

According to the author, when might our national identities be most relevant when interacting with people of different nationalities?

Under what circumstances might our national identities be less relevant?

Why?

2.2.1 Contextual relevancy of social identity

Even though we each have multiple, intersecting social identities, it is not the case that all of our identities are always relevant. As with the meanings of our linguistic resources, their relevance is dynamic and responsive to contextual conditions. In other words, while we approach our communicative encounters as constellations of various identities, the particular identity or set of identities that becomes significant depends on the activity itself, our goals, and the identities of the other participants. Let us assume, for example, that we are travelling abroad as tourists. In our interactions with others from different geographical regions it is likely that our national identity will be more relevant than, say, our gender or social class. Thus, we are likely to interact with each other as, for example, Americans, Spaniards, Australians or Italians. On the other hand, if we were to interact with these same individuals in schooling events such as parent-teacher conferences, we are likely to find that certain social roles take on more relevance than our nationalities, and we will interact with each other as parents, teachers or school administrators. Likewise, in workplace events, we are likely to orient to each other's professional identity, and interact as, for example, employers, colleagues or clients, rather than as parents and teachers, or Americans and Canadians.