

## **A Comparative Study of Native and Non-Native Novice EFL Teachers in Relation to Their Identity and Agency in Canada**

Shiva Kaivanpanah <sup>1</sup>

Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

Sara Mahabadi

PhD in Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language and Literature, Alborz Campus, University of Tehran, Iran

Received: 25 January 2018      Accepted: 17 April 2018

### **Extended Abstract**

#### **1. Introduction**

In studying how teachers work, learn, and grow, there seems to be an expansive interest in teacher identity (e.g., Abednia, 2012; Alsup, 2006; Kayi-Aydar, 2015). The concept of situated, multiple, and dynamic identity forms a common feature across studies grounded in multiple theories (MacLure, 1993). One issue in language teacher education, particularly pertinent to the study of teacher identity, is teacher agency (Vongalis-Macrow, 2007). When individuals take on agentic positions, they have the capacity or willingness to act. Agency and positionings are therefore closely linked, one influencing the other (Kayi-Aydar, 2015).

However, the identities of novice teachers, especially possible differences among native and non-native ESL teachers, have not been adequately addressed. To our knowledge, little is known regarding their identity negotiation in relation to their educational context and English language learners, and how such negotiations influence their agency, interactions, and practices.

Thus, to better understand the identity construction of novice ESL teachers, this study, drawing on positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) is investigating how novice native and non-native ESL teachers position themselves and are positioned by others in their oral and written narratives, and how their positioning interacts with their agency.

This study uses Positioning Theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) as what Glaser and Strauss (1967) call 'substantive theory'. Substantive theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) has been defined as a strategic link in the formulation and generation of grounded formal theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) believed that although formal theory can be generated directly from data, it is more desirable, and usually necessary, to start the formal theory from a substantive one. Positioning Theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) is an appropriate theoretical lens for capturing two crucial aspects of identity: its

---

1. Corresponding Author: shkaivan@ut.ac.ir

fragmentation and its ambivalence and that is why it was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study.

## **2. Methodology**

This study is a qualitative case study by design. 10 novice ESL teachers, five native and five non-native (Iranian), participated in this study. All of them were teaching at a well-established private English language institute in Montreal, Québec (BLI). They all signed the consent form which ensured the confidentiality of the shared information and agreed to work closely with the researcher for a period of 4 months. They all held a Master's degree in TESOL/TEFL from recognized institutions and their teaching experience ranged between 6 month and three years. Participants were a mix of 10 male and female teachers aged between 25 and 30 years old. The data for this study consisted of interviews, journal entries, observations and researcher's reflective memos.

## **3. Discussion**

All the transcribed interviews, journal entries, field notes and reflective memos were transferred to a qualitative analysis software called 'Dedoose' (version 4.12). Subsequently, data reading and analysis began. In order to answer the research questions, the data were coded in two different subsets of native ESL and non-native ESL teachers. In the open coding procedure, data were examined closely and carefully by the researchers. 258 initial codes eventually emerged from the recursive and line-by-line readings and were then compared to establish their descriptive content and to confirm that they were faithfully grounded in the data. Multiple readings of data and multiple reviews of the codes helped to group the initial codes and categorize them under the 6 headings of the interview (background, self-image, sled-efficiency, job motivation, future perspective and emotional aspect).

After the open coding, in the second phase or the axial coding, data were put back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories while elevating the level of conceptual analysis. Four major categories were identified for each group and each major category was further divided into three subcategories. Major categories for native ESL teachers were: 1) minimal professional support, 2) reaching stability in seeing self as a teacher, 3) robust agency, and 4) long-term goals. Major categories for Iranian ESL teachers were: 1) inadequate but growing confidence, 2) struggling in creating professional ties, 3) deficient agency and 4) short-term goals.

In the last phase categories were integrated to form a grounded theory. The representation of teacher agency was always the core theme around which all the other explanations and descriptions were organized in both oral and written narratives of participants. Hence, it was logical to choose teacher agency as the core category in each group as it was easier to create the story line with the core category in place.

#### 4. Conclusion

The results of this study were consistent with those of Beijaards, Verloop, & Vermunt (2000) in which three types of knowledge that may influence teachers' identity were identified as: subject matter, pedagogical knowledge and didactical knowledge. In the case of non-native ESL teachers it was observed that their perceived lack of knowledge influenced their confidence and consequently negatively affected their agency. Other studies have shown that professional agency is salient in the process of professional identity negotiation, change and continuity (e.g., Vähäsantanen, 2015). This is exactly in line with the results of our analysis. Agency or lack thereof was a prominent theme in the data derived across different sources and that was why it was chosen as the core category in the last phase of the analysis.

Kostogriz and Peeler (2007) have shown that adapting to a new professional community may result in the renegotiation of professional identity. This was also the case for our non-native ESL teachers. One of the main categories of identity in Iranian ESL teachers was identified as struggles in creating professional ties with native colleagues. Moussu and Liurda (2008) have stated that it is critical to recognize the importance of a speaker's acceptance by a community as one of its members, as it is what will ultimately be determining the social recognition of the non-native speakers' identity. Not being accepted and recognized by native teachers as an equal member of the community made the integration process into the new professional environment harder for Iranian teachers in this study.

**Keywords:** Agency, Identity, Novice Teacher, Positioning

#### References

- Abednia, A. (2012). Teachers' professional identity: Contributions of a critical EFL teacher education course in Iran. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28*(5), 706-717.
- Alsup, J. (2006). *Teacher identity discourses: Negotiating personal and professional spaces*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Árva, V., & Medgyes, P. (2000). Native and non-native teachers in the classroom. *System, 28*(3), 355-372.
- Ball, D. (1972). *Self and identity in the context of deviance: The case of criminal abortion: Theoretical perspectives on deviance*. New York: Basic Books.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 20*(2), 107-128.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., Morine-Dershimer, G., & Tillema, H. (2005). *Teacher professional development in changing conditions*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Beijaard, D., Verloop, N., & Vermunt, J. D. (2000). Teachers' perceptions of professional identity: An exploratory study from a personal knowledge perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 16*(7), 749-764.

- Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2006). How is agency possible? Towards an ecological understanding of agency-as-achievement. Learning lives: Learning, identity, and agency in the life course. Working Paper Five, Exeter: Teaching and Learning Research Programme.
- Britzman, D. P. (2012). *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Bullough, R. V., Knowles, J. G., Crow, N. A., Grace, G., & Lawn, M. (1992). Emerging as a teacher. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 40(2), 183-185.
- Cameron, D. (2013). Willingness to communicate in English as a second language as a stable trait or context-influenced variable. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 36(2), 177-196.
- Chong, S. (2011). Development of teachers' professional identities: From pre-service to their first year as novice teachers. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 8(2), 219-233.
- Clarke, M. (2008). *Language teacher identities: Co-constructing discourse and community*. Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- Coldron, J., & Smith, R. (1999). Active location in teachers' construction of their professional identities. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 31(6), 711-726.
- Danielewicz, J. (2014). *Teaching selves: Identity, pedagogy, and teacher education*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20(1), 43-63.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1999). Positioning and personhood. In R. Harré, & L. V. Langenhove (Eds.), *Positioning theory* (pp. 32-52). Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Day, C., Kington, A., Stobart, G., & Sammons, P. (2006). The personal and professional selves of teachers: Stable and unstable identities. *British educational research journal*, 32(4), 601-616.
- De Munck, V. C., & Sobo, E. J. (1998). *Using methods in the field: A practical introduction and casebook*. Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman Altamira.
- Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(4), 962-1023.
- Flores, M. A., & Day, C. (2006). Contexts which shape and reshape new teachers' identities: A multi-perspective study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(2), 219-232.
- Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2003). *Educational research: An introduction* (7th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gee, J. P. (2000). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education*, 25(1), 99-125.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). Grounded theory: The discovery of grounded theory. *Sociology the Journal of The British Sociological Association*, 12, 27-49.
- Handelman, D. (2008). Returning to cosmology: Thoughts on the positioning of belief. *Social Analysis*, 52(1), 181-195.

- Harré, R., & Slocum, N. (2003). Disputes as complex social events: On the uses of positioning theory. *Common Knowledge*, 9(1), 100-118.
- Harré, R., & Van Langenhove, L. (2008). Positioning theory. *Self-Care, Dependent Care & Nursing*, 16(1), 28-32.
- Jenlink, P. M. (2014). *Teacher identity and the struggle for recognition: Meeting the challenges of a diverse society*. Lanham: R&L Education.
- Kayl-Aydar, H. (2015). Multiple identities, negotiations, and agency across time and space: A narrative inquiry of a foreign language teacher candidate. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 12(2), 137-160.
- Kelchtermans, G. (1993). Getting the story, understanding the lives: From career stories to teachers' professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9(5-6), 443-456.
- Kelchtermans, G., & Hamilton, M. L. (2004). The dialectics of passion and theory: Exploring the relation between self-study and emotion. In J. Loughran, M. L. Hamilton, V. K. LaBoskey, & T. Russell (Eds.), *International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices* (pp. 785-810). Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Korthagen, F. A. (2004). In search of the essence of a good teacher: Towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(1), 77-97.
- Korthagen, F. A. (2004). In search of the essence of a good teacher: Towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(1), 77-97.
- Kostogriz, A., & Peeler, E. (2007). Professional identity and pedagogical space: Negotiating difference in teacher workplaces. *Teaching Education*, 18(2), 107-122.
- Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), 899-916.
- McLean, S. V. (1999). Becoming a teacher: The person in the process. In R. P. Lipka, & Th. M. Brinthaupt (Eds.), *The role of self in teacher development* (55-58). New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society* (Vol. 111). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mockler, N. (2011). Becoming and 'being' a teacher: Understanding teacher professional identity. In N. Mockler, & J. Sachs (Eds.), *Rethinking educational practice through reflexive inquiry* (pp. 123-138). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- Mockler, N. (2011). Beyond 'what works': Understanding teachers' identity as a practical and political tool. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 17(5), 517-528.
- Moghaddam, F. M., & Harré, R. (2010). Words, conflicts and political processes. In F. M. Moghaddam & R. Harré (Eds.), *Words of conflict, words of war: How the*

- language we use in political processes sparks fighting* (1-30). Santa Barbara: Praeger.
- Moussu, L., & Llurda, E. (2008). Non-native English-speaking English language teachers: History and research. *Language Teaching*, 41(3), 315-348.
- Olsen, B. (2010). *Teaching for success: Developing your teacher identity in today's classroom*. Boulder/London: Paradigm Publishers
- Pennington, M. C. (2014). Teacher identity in TESOL: A frames perspective. In Y. L. Cheung, S. B. Said, & P. Kwanghyun (Eds.), *Advances and current trends in language teacher identity research* (pp. 16-30). Abington: Routledge.
- Phillips, D. J., & Hayes, B. A. (2008). Securing the oral tradition: Reflective positioning and professional conversations in midwifery education. *Collegian*, 15(3), 109-114.
- Priestley, M., Edwards, R., Priestley, A., & Miller, K. (2012). Teacher agency in curriculum making: Agents of change and spaces for maneuvers. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 42(2), 191-214.
- Pyhältö, K., Pietarinen, J., & Soini, T. (2012). Do comprehensive school teachers perceive themselves as active professional agents in school reforms? *Journal of Educational Change*, 13(1), 95-116.
- Ray, J. M. (2009). A template analysis of teacher agency at an academically successful dual language school. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 21(1), 110-141.
- Rex, L. A., & Schiller, L. (2009). *Using discourse analysis to improve classroom interaction*. New York: Routledge.
- Rodgers, C. R., & Scott, K. H. (2008). The development of the personal self and professional identity in learning to teach. In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, & D. J. McIntyre (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education: Enduring questions in changing contexts* (3rd ed., pp. 732-756). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Rogers, R., & Wetzel, M. M. (2013). Studying Agency in literacy teacher education: Layered approach to positive discourse analysis. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 10(1), 62-92.
- Sachs, J. (2001). Teacher professional identity: Competing discourses, competing outcomes. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(2), 149-161.
- Sammons, P., Day, C., Kington, A., Gu, Q., Stobart, G., & Smees, R. (2007). Exploring variations in teachers' work, lives and their effects on pupils: Key findings and implications from longitudinal mixed-method study. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(5), 681-701.
- Schensul, J. S., Schensul, J. J., & LeCompte, D. M. (1999). *Enhanced ethnographic methods: Observation, interviews, and questionnaires*, Vol. 2. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Singh, G., & Richards, J. C. (2006). Teaching and learning in the language teacher education course room: A critical sociocultural perspective. *RELC journal*, 37(2), 149-175.

- Søreide, G. E. (2006). Narrative construction of teacher identity: Positioning and negotiation. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 12(5), 527-547.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage publications.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Procedures and techniques for developing g theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Vähäsantanen, K. (2015). Professional agency in the stream of change: Understanding educational change and teachers' professional identities. *Teaching and teacher education*, 47, 1-12.
- Van Langenhove, L., & Harré, R. (1999). Introducing positioning theory. In R. Harre & L. van Langenhove (Eds.), *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action* (pp. 14–31). Blackwell: Oxford.
- Varghese, M. M. (2006). Bilingual teachers-in-the-making in Urbantown. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 27(3), 211-224
- Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B., & Johnson, K. A. (2005). Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 4(1), 21-44.
- Walkington, J. (2005). Becoming a teacher: Encouraging development of teacher identity through reflective practice. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 33(1), 53–64.
- Yin, R. (2003). *Case study research. Design and methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.