Identity is a concept that has been defined in many ways and scholars have built theories of identity to explain persons’ and people’s sense of the term. In this lecture, I compare and contrast theories developed in second language acquisition, social psychology, anthropology, and communication sciences and conclude that each is grounded on the particularity of a social context. To expand the particular contexts studied by identity theorists, I consider the varied responses of individuals and groups to the influence of a hegemonic language. Although contact by speakers of a local language with a hegemonic language is sometimes seen as endangering the local language and threatening speakers’ identities, I reject that as a pessimistic oversimplification. I reviewed these studies of persons in contact with hegemonic languages: Uyghurs in China in contact with Han Chinese, Quichua musicians in contact with Spanish in Ecuador and the United States, and Advertising copywriters in Korea, bloggers in Malaysia, and a Singaporean poet in contact with World Englishes. They provide new insights into how local identities are contested and creatively constructed in contact with hegemonic languages.

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