed language class, you could ask them to do different word lists.

A variation of this exercise can be done in small group work to create words around a brain-storming activity.

Such as;



It is interesting to explore the differences between the language label 'English' and the cultural identities associated with 'British', or 'American' for example. You can vary your central key word depending on what you wish to explore.

The final variation on this exercise is to present the participants with 10 images which you can choose yourself or which were the top 10 of another group's results. Present the image for about 30 seconds and then ask the viewers to write down a few words which come to them when presented with the image. For example the image of the Queen may give rise to words such as 'rich', 'old', and 'London'.



These images were a result of word lists produced around the words 'French' and 'English'. The participants were Masters students at Nantes Science faculty, France. They were used to stimulate reactions from other participant groups. The PowerPoint of these images, as well as other associated documents can be found on my Sussex University online profile <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/languages/people/list/person/305725> or I can email them to you.



For an interesting alternative to these images of London, see <http://shitlondon.co.uk/> !

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