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The positioning of spoken language as a key (badly-needed) educational notion

Pozycjonowanie języka mówionego jako kluczowe
(bardzo potrzebne) pojęcie edukacyjne

Abstract

This paper introduces the notion of spoken language positioning, which has remained unrecognised but has the potential of affecting educational systems altogether on many different levels. The text covers the notion through four sections on how to understand, present, study, and implement the eponymous notion, respectively. Hence, the text first discusses the character and significance of positioning in education, exemplifying it with spoken language. Then, it presents how the notion serves as grounds for a holistic approach to spoken language, viewed in positivist terms as a concept or as an individually shaped construct. Four rules are formulated here as following from the holistic view. This is followed by an analysis of how the positioning of spoken language, as a hybrid, can be studied, with two complementary types of methodologies. The hybrid type of research is proposed as covering two stages, one ('Generalisation') complying with the positivist regime and the other one ('Specification') – with the constructivist rationale. The paper closes with a discussion of what the notion of positioning unravels for entire educational systems, how – despite its absence in educational science – paradigmatic a notion it is, and how it complements, follows and expands that of knowledge construction.

Keywords: spoken language, positioning, education, mixed study, holistic approach to speech

Abstrakt

Artykuł wprowadza pojęcie *pozycjonowania* języka mówionego, niezauważanego w teorii kształcenia pomimo wpływu, jaki wywiera ono na wielu poziomach edukacji. Tekst obejmuje cztery sekcje dotyczące tego, jak – kolejno – rozumieć, przedstawiać, badać i wdrażać tytułowe pojęcie. Na wstępie tekst omawia charakter i wagę *pozycjonowania* na przykładzie języka mówionego. Następnie przedstawia je jako podstawę podejścia holistycznego do języka mówionego, traktowanego jako albo pojęcie dające się przedstawić na skali, albo jako wielowymiarowy (niedający się skalować) konstrukt. Sformułowane są cztery zasady wynikające z holistycznego podejścia. Dalsza część tekstu to analiza tego, jak *pozycjonowanie* języka mówionego, rozumiane hybrydowo, można badać poprzez dwa

komplementarne typy metodologii. Hybrydowy rodzaj badań przedstawiony jest w formie dwóch etapów – pierwszego ('Uogólnienie'), ujmowanego pozytywistycznie, oraz drugiego ('Uszczegółowienie'), opartego na konstruktywizmie. Tekst zamyka dyskusja na temat tego, (a) co pojęcie *pozycjonowania* odsłania dla całego systemu kształcenia, (b) jak – mimo jego braku w badaniach pedagogicznych – paradygmatyczne jest to pojęcie, oraz (c) jak uzupełnia i poszerza ono pojęcie konstruowania wiedzy.

Słowa kluczowe: język mówiony, pozycjonowanie, edukacja, badanie mieszane, podejście holistyczne do mowy

1. The notion of positioning spoken language

The notion of positioning applied here with regard to spoken language serves a crucial diagnostic purpose: it helps to grasp an individual's approach to speaking in objective and subjective terms. In classroom settings it can provide teachers with most valuable information, because if they become aware of how their students position speech, the former can understand the latter's approach to learning altogether, which can make classroom instruction far more effective. Students (and individuals altogether) choose to speak for their private reasons, but each time they do, it partially determines their entire social functioning and educational success. This is not to say that students position speech deliberately or in any regular (behaviouristic) manner, but they do, mostly unconsciously, develop some approach to it which accompanies them throughout their education. As speech is present in all school subjects and at all levels of schooling, how it is positioned by students can and actually should be of interest to all teachers. The pivotal role of speech and how it is approached – individually – by students calls for a notion that can help grasp this personal approach and can contribute to improvement and to higher learning results. And although we might refer the eponymous notion to the other language skills, too, it is speaking that deserves primary attention in the world where students (and people altogether), becoming heavily dependent on phones and computers, predominantly just watch and listen.

Perhaps the simplest way of presenting the logic underlying this paper reads as follows: each person is an individual with a unique approach to spoken language. This approach is determined by numerous factors such as one's motivation, willingness to communicate, speech anxiety etc., all of which are hard to grasp jointly by empirical studies. Yet, there is a common denominator of different people's approaches: they can be referred to by means of both universal categories scales (e.g. important-unimportant) as well as with personal descriptors, falling out of scales, hierarchies, etc.

Each person can be prompted to reflect on how s/he views spoken language in such closed and open ways at the same time, and if we obtain two respective sets of data, we arrive at a comprehensive picture of how a person positions speech (on scales and within their own unique networks).

The eponymous notion of positioning can be understood by drawing an analogy to how positioning functions in the online world: when talking about positioning particular websites, we refer to how highly they are located on the lists of similar pages and how effectively they are prioritised. If they are positioned effectively enough, they remain on the top and are frequently exploited, but if the positioning is not successful or not undertaken altogether, the particular web pages appear low on the lists of search engines and, as a result, are not referred to by users. Much as humans radically differ from computers, the analogy here refers to several characteristics of the process and its outcomes:

- 1) re. the process: people position things (excuse the generalisation – I will elaborate on what specifically is positioned soon) in their minds, as a consequence of which they refer to them less or more frequently;
- 2) re. the criteria: people position things on the basis of both explicit as well as implicit criteria similarly to how the online positioning works, where certain criteria are easily noticeable (be it a location, a discipline, a category, a characteristic, depending on what we happen to be seeking), whilst others remain unknown to us as computer users and then we may wonder for what particular reason a certain item appears higher on the list of hits;
- 3) re. omnipresence: people keep positioning things – as relevant to one another – continuously despite the fact that this process remains highly unrecognisable and not spoken about; by the same token, no search engine will work without applying some form of positioning particular items;
- 4) re. changeability: people do not remain too constant in how they position things, with multiple facets of particular settings affecting the specific positioning of particular items on our mental list; similarly – and also essentially invisibly – the online positioning falls subject to change in such a degree that a search engine may come up with a different list of items just after a few seconds. This, however, does not exclude a relevant stability of some key elements.

The notion of positioning has been heavily exploited in many different fields, particularly marketing, where it refers to an overall strategy of making specific brands or products occupy a distinct position, relative to competing names or items – both objectively as well as subjectively in the mind of the customer. As Janiszewska & Insch note, brand positioning ‘determines

the framework of visual and communication-related execution' and 'future brand development as [it is] the basis for gaining competitive advantage' (Janiszewska & Insch 2012: 9). It can be said that the notion of positioning itself is positioned highly in the field in question, which is marked by, for example, the fact that dictionary definitions will mention this meaning as the first (or even) only meaning of the term, be it "the position held by a product in the opinion of customers, in comparison with its competitors' brands" (Collins 2024). What is worth emphasising here is the fact that so far the notion of positioning has not been used in the realm of education, which this very paper strives to change.

As noted above with reference to the criteria determining how/where things get positioned, certain characteristics are easily recognisable and they fall onto some scales, whilst others, equally active at the same time, remain unnoticed and retain a multidimensional character not falling to scales or rigid measurements. The same logic applies with regard to how people approach spoken language and how we speak about it:

- 1) on the one hand, they make remarks such as, on the positive side of the coin, "I really like speaking/talking", "I find speaking important for my overall development", "I speak to myself a lot", etc., or, on the negative side, "Speaking tires me", "I prefer learning in silence, without anyone or myself speaking", "There's too much spoken language and too little action", etc., and
- 2) on the other hand, (as not everything in people's lives gets categories and put into positions) they formulate comments made *without* any hint of hierarchisation on the character of spoken language, be it "Speaking is a natural part of learning, just like listening, testing, asking questions", "It's hard to imagine schooling without spoken language", "In our educational system spoken language is often replaced by graphics deprived of any words", etc.

The above implies that two forms of positioning speech by individuals can be envisaged, depending on what status people assign to spoken language and whether its position can be presented as stretching between pre-defined extremes or not:

- 1) spoken language as a **concept** placeable on different spectra stretching between two extremes such as 'unimportant-important', 'disliked-liked', 'rare-frequent', etc; under this perspective different people's (students') positioning of spoken language can be hierarchised and how they position speech can be easily compared against various criteria (presentable linearly): whilst one person may value and use spoken language a lot (i.e. position it highly on the level of beliefs and actions), another person

may value it as well, but use only when required (i.e. position it highly on the level of beliefs, but lowly on the level of actions). Under this perspective, spoken language shares its features with such concepts as income, education, age, etc. (cf. Measurement and Measurement Scales 2024), the common denominator of which is that they are generated by particular facts and can be presented on a scale. Such reasoning will be referred to as the **positivist** form of spoken language positioning;

- 2) spoken language as a **construct** individually structured and not presentable hierarchically between any extremes or on any scale; under this perspective different people's positioning of spoken language cannot be by any means objectively compared, with individuals categorising spoken language and associating it to other constructs differently. Under this perspective, spoken language has the status of a construct of such a non-measurable (latent) and multi-faceted character as, for instance, beauty, happiness, health, or justice (cf. Measurement and Measurement Scales 2024). Such reasoning will be referred to here as the **constructivist** form of spoken language positioning.

These two perspectives can be summarised as follows:

Table 1. Juxtaposition of the positivist and constructivist treatment of spoken language

spoken language – facet	positivist treatment	constructivist treatment
status	CONCEPT	CONSTRUCT
placement	linear	unsystematic
character	hierarchised	structured
descriptors	pre-determined / explicit	self-defined / implicit

The two perspectives are complementary to each other and the two types of remarks are manifestations of how we grasp reality and how we naturally approach spoken language.

2. Holistic approach to students' speech

If we look closely at the two types of remarks exemplified above and try to systematise them, we can see that they relate to spoken language on the level of beliefs, emotions, actions, and thoughts, which is reminiscent of the traditional theory of multi-lateral education (cf. Okoń 1967) as developed by its later proponents (esp. Niemierko 2019) and which is particularly evident with the first type of comments reflecting the first form of positioning, whereby spoken language is viewed as a scalable concept.

Here, the positioning can be grasped by a set of pre-determined descriptors placing speech on various spectra stretching between one extreme to the other and if we look at the four domains named above, we can exemplify this form of linear placement with the following graphic presenting a student's approach (Fig. 1).

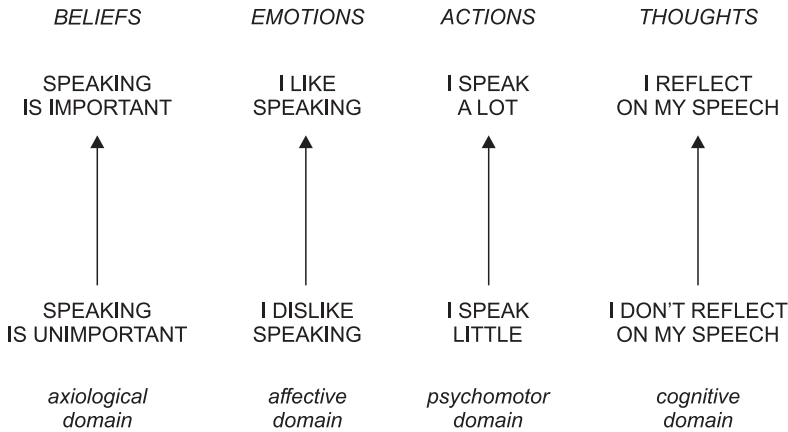


Fig. 1. Four dimensions of spoken language under the first form of positioning (positivist: concept)

This perspective of spoken language positioning offers direct means to perform two steps:

- first – with regard to an individual – to consider how one positions spoken language in terms of **intensity** in different dimensions, that is how intensely one believes in, feels about, acts with, or reflects on spoken language. Crude as the graphic may appear at first, people do specify their approach with regard to spoken language along such lines, positioning it differently in particular dimensions, and a high placement in one dimension does not necessitate an equal or comparable placement on any other of the entire set. Yet, when considered together, the four components add up to form an overall approach to spoken language, which could be visualised by imagining one big arrow made up of the four little ones, on which spoken language understood as a concept could be placed. From the educational perspective, it can be argued here that the highly desirable approach is that where spoken language is positioned at or near the four higher extremes, whilst the undesirable approach – that whereby spoken language is located at or near the low-lying extremes.
- second – with regard to differences between individuals – to grasp them as belonging to two sets: (a) differences in the **overall positioning** of spoken language, which we can visualise by marking four lower points

on all the four scales and four higher points, the former of which will yield four lower arrows and the latter will generate for higher arrows, i.e. a shorter aggregate arrow against a longer aggregate arrow, reflecting a less positive or more positive approach to spoken language, respectively; if we noted that with regard to two particular people, we might interpret this along the lines ‘one person positions spoken language higher across the four domains than the other person, which means that the former finds spoken language more important, has a stronger liking to speaking, speaks more, and reflects on spoken language more’; (b) differences in the **specific configurations** across the four dimensions of positioning, which we can visualise by marking, e.g., a lower point on the scale pertaining to beliefs, and a higher point on that relating to emotions, and – for another person – the other way round; the resulting aggregate arrows might be of the same length, but obtained by opposite contributions, so to speak, from the two dimensions in question; if we observed that that with regard to two particular people, we could interpret this as follows: ‘one person values spoken language more but speaks less than the other person, with whom the opposite situation is the case, which means that the other person likes using spoken language, but s/he does not assign any special importance to it’.

The concurrent involvement of all the four dimensions aligns with today’s holistic treatment of people and their development. The traditional separations and divisions have come to be questioned by many different fields and sub-disciplines showing through numerous findings that no dimension – be it cognition or affect – exists in isolation or in a vacuum, but, instead, they permanently co-exist and call for their joint treatment. Needless to say, if such discoveries are made in the field of sciences which underlie education, today’s learning and teaching methods need to comply with them. Most notably, this applies to neuroscience, which has shown, for example, that the link between cognition and affect is so strong that entirely rational decision-making process practically does not exist and it remains strongly affected (and essentially initiated) by affect (Beck 2019: 177). Similar reasoning concerning the interdependence between various dimensions that have traditionally been treated in separation from one another is represented by the extensive thread of recent publications focused on a student’s identity (e.g. Joseph 2004; Jenkins 2008; Fekete 2021), linguistic identity (Haugan 2020), or holistic approaches to identity construction (Fekete 2020).

Equally holistic is the second form of positioning. Although the constructivist perspective hugely differs from the earlier (positivist) one, there is one major similarity involved: it is equally **real**: on the one hand we,

most naturally, summarise our approach to speech in simple linear (i.e. positivist) terms (*I don't like speaking too much, I think a lot before I say anything at my business meetings, Speaking is highly important for learning history effectively, etc.*). On the other hand, we – what is equally human – develop our own (essentially constructivist) ways of referring to spoken language, we place it in completely different contexts, we use it for various reasons which are not as simple as binary causes along lines *like-dislike, rare-frequent, petty-significant, etc.* Life, we might say, is just too rich and too complex for such simple rules to operate, which, most notably, is partially hypocritical as at the same time people *do* tend to reduce their approach to speech to linear and binary terms, too. Alternatively, we could say that such a form is not so hypocritical, but complementary to those non-linear/non-binary. We can clarify this point by using a simple analogy to another concept we position on a daily basis – say, family. Quite analogically then, people both confine their approach by formulating statements putting their families on definable spectra such as *My family is most important for me* or *I concentrate too little on my family's happiness* as well as position their families within their own self-defined spaces which cannot be captured by one- or two-dimensional scales.

People's approach to spoken language is essentially, naturally and automatically, twofold: they regard it as a scalable concept (referable by pre-determined descriptors) or a multi-faceted construct (described in unique ways of an individual). Its holistic character additionally relates to the fact that its positioning **determines our functioning in our families, social environments, schooling, and work**, with speech, as Yunusova notes, 'afford[ing] humans with an almost limitless capacity for communication, self-expression and creativity' (Yunusova 2014: 52). In none of the said settings they generally remain quiet (in the sense of communicating things, meaning that the same applies to deaf people whose verbal "silence" is filled with sign language of the same function as normal oral speech) and this also affects the way people are perceived, liked, and understood by others. The notions of positivist and constructive positioning can help interpret this causal relationship in greater detail, with some general rules operating within and across the two notions:

Rule 1. (positivist perspective) The higher the (four-tier) positioning of spoken language, the higher the students' involvement in education and the higher their potential results. This rule applies to both how students themselves position spoken language as well as to how it is positioned by educational systems which can prompt a specific approach to speech on the parts of students. Most interestingly, the effect in question pertains not

only to the overall four-tier positioning considered together, but also to each of the four dimensions (domains) named. This is to say that any of the four components – a student's belief in the importance of speech, positive emotions relating to it, the very act of speaking, and reflecting on what is being said – contributes to the said involvement and thus has the potential of yielding high results. Whilst we often tend to confine this effect to the very act of speaking itself only, it may be the case that the other dimensions turn out to be equally (or even more) influential here.

Rule 2. (constructivist perspective) The positioning of spoken language remains unbound by any pre-determined categories, classifications, contexts, or measures. This has direct implications for its examination: when it is studied how a particular person positions speech, this should be done in such a way that this person's individual concepts are prioritised and treated as this person's "pulsating categories". In other words, maximum conceptual liberty needs to be allowed, similarly to how it is observed in qualitative studies (in which, as opposed to quantitative research, it is the respondents' language that is applied the most, not the researchers pre-set fixed terminology). The pulsating categories of an individual build up a consistent and coherent line of reasoning as each person naturally seeks consistency and coherence in the surrounding reality as well as in one's internal world. Accordingly, the studies of constructively-oriented positioning need to allow individual narrations during which personal latent (hidden) categories can be derived and articulated, shedding light on how a person positions spoken language in particular contexts.

Rule 3. (positivist-cum-constructivist perspective) For a student's comprehensive approach to spoken language to be well recognised, both the positivist and the constructivist lenses need to be applied. To appreciate the sense of their joint employment, we can consider two opposite situations in which only one perspective is taken into account: (a) if only positivist (behaviouristic) lenses are applied, we see the overall picture of how spoken language is viewed, but we hold no awareness as to why it is the case, or, in other words, what (construction) specifically underlies a person's approach to speaking; (b) if only constructivist lenses are employed, we become aware of how a student approaches speech in her or his own terms, but we do not know how its positioning compares to that of others. This is by no means to say that recognising the positivist or the constructivist perspective only is not worthwhile or nor educationally beneficial, but the two perspectives are complementary to each other. Although in multiple studies the common practice is to remain consistent by following – only – either the positivist or the constructive line of thought, in life it is simply natural to talk –

simultaneously – about how highly we think of people and phenomena (thus applying positivist terms) and how specifically we see them in greater detail in self-defined dimensions (thus resorting to constructive reasoning).

Rule 4. (positivist-cum-constructivist perspective) The positioning of spoken language by an individual is neither very dynamic nor too stable, which in practice means that it is subject to change, but its alteration is a slow gradual process – similarly to educational changes of a gross character. This can be accounted for in two ways, depending on which form of positioning we take into account: (a) from the positivist perspective, the fact that the positioning is also determined by one's beliefs as one of the concept's integral components implies that the positioning will tend to falter only slightly because one's beliefs, by definition, take time to change; (b) from the constructivist perspective, spoken language is too multi-faceted a construct to fall subject to change too easily, either; any rapid alteration would act against our natural innate search for coherence or, as psychologists could also put it, our avoidance of dissonance (be it cognitive, affective, or any other including what we might refer to on the basis of the four-tier logic axiological or psychomotor); we do not act against ourselves and rapid changes would violate our entire construction and/or particular personal constructs.

This set of rules can be summarised jointly by saying that if we wish to study the positioning of spoken language comprehensively and to secure grounds for a solid interpretation, we need to examine the two forms of positioning parallel to each other, that is once subjecting it to a scales-based evaluation and once leaving room for its unrestricted analysis, bearing in mind throughout the two types of studies that spoken language, both as a concept and as a construct, falls subject to slow positioning changes.

3. Hybrid treatment of students' approach to spoken language

It is only such research that assumes the form of a hybrid and takes into account the two perspectives above that will truly correspond to how students approach spoken language in reality. This is not to say that the two perspectives must be adopted concurrently, but either of them will invariably remain deficient without the other. Hence, on the one hand, the research in question needs to (alternately, not be confused with alternatively) comprise positivist study techniques employing repeatable patterns (Sławecki 2012: 79) as well as constructivist methods resting on the stance that there

exist different social worlds, functioning predominantly in human minds (ibidem: 80). Such two-foldedness of a person's natural and internally consistent approach to spoken language constitutes what we may refer to as its, as Bryman puts it, the 'epistemological and ontological baggage' (Bryman 2012: 649) and fully justifies or even necessitates the application of research having a mixed form and thus combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. In other words, the twofold notion of positioning clearly supports the validity of Creswell's formulation that 'mixed methods research has come of age' (Creswell 2003: 4) and the fact that the inclusion of only qualitative or quantitative methods would fall short here of the very human and social nature of the phenomenon of positioning.

Let us take a closer look at what methodological qualities follow from the two said perspectives. The two perspectives differ significantly and so must the corresponding methodology. In order to juxtapose them, we are going to refer to a selection of strata recognised by Guba & Lincoln in their updated version of the premises of alternative research paradigms (Guba & Lincoln 2009: 285–287) as well as their list of currently valid issues (Guba & Lincoln 2009: 285–287):

The two methodologies yield quantitative and qualitative data that, despite referring to the same subject matter (be it, one's approach to spoken language), cannot be added up together or combined by means of any objective measures (as the constructive methodology per se remains consistently subjective). Yet, the two sets of data are complementary and mutually supportive when it comes to forming a more complete and thus more real picture, for example, as in the case being considered here, how a particular person positions spoken language by means of pre-set descriptors, on the one hand, and self-specified 'labels', on the other hand.

One sensible option of carrying out hybrid studies comprising the two perspectives is to adopt the former perspective (outlined in the left column of Table 2) as first as providing us with **general** information as to how spoken language is positioned and the latter perspective (delineated by the right column of Table 2) as second and informing us on **specifics**. Following such reasoning, we conduct two-stage research, with the first stage revealing how a particular student locates spoken language (as a concept) on the four scales mentioned and defined with general descriptors, and the second stage expanding and deepening the picture with how the same student approaches spoken language individually (i.e. builds up a unique construct), wherever on the four scales it has been located. This is not to say that the positivist stage of studies needs to precede the constructivist one, but this sequence does favour the systematisation and diagnosis of students' – approach.

Table 2. Spoken language on positivist vs. constructive grounds – methodological facets

Stratum	positivist grounds	constructivist grounds
epistemological foundations	positioning seen in dualistic/objective terms, whereby the position of spoken language is presentable on scales stretching from one extreme to the other	positioning seen in transactional/subjective terms, whereby the position of spoken language cannot be simply pinpointed as being multi-faceted and personal
nature of knowledge	describable by fixed descriptors falling within pre-classified particular domains (beliefs, affect, actions, or thinking)	falling outside sets of predetermined descriptors , hence less easily “grasp-able” and highly individual and flexible labels
educational treatment	quantity-oriented : aimed at the achievement of spoken norms	quality-oriented : ongoing, heavily contextualised
assessment criteria	conventional standards setting lower and higher forms of speech	experience-based one-off yardsticks
methodological lenses	verification of the positioning viewed on the basis of compliance of speech with pre-set features; validation of hypotheses	examination of the positioning view through the prism of the character of speech assigned by particular language users

Stage 1: GENERALISATION

In the first stage, we can add up the four components (rankings) presented in Figure 1 and thereby recognise three overall positions (degrees) of spoken language:

- 1) primary positioning, with spoken language being placed at the four highs, which translates into speech being seen as important, liked, carried out and reflected on a lot;
- 2) secondary positioning, with spoken language being placed “in between” and taking a number of intermediary positions, in some cases, for example, appreciated but not undertaken much, whilst in others – not considered crucial, but enjoyed, etc.;
- 3) tertiary positioning, with spoken language being placed at the four lows, which translates into spoken language not being valued, not liked, not performed or reflected on.

These three degrees of spoken language imply assigning to spoken language different roles in the educational process by different students and functioning accordingly, that is:

- 1) the primary positioning implies the **central** role of spoken language, which means that it becomes an **aim** per se to a person who treats spoken language as a vital important attribute;

- 2) the secondary positioning implies a **prominent** or **supportive** role of spoken language, which means that it is conceptualised in the area of **methods** by a person who treats spoken language as a tool serving the understanding of content and the learning of various subjects;
- 3) the tertiary positioning implies a **marginal** role of spoken language, which means that it is classified as falling into the domain of **resources** only by a person who treats spoken language as something to be used to perform tasks (more crucial than the spoken language itself).

This – i.e. different locations of spoken language – can be presented as follows (Fig. 2).

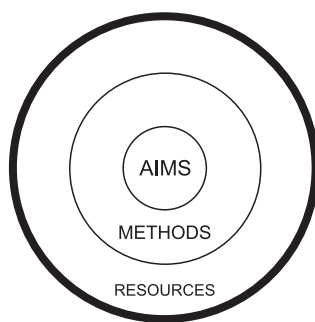


Fig. 2. Three degrees of spoken language (positivist) positioning

What the above implies is that there occurs a marked degree of **cumulativeness** here, which can be expressed in the following way: if a person sees their spoken language as an aim in itself, s/he will naturally recognise its role in the pool of resources and in the repertoire of methods, but not the other way round. In other words, if a person has come to recognise spoken language in the very centre of education, s/he will have acknowledged its presence in the body of educational resources and learning/teaching techniques, but the opposite will not hold, meaning that a person who sees spoken language as underlying (only) resources or forming (only) the substance of learning or teaching methods will not include spoken language per se in the set of their personal aims.

Stage 2: SPECIFICATION

In the second stage we can reach lower or deeper, so to speak, by addressing problems more rudimentary than those posed in the first stage, without assuming the existence of any particular benchmarks, boundaries, facets, or dimensions. On the linguistic level, this implies a different form of research problems, the key characteristic of which is openness and lack

of any possible suppositions or understatements. Hence, in the second stage we can ask about *how spoken language is positioned* (rather than *at what point*), *what determines the positioning of spoken language* (rather than *how do emotions relate to the positioning of spoken language*), *what is the character of facets underlying the positioning of spoken language* (rather than *what is their intensity*), or *does the positioning of spoken language occur multi-dimensionally* (rather than *how can the positioning of spoken language be presented vertically or horizontally*).

The constructivist positioning of spoken language (P-SL) is less easily graspable and describable than its positivist form as it rests on the student's unique mental framework forming the grounds for the processes of assimilation and accommodation (as distinguished by Jean Piaget and outlined graphically by Dickson et al. (2016)). Yet, certain – highly general – lenses can be adopted for the systematic consideration of how the constructivist form of spoken language positioning proceeds:

Table 3. Four types of lenses involved in the constructivist positioning of spoken language (P-SL)

Semantic lenses	Structural lenses	Pragmatic lenses	Evaluative lenses
P-SL rests on a person's associations : it can be associated with, say, development, education, work, or recreation the most; with other linguistic constructs or non-linguistic elements; with various goals, needs, settings, situations, actions, etc.;	P-SL involves a person's categorisation : it can be categorised as a component of a bigger whole or be itself divided into smaller parts, of whatever names; thereby, it can be placed within a certain context serving as a system of reference for its positioning;	P-SL entails its specific applications : it can be put to different uses, each time serving a different function; thereby, it can be assigned a different role complementary to other co-existing components;	P-SL implies its specific judgments : it can be assessed through different criteria determined by particular circumstances; hence, it can fall subject to various assessment systems operating within wider frameworks

4. Towards the positioning-based paradigm of education

The notion of positioning, exemplified above with regard to spoken language, points to a number of phenomena and human characteristics which educational systems are continuously determined by and which lead to the claim that the notion in question needs to be made more apparent and considered paradigmatic:

- 1) the process of positioning retains a twofold character, meaning that we both relate things to linear (vertical or horizontal) scales of pre-determined descriptors as well as to our own sets of terms; in other words, we naturally treat phenomena and particular bits of our knowledge as either (closed) concepts or (open) constructs, as a result of which they can be regarded as quantitatively-qualitative **hybrids** to be studied accordingly;
- 2) the positioning occurs both on the part of students and teachers, which means that it keeps serving two functions: first, it is a psycholinguistic notion applied **internally** by students themselves, and, second, it is didactic notion applied **externally** by teachers making decisions as to how things are positioned in their classrooms. Ideally, the positioning made by teachers should match that of students, which can best be achieved when the very issue of how (and why) things are positioned are discussed in a fully explicit matter and negotiated with students openly and regularly;
- 3) as we have observed with the first form of positioning, we are conceptually unfair, so to speak, in that we do not assign concepts the same status, but, instead, we tend to be judgmental and emotional about them (i.e. we position them differently in particular dimensions). We clearly differ from machines and robots in this respect and this feature of ours – which can be regarded both as a weakness as well as our strength – must be taken into account in education by allowing something of a (cognitive, axiological, psychomotor, or emotional) **bias**. Recognising the degree of such conceptual partiality, particularly the dimensions in which spoken language is positioned lower or treated as non-central, is significant for the educational effects, which we will address later;
- 4) the exact nature (arrangement) of this bias is invariably a question of what educational systems we have happened to be shaped in, which, in the case of apparent differences, can lead to less or more easily observable **national inclinations**. Specifically, we can note here such positioning of spoken language that is consistent with well established and described peculiarities of people coming from different countries, that is, for example, Spaniards speaking a lot and liking it, but doing it with lots of fillers (thus spoken language being positioned high in the psychomotor and affective domains, but lower on the cognitive spectrum). And conversely: Japanese people, speaking less, but being in the habit of paying much attention to nearly every single word they choose to articulate (thus positioning spoken language lower on the spectrum of actions, but higher on the cognitive one).

On the theoretical level, we can view positioning as occurring after the process of knowledge construction. Its absence in the theories of education can be argued to be highly detrimental to educational science and practice. Most interestingly, whilst many educators will think of the early stage of development during which different concepts and constructs are assigned meanings, far fewer will consider what occurs to these concepts and constructs later, as if they were assigned their meanings and place in the mental structure once and for all. Each concept and each construct is subject to personal ongoing evaluation and to change and, this being the case, the positioning of concepts and constructs continues. This leads to two different ways in which the notions/processes of constructing and positioning can be juxtaposed against each other:

- 1) first, as noted above, chronologically, with the latter essentially following the former; perhaps the simplest way of clarifying this point would be to say that first we form concepts/constructs individually but also in the course of social negotiation, and, then, we position them after we have come to see and relate them to other concepts/constructs. In other words, we position concepts which we have recognised as belonging to our everyday reality;
- 2) second, with regard to scope: whilst (knowledge) construction has come to be generally understood in cognitive terms only, the positioning of concepts/constructs has a much broader appeal and may relate to various dimensions of our functioning, namely on the level of beliefs, actions, affects, or thinking (and – notwithstanding what we have said above in connection with the holistic treatment of people and development – whatever categories or “shades” of our approach to spoken language we come up with, they will fall within these four domains).

It transpires from the above that **in education we badly need the notion of positioning**, which can be particularly revealing when applied to spoken language. The notion grasps a number of human features in our approach to any subject matter we can envisage, and in the case of spoken language can serve all range of diagnostic, instructional, and evaluative purposes – thus proving essential at the stage of planning, conducting, and assessing education. It can help us move one substantial step further on our path of educational and linguistic research and practice, both of which have recently become excessively dominated by reasoning in terms of knowledge construction, which calls for a supplementary notion capturing how subject matter is individually approached after it has become incorporated into the student’s conceptual structure. At the same time, the notion in question demonstrates a significant character of how each of us approaches spoken

language, with that approach having a hybrid, individually- and socially-driven natural character. Possibly, in the course of time, the model presented in this paper might be enhanced with some neurological advancements, making it possible to grasp the second (constructivist) thread of positioning better. Yet, as it is, the model itself seems to have the advantage of being easily graspable by educators and students and to offer most concrete means for maximising the role of spoken language in education.

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