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Transcultural Voices: Exploring Notions of Identity in Transnational Language Teachers' Personal Narratives

Matilde Gallardo

1   Introduction

The internationalisation of Modern Foreign Language (MFL) teaching and related occupations in the UK can be traced back to the sixteenth century, to the movement of transnational collectives such as diplomats, merchants, reformers and political emigrés (Gallardo 2006). It is also linked to global economic migratory phenomena in the Western economy in contemporary times. Transnational language teachers, as cultural transmitters, have played a valuable role in shaping and influencing social, cultural and educational attitudes while belonging to *communities of memory* (Erll 2011) and establishing interconnectedness between distinct worlds. They may retain connections with their place of origin through national group membership, frequent visits to the home country and use of electronically mediated communication, but their multidimensional identity also needs to be understood from the perspective of the self and the process

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of assimilation and integration into the host society they experience. As pluri-cultural and pluri-lingual individuals with multiple memberships—linguistic, cultural, national, professional—teachers embody the idea of the transnational, understood as movement in space across national borders (Rothberg 2014). They also represent the concept of transculturality (Welsch 1995), as they move in cross-cultural spaces and operate in a world of translations and reconfigurations of established cultural national themes, references, representations, images and concepts (Assmann 2014).

Following a post-structuralist, post-modern conceptual orientation (Giddens 1991; Akkerman and Meijer 2011) in which identity is understood as "[…] a dynamic personal life project that is nevertheless conditioned by the social context" (Werbińska 2017, p. 21), in this chapter I investigate the experiences and perceptions of identity of six transnational MFL teachers living and working in the UK, manifested in their personal narratives in the form of meaningful reflective accounts. My aim is to reveal how transnational language teachers approach the process of identity construction by looking at the situated nature of their narrated experiences and beliefs and the contextual factors influencing their personal and professional choices and how these may correspond with the values and attitudes they transmit to their learners. In particular, I want to explore the following questions: How do transnational language teachers identify themselves with being language teachers in the context of their transcultural experiences? What is their interpretation of key concepts which are intrinsic to the idea of identity, such as *homeland*, *otherness*, *change*, *belonging*? What are their feelings and beliefs about the activity of teaching and the profession?

Through this investigation I aim to make a contribution to the field of MFL teacher identity and more specifically to the under-researched topic of transnational language teacher identity construction.

2   Theoretical Framework Underpinning the Study

The field of language teacher identity which originated in applied linguistics and general educational research has attracted increasing interest in the

last decade or so. In sociocultural theory (Wenger 2006; Kramsch 1998; Varghese 2018) the notion of identity, understood to mean the aggregate of a person's self beliefs which may be private or public and may differ from one relational context to another (Taylor 2013), relates to *desire*, "the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation, and the desire for security and safety" (Norton 1997, p. 140). In post-structuralist theory (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Norton 2013), identity is interpreted as the reflexive construction of the self, as a process which connects knowledge, personal and social change and which involves constant adaptation and adjustment (Giddens 1991). This idea is based on the assumption that individuals are flexible and adaptive and also that they exercise agency making decisions about shaping their professional lives and values (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Kalaja et al. 2016; White 2018). Under post-modern views, identity emerges as a multiple, hybrid and heterogeneous mindset made up of several selves, which is subject to change and interwoven with social, political and global factors, rendering the nature of the identity construct dynamic (Nunan and Choi 2010). It is also subject to the associations and attachments individuals may forge with the communities which they encounter and with whose ideals, norms and values they may identify.

Transnational language teachers, as members of the diverse multicultural urban landscape resulting from the movement of peoples (Simpson and Hepworth 2010; Modood 2013), are a representative case of the hybrid, multiple and dynamic identities already considered. Their personal experiences conditioned by the geographical and cross-cultural spaces they inhabit are affected by the processes of assimilation, integration and citizenship which define the societal culture in which they negotiate a sense of individual social self and group identity as members of communities of practice (Wenger 2006). However, the internal life history of the person must also be considered in this process. Ricoeur (1981) referred to this both in terms of *idem* (sameness, permanence in time) and *ipse* (self, individuality) and to the mediating role that *narrative identity* plays in the dialectic relationship existing between those two aspects. Likewise, narrative identity, as stated by Werbińska (2017), has to be understood not as an enumeration of events in somebody's life, but as "[…] finding "the key" through which a person can reach the meanings of his or her existence" (2017, p. 24).

In this chapter the idea of a collective language teacher identity, whereby there are national-based groups of people with a common cultural denomination and language, is rejected in favour of considering the individual teachers' voices making meaning of their personal experiences and perspectives and taking into account *the social world* as well as *the self* as intrinsically related elements (Canrinus et al. 2011; Varghese 2018; Van Leeuwen 2009).

Among the identity frameworks examined for the purpose of this chapter (Barkhuizen 2017; Barkhuizen et al. 2014; Varghese et al. 2016; Cheung et al. 2015; Norton 2013; Tsui 2011), I focus attention on the "Three As Language Teacher Identity Framework" (3ALTIF) by Werbińska (2016, 2017). This reviews the impact that institutional and personal environments have on teachers' professional identities by showing how language teacher professional identity is constructed around the three domains of *affiliation*, *attachment* and *autonomy*. It provides a holistic approach to discussing key questions in relation to language teachers' professional identity, which include "Who am I as a language teacher?" (affiliation), "How do I teach?" (attachment) and "What am I allowed to do?" (autonomy) (Werbińska 2016, p. 137). These concepts and questions are highly relevant to my study on transnational language teachers' construction of identity which is the basis of this chapter.

3   The Study

This chapter investigates the perceptions and beliefs of identity in a group of six transnational MFL teachers in the UK. The idea originated from meetings with fellow language teachers in which questions around our own identity as transnational individuals and as members of the MFL teaching profession emerged as a frequent topic of debate. The need to share experiences and views, as well as to reflect on the processes that shaped our lives and those of fellow practitioners, became critical in the present climate of the decline of modern languages as an academic subject and the socio-economic and political scenarios that affect many transnational individuals in the UK.

3.1   Methodology

The investigation was conducted using a Narrative Inquiry methodological approach (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Clandinin 2016), which places teachers' voices at the core of the inquiry in the form of reflective stories.

From the perspective of sociocultural theory, narrative appears to be naturally connected to teacher biographies and autobiographies (Moen 2006; Nunan and Choi 2010; Barkhuizen et al. 2014; De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2015). Similarly, teachers appear to value engaging with the reflective autobiographical process because it allows them to explore their narrated identity as they re-construct and re-connect their personal and professional selves (Bukor 2011), which becomes part of the act of inquiry (Nunan and Choi 2010; Belcher and Connor 2001). In the case of transnational language teachers, retroactive first-person narratives are especially relevant because they offer insights into their experiences of cross-cultural struggles (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000) and allow them to analyse "spatial and temporal scenarios that go beyond the here and now", as explained by De Costa and Norton (2017, p. 6).

The personal narratives allowed teachers participating in this study to create descriptions about their experiences and also allowed me as a researcher to develop my own narrative to make sense of the experiences of others. As all human action is dialogic in nature (Bakhtin 1986), it is the interaction between these teachers' voices and my own voice and my personal reflection as a transnational language teacher, that creates meaning of their perceptions of identity in relation to the social contexts which they inhabit. This is what Moen (2006) following Ricoeur (1981) calls an *open work*, as the meaning in the researcher's final narrative report "opens for a wide range of interpretations by others who read and hear about the report" (Moen 2006, p. 62).

As a researcher, I encouraged participating teachers to look back and to reflect both on past and present actions that shaped their lives as transnational and transcultural language teachers, while I also reflected on the connections between their experiences and my own story as a member of the profession. I subsequently interpreted their stories within the theoretical framework of identity already presented in this chapter. Through this process, the participants and I became auto-ethnographers when constructing

Table 1 Participants' characteristics

Participants' characteristics
• The six participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6) are female
• Four are Spanish (P1, P2, P3, P4 and teach Spanish language and culture, with one teacher also teaching Intercultural Communication (P1). Two teachers were Italian and teach Italian language and culture (P5, P6)
• They have an average of between fifteen and eighteen years teaching experience (more in some cases) and currently work in tertiary education, although some also have experience of secondary and further education
• All of them have been educated to degree level in relevant subjects (language studies, translation, English language) and have additional post-graduate qualifications (three MAs, two PhDs and one PGCE/TEFL)
• They have lived in at least two countries, including the UK and other European countries
• They are fluent in at least two languages, English being one of them. Three teachers also spoke other European languages

our own stories (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2015) and reflecting on our identities.

3.2   Participants

Language teachers participating in this study did so in the context of the Diasporic Identities and the Politics of Language (DIPL) research project under which this study was carried out. The DIPL is a research strand of the Language Acts and Worldmaking project, already mentioned in the introductory chapter of this book. It investigates the role of modern language teachers in the UK with a view to challenging perceived attitudes about language education.

From an initial workshop in January 2017 organised by the DIPL team at King's College London for MFL teachers interested in joining the project, six language teachers voluntarily agreed to participate in this study and contribute theirautobiographical narratives. They generally share the characteristics of the larger cohort of language teachers involved in the overall project, which can be seen in Table 1.

The ethical aspects of this investigation were considered and the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2018) guidelines were adhered to.

3.3   Data Collection and Analysis

The investigation benefited from a previous initial survey with twenty-nine MFL teachers carried out under the umbrella DIPL project in 2017 in which I was also involved. The initial survey encouraged teachers to talk about their personal stories as language teachers in the UK, to discuss their feelings about the profession and the challenges in doing the job. This provided the context which led to the investigation into teachers' personal narratives, the focus of this chapter. Six teachers responded favourably to the expression of interest sent to all participants in the DIPL project. The process for obtaining the data, based on Long et al. (2012) consisted of the following stages:

Stage 1:   A short personal details questionnaire to establish participants' profile (languages spoken, mother tongue(s), years of teaching experience).

Stage 2:   A personal reflection on the concept of identity prompted by open questions such as: what does identity mean to you?; what do you consider markers of identity?; what factors may influence identity?. This information helped to establish participants' understanding of the concept in the first instance and also prepared them for the in-depth narratives.

Stage 3:   A personal narrative (between 500–600 words) in which participants reflected upon and expressed their beliefs about their identity as transnational and transcultural individuals and language teachers. For the purpose of this task, participants were prompted with a list of meaningful keywords related to the discourse of identity (e.g. transculturality, adaptation, sameness/otherness, interconnectedness, citizenship) which they could choose to use or not in their narratives. The selection of keywords originated in the concepts that were more prominently used by respondents in the DIPL initial survey.

Teachers sent their narratives in written form, except for one who preferred to send a recorded narrative, which was later transcribed. English was used as a common language in all narratives to facilitate the analysis.
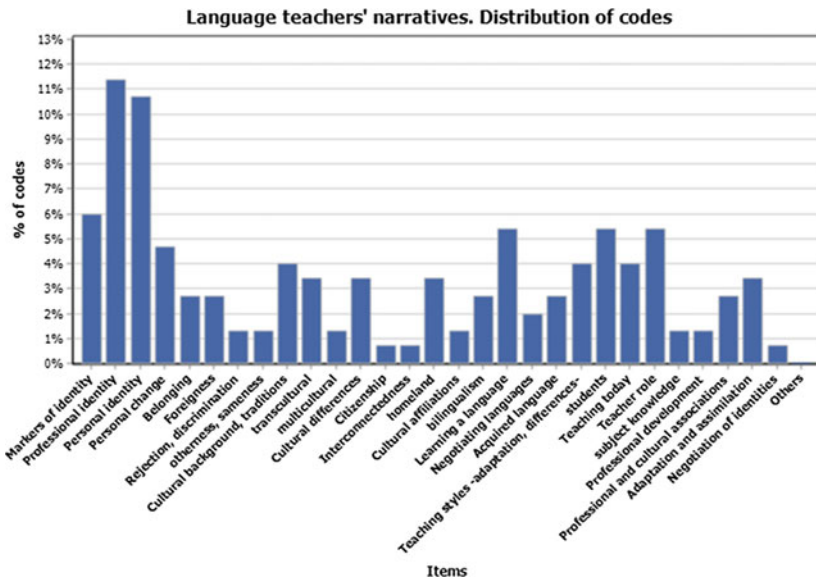
Fig. 1 Language teachers' narrative categories chart

The narratives were collected over an extended period of time (October 2017–April 2018) to give participants flexibility of opportunity to engage with the task in a reflective way.

The scrutiny of the six narratives was approached using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2013; Guest et al. 2012) followed by a narrative analysis (Werbińska 2016) informed by the researcher's personal reflection. The thematic analysis looked for commonalities emerging from teachers' accounts, but it also highlighted contrasting views and experiences. Firstly, I scrutinised the data using QDA Milne qualitative research software to identify general themes and categories, as well as the frequency of their use, as shown in Fig. 1.

Secondly, I considered the common themes and interpreted them in the light of the theoretical framework underpinning the study to fully understand the beliefs underlying the stories and to provide answers to the research questions. The analysis was followed by my personal reflection in the form of an "open work" narrative report (Moen 2006, p. 62), as previously explained.

3.4   Analysis of Findings

The following six themes emerged from stages 2 and 3 of the data collection: perceptions of identity, language and identity, emotions and identity, culture and identity, teacher agency and visions of teaching, as explained below:

3.4.1   Perceptions of Identity

As the general theme of the narratives, the notion of identity underpins all themes and categories in the personal accounts, but examining teachers' interpretation of the concept, it emerges as the aggregate of the many aspects which make up who teachers are. As some respondents commented:

> There is no fixed notion of identity and we all adopt many identities according to the role we have in certain life scenarios (e.g. mother; daughter; teacher; commuter; customer; etc.). (P5)
>
> Identity is a deeply personal part of someone that can be composed of many different aspects, such as language(s), culture(s), profession, interests [...] religion, beliefs. (P6)
>
> Identity is more about how I view myself, rather than how others view me [...]. Cultural background I was brought up in, but also the one I created for myself in my formation years and in my academic life. (P1)

These statements suggest identity is about how individuals perceive themselves in the two spheres of the *personal* or private and the *professional* or public (Miller 2009; Taylor 2013), which are closely intertwined. This coexistence of identities, as justified by post-structuralist Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research (Norton 2013), is taken a step further when teachers define themselves in terms of their multifaceted *professional* identity as language teachers and as researchers:

> I see myself mainly as a Spanish language teacher. (P3)
>
> My professional identity is also an important part of my life. I am proud to be a language teacher, a linguist, a researcher, a teacher of Spanish

linguistics (and I'm proud to be so, despite being considered second-class teaching, unfortunately), and to be part of associations and groups of language teachers in the UK. (P4)

These extracts suggest that teachers' beliefs about identity can be contextual and spatial and some clearly highlight the disassociation between the individual's positive sense of professional identity and the negative perception of the profession externally, as seen in the above comment. The extracts also highlight the importance of language as a marker of identity (Ushioda 2009; Lightbown and Spada 2013) and reinforce the ambivalence between "achieved" or "inhabited" identity—the identity people themselves articulate or claim—and "ascribed" or "attributed" identity—the identity given to someone by someone else, in Miller's words (2009, p. 173).

Among the markers of identity, defined by Norton (2013) as subjective sub-identities, teachers mentioned cultural background, place of birth, nationality and change. *Change* and the process of transformation it conveys are intrinsic to the idea of identity as a dynamic, ever-evolving aspect of life: "Identity is not something fixed at some early point in life: it is in constant change" (P1). It also defines how teachers create their professional identity through a process of constant negotiation of their relationship to the outside world (Varghese 2018; Norton 1997). In addition, change is also inherent in the notion of diaspora, understood as hybrid, fluid and non-static communities, "[…] always creolizing the languages and values they encounter in diverse lands" (Canagarajah and Silberstein 2012, p. 82). As observed in the following comments, the diasporic identity of transnational language teachers appears to be shaped by their encounters as migrants with new cultural contexts as much as by the changes they adopt and embrace:

Cultural background, personal cross-cultural life experiences, and sociocultural factors […] because I am an immigrant, I feel that part of my identity is quite shaped by them. (P2)

How much I have changed as an individual having left one set of defined cultural and linguistic parameters in my country of origin and having embraced a new one in a new country […]. How does working and

functioning as a social being in a new country, adopting a new culture and language, transform an individual? (P5)

3.4.2 Language and Identity

In post-structuralist theory, identity is defined as "self-conscious and ongoing narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in actions and language" (Block 2007, p. 27). Learning a language, a key aspect of identity formation in sociocultural theory (Kramsch 1998; Ricento 2005; Lantolf 2011), was considered by teachers to be a positive and logical consequence of a transnational life: "Living abroad has also offered me the great opportunity of learning other languages" (P4). Furthermore, in the case of competent multilanguage users, language, as carrier of cultural attitudes, behaviours and ideas, is an open door to building new identities and navigating across cultures; a process of personal growth:

> Being bilingual, since an early age the strong relationship between language and culture was to play a key role to turn me into a keen linguist. (P6)
> English has opened me the doors to a new world and culture, and allows me to communicate with many different people. (P4)
> Learning and using a new language means learning and adopting not only a new vocabulary but a new understanding of behaviours and attitudes, an entire new culture. (P5)

Simpson and Hepworth (2010) explain how language is intrinsic to the construction of identity and this also applies to migration contexts where the encounter with a new culture and a new language takes place. It can be added that identification with the new language is a key factor in negotiating relationships with other communities and establishing affiliation and proximity with the members of those communities (Werbińska 2017). Participants' narratives showed examples of teachers' agency in communicating across languages, in connecting with individuals and communities and their established cultural models. They also show a sense of personal satisfaction in achieving this goal, as suggested in the following comments:

I consider myself, rather, an Anglophile. I am deeply interested in the culture of the Anglophone world. This interest does not necessarily stem from experience, but from knowledge of history, literature and art. (P1)

While being in England I used to speak Spanish frequently as this is the language I teach and most of my colleagues are from Spanish-speaking countries. […] Now that I am in Spain I consider that English is also part of my identity. Being able to understand and speak this language fluently makes me very pleased […] I also enjoy the possibility of changing identity just by changing the language of communication or even the dialect used […]. (P4)

These comments suggest that as teachers move between communities at home and abroad, they negotiate social and institutional relations with other groups. They also illustrate that switching personas reveals not a unitary, static identity but the dynamic sense of self, which, according to Belcher and Connor (2001), is a consequence of the experience of being multilingual and navigating across languages.

As explained by Ricento (2005), transnational language teachers operate in distinct but interrelated communities in which, "bilingualism […] is the norm" (2005, p. 906). However, being *bilingual* can be an emotionally charged experience, not exempt from conflict and anxiety as language and discourse are always interwoven with power relationships and ideologies. This is highlighted in the following respondent's views:

It was not always easy having to bridge the gap between the Venetian culture embedded in the language spoken at home and the Italian language taught at school. This bilingual experience highlighted people's acceptance or rejection, even discrimination at times. (P6)

This example of *diglossia* not only refers to the physicality of the different linguistic contexts inhabited by the person, but also to the more complex, invisible, although perceptible, different linguistic and cultural selves which make individuals who they are.

3.4.3   Emotions and Identity

The positive emotions associated with the personal satisfaction of learning a new language are counterbalanced by the negative feelings experienced by some teachers when negotiating their sense of self in differing cultures. Teachers' stories often talk of feelings of *foreignness, otherness* and additionally of idealised nostalgic memories of the homeland. They show that on the surface they may consider themselves integrated into their adopted environment, but as transcultural individuals who move between cultures and nations they have a stake in maintaining strong memories of, and emotional connections with, their places of origin, as exemplified by the following comments:

> Basic aspects I was used to (the sunshine, the silence of the countryside, the beauty of the landscape, the delicious and fresh food, the happiness of the people…) are really appreciated after having missed them while being abroad in large busy and grey cities like London […]. As a consequence of living abroad for many years, I appreciate much more my place of origin and my life at home. (P4)
>   Of course, the idea of homeland acquires a much profound (even idealised) meaning though, if one is forced to leave their country due to political and social unrest.[…]. (P5)

As identities are relational and constituted partly from the outside (Modood 2013), teachers' views of themselves are often influenced by outsiders' perceptions and social expectations, which can lead to emotions and feelings of inadequacy and eventually to negative feelings about belonging and identity, as illustrated by comments such as:

> In this city, I hardly ever felt like home. (P4)
>   How fragile my own sense of identity has become […] Why am I perceived as a 'stranger' when I return to my hometown?. Yet why do I not, still after 25 years, feel as if I belonged to this country -where I have lived for so long- either?. Why am I still a 'foreigner' here? (P5)

The idea of *foreignness* understood as difference, often becomes a marker of identity for transnationals who do not recognise themselves in either

the home society nor the adopted one. As migrants who have left behind their homeland encouraged by the perspective of a better future, work opportunities and social mobility, these teachers could be identified as members of diasporic communities with shared languages, cultural traits and professional identities who embody *difference*, not similarity. This can lead to homogeneous conceptions of national communities (Rothberg 2014) which become entangled with the idea of nation-state and national memory. However, memories are not fixed mechanisms but are affected by everyday interactions and exchanges across different social groups. As carriers of memories and stories, transnational language teachers move between the local (past, history, cultural experiences) and the global (the encounters, translations, adaptations and process of identity construction and redefinition) and this makes them question and challenge national stereotypes and ideologies. One of the teachers explained:

> People label me as Spanish because of where I was born and what my passport says, but my Spanish identity is my relationship with that part of myself: e.g. Am I typical Spanish person? How do I fit in Spanish society? Has this changed over time? It is interesting how people are taken aback by aspects of myself that are not "typically" Spanish for them […].Spanish culture is collectivistic and there are elements of this that I have always found difficult, even as a child […]. Maybe individuals who are perfectly happy and integrated within the societies where they were born do not experience a thirst for change and adventure, they do not feel dissatisfied to the point where they pack up their bags and leave. (P1)

Thus the negative connotations of *difference* and the feelings of inferiority and insecurity, not to mention prejudice, stereotyping and exclusion attached to it (Modood 2013) are contrasted with a positive view in which difference frees individuals from the constraints of *being a national*, and allows them to develop a critical approach to their own culture, as explained here:

> Curiously enough, within a foreign country you can be happily adjusted even if you never feel you are like the native population, because there is no external or internal pressure for you to be. Being perceived as a foreigner can be liberating. (P1)

It doesn't mean that I completely identify with my cultural background; on the contrary, there are some aspects with which I don't feel identified at all, including religion or giving too much details about people's private lives. (P4)

We live in a world fond of waving flags and boasting about their own countries. How does this make me feel about my national identity? I am a bit sceptical about this. I find it difficult to feel chauvinistic about the achievements of my country. Sometimes I come across students who seem to be very idealistic not only about Hispanic culture, but also about the personality of the population: e.g. "Spanish people are so nice"! (P1)

This critical approach is extended to the current unsettling sociopolitical discourse which affects migrant citizens in the UK, as experienced by many European language teachers. Some teachers actively challenge the discourses of nationalism ingrained in many sectors of society and defend their right to maintain their transnational and transcultural identities, as explained by two respondents:

Contrary to Theresa May's sadly narrow minded view that *citizen of the world* means citizen of nowhere, I believe we are all citizens of the world today, exactly because of its interconnectedness. (P5)

Connections are good both in the UK and in the motherland but the writer is reluctant to go through the naturalisation process, even after the governmental stance on immigration, subsequent to the Brexit 2016 referendum result. (P6)

3.4.4 Culture and Identity

Teachers' narratives show that their understanding of the world and themselves is not fixed by their birthplace, nationality or the culture they have been brought up in, but by the different cultures they have experienced, as the following comments suggest:

What has really influenced my appreciations of the world has been the great opportunity of living in different countries with people from many different cultural backgrounds. Only after getting to know better other cultures, I can really understand and appreciate my own background. (P4)

Nowadays, people are immersed in more than just one culture: we travel for work, for pleasure (although not always this interchange defines our identity), we migrate, we learn from different cultures in different ways (movies, friends, learning a language). (P2)

These statements highlight a sense of global citizenship which supports the notion of *transculturality* (Welsch 1995) and *multiculturalism*, understood not as a fixed process of assimilation but as a dynamic activity which is also the most successful form of integration (Modood 2013).

On the other hand, negotiating their identity and sense of belonging to *imagined communities* (Kanno and Norton 2003) and *figured worlds* (Varghese 2018) of professional networks marks the lives of many transnational language teachers in the UK, for whom the close relationship between territoriality, language and the associated cultural social settings raises the need for creating cultural and professional affiliations and attachments. Wenger's (2006) view of identity points to the sense of community membership, as well as to the multi-membership and the relation between the local and the global. As members of the educational establishment, a constructed community in itself with rules and modus operandi, language teachers' affiliation to cultural and professional associations plays a key role in developing a collective identity and maintaining a sense of attachment and belonging. It is also important for their professional development as much as for their emotional wellbeing, as one respondent explained:

Being a member of the Italian Cultural Institute means that I am informed and invited to events […] relevant to the Italian culture happening in the UK, particularly in London. These events are mostly important and relevant to my role as a language teacher, help me to keep up-to-date with developments in my country. […] They are also events that I truly enjoy and that give me pleasure. (P6)

Teachers are also aware of the benefits of collaboration with colleagues as a key aspect of their professional development, as explained by a participant:

I am influenced by my colleagues' views, as they are important in my life. Getting to know colleagues from many different cultures has made me realise

of features of my own identity […]. I still feel part of the UK language teaching culture and associations and I am very happy to be able to work and collaborate with colleagues who live thousands of miles away, thanks to the advances of technologies. (P4)

3.4.5 Teacher Agency

Teacher agency, as previously discussed and as stated by White (2018), refers to teachers' conscious choices within their professional contexts. This includes "relationships with learners and colleagues […] participating in ongoing professional development opportunities […] and adapting themselves to the diverse requirements of their working contexts" (White 2018, p. 196).

Participants' narratives show that agency, as influenced by situations outside the classroom, plays a role in the process of identity construction. The data suggests that membership of professional and cultural networks means opportunities for personal satisfaction and professional growth. It also means engagement and positioning in the debates affecting modern language subjects in the context of UK educational policies. Narratives offer an insight into the realities of the profession from the perspective of the practitioners themselves, such as the characterising uncertainty of "the unstable contracts as a language teacher and a lecturer in prestigious universities" (P4), or the multiplicity of occupations held in addition to teaching, including translator and interpreter, as stated in the following comment:

As I work for different employers I also feel that different institutions' pedagogic policies, job contracts or expectations may affect the way one performs in the classroom having to vary one's identity. (P6)

Precariousness, insecurity and constant changes in the educational environment appear to affect many professionals' working conditions and trigger attitudes of action:

There are many battles to be fought in teaching and HE in particular and I sometimes see myself as a rebel or an activist fighting against injustice and

bad senior management choices, as sadly the system has really let us down. (P5)

This aspect of identity, *activism*, vindicates the profession and the discipline against the perception of MFLs as "second-class teaching" (P4) and the many changes in educational policies that affect teachers' jobs and teacher training education (Kramsch 2014; De Costa and Norton 2017). In spite of these difficulties, teachers' narratives show, in Werbińska's words, "individual agentive powers […] when confronted with critical events and tensions or forced to make decisions" (2017, p. 45) related to their role as teachers, their teaching styles and the importance of pedagogical and subject knowledge, as explained in the next section.

3.4.6 Visions of Teaching

The multidimensionality of language teaching implies different personas within the teacher role, which teachers need to learn and absorb. Some teachers saw themselves as educators or facilitators, functions which go beyond the mere language and cultural instruction or knowledge transfer:

> I believe that the ethical aspect of my role as a teacher (and the one I value the most) is to absorb, digest and translate change into a language my students can understand, regardless of the subject I teach […]. This is what education should be about, not just getting good marks and passing a module. (P5)

Fulfilling this multiplicity of functions requires active agency in making adjustments to achieve the "transformable identity" (King 2015, p. 107) that helps teachers to become *performers* and to create emotional distance from their role, as suggested by one respondent:

> In the world of work […] we have a persona […]. I have always found it intriguing that so many teachers who appear to be very lively and extroverted in the classroom claim to be, really, shy and quiet people. Teachers have to be permanently on show, right in front of their pupils […]. It is interesting how so many of them claim to have this "double personality". (P1)

This transformable identity requires reflection about the language class-room as a community in which identities are forged and negotiated through interaction and language, as explained below:

> […] a place where students share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly, we can understand that every individual/student in the language classroom is shaping her/his own identity, and overall, negotiating it with the other participants in the community. (P2)

In this learning community, the interaction between teacher and learner is a key factor that requires teachers to have conceptual and pedagogical knowledge, as well as communicative knowledge of the language they teach (King 2015). However, as Varghese (2018) explains, pedagogical content knowledge is often an area of conflict for language teachers. While for some, subject knowledge is important to determine their professional identity, "Knowledge of my subject […] determines my professional identity, makes me proud of what I do and the way I do it" (P6); for others, competence in their subject is not enough:

> I don't think 'knowledge of a specific subject' determines my professional identity. Being competent in my area and acting professionally in my sphere of work enriches my professional identity by making me feel adequately equipped to do my job well. But ultimately I don't recognise myself as a teacher of Italian only – I would find this extremely limiting. (P5)

Teachers found they have to adapt their practices and teaching styles to the needs and characteristics of their learners, and this includes awareness of different cultural backgrounds:

> My teaching style had to change and adapt too. In Italy I would not need to teach language through 'examples' as I have to do here. There are also different levels of sensitivity between the two cultures (Italian and British) and how we talk in a class in the UK is very different (more cautious) from how we would talk in a class in Italy […]. (P5)
>
> Teaching Italian to English speakers […] was quite different to teaching adults who had good command of English but were native-speakers of other

languages […]. It became apparent that it was necessary to adjust language teaching materials to the need to understand and reconcile the intercultural differences in attitudes and skills. (P6)

Narratives show that teachers' beliefs of what is and is not good teaching practice come from their experiences in the classroom, as well as from their reflective involvement with pedagogical curriculum design and planning.

4   Discussion and Personal Reflection

The aim of this chapter was to investigate the experiences and perceptions of identity in six transnational MFL teachers living and working in the UK, manifested in their personal narratives. The analysis of these narratives has revealed, among other aspects, that transnational language teachers embed the concept of dynamic, hybrid and non-static identities, which is also consistent with the notion of diaspora (Canagarajah and Silberstein 2012). Teachers approach the concepts of *difference* and *sameness* in different ways as they move across diverse contextual and spatial cultural and linguistic settings with ease. However, attachment to their subject and affiliation to communities related to their profession provide personal satisfaction and reassurance. These also bring them a connection and continuity with their past experiences and selves, relieving the feelings of anxiety brought about by the process of integration into host environments.

Reflecting upon and writing my interpretation of these six narratives has allowed me to be critically conscious about my own lived experiences as a transnational language teacher in the UK: a woman, a migrant, a teacher of Spanish, teacher of linguistics, researcher and teacher educator; but also a daughter, a mother, a spouse, a friend and a colleague.

Moen (2006) states that "a voice can never exist in isolation […] Thus a voice is overpopulated with other voices, with the intentions, expectations, and attitudes of others" (2006, p. 58). In the act of finding my autobiographical voice, I find myself in the voices of these six women teachers, in the complexity of their feelings and beliefs about their place in the societies and communities they inhabit; reflecting about their attachments to teaching networks and learning communities; recognising their sense of

belonging and displacement. I also find myself in their determination to succeed in their profession and their pride in being a language teacher in sometimes hostile environments; in their passion for learning and supporting their learners.

In my interpretation of these narratives I am aware of their situational subjectivity, subject to *here* and *now*, prone to change, as well as to the fact that my relationship with them may be equally affected and influenced by space and time as much as by the multiple voices and beliefs which inhabit deeply myself. The fact that these teachers are known to me might have also influenced my interpretation in that I know of their personal circumstances, their professional attitudes and roles, their feelings and emotions, which may take me beyond the narrative of their texts. But since "meaning and understanding are created when voices engage in dialogue with each other" (Moen 2006, p. 58), this reinforces the dialogic nature of the process of narrative and my own narrative as a transnational language teacher (whose professional identity is constructed by the interaction between lived individual experiences, the professional settings I have encountered and my personal history).

Reflecting on these accounts has made me understand the diasporic nature of the MFL teaching profession in the UK, represented by the sample in this study as much as by my own life history. Transnational language teachers are part of the migratory phenomenon that characterises the global economy. Immigration is perceived "as an act of adventure, a new beginning of one's life in a land of promise and prosperity" (Park 2017, p. 4). We are members of a community which is defined by strong interest in personal and professional growth as well as by economic factors. We move between communities, between opportunities for learning and learning is associated with improving job possibilities, but also with developing a sense of self that goes beyond affiliations to inherited cultures to embrace other cultures, a dimension which manifests itself in the classroom.

In our professional lives as transnational and transcultural language teachers who benefit from being part of academic and pedagogical discourses associated with the values of openness, tolerance and equality, we may consider ourselves to be privileged. However, we must not forget that inequity, prejudice and precariousness affect many of us, showing,

therefore, that both privilege and otherness go hand-in-hand in our journeys as we negotiate their coexistence throughout our lives.

5   Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to unveil transnational language teachers' experiences and perceptions of identity in the context of their transcultural lives by engaging a small group of practitioners with the process of reflection through autobiographical narratives and by providing my own interpretation and meaning of their perceptions of identity in relation to the cross-cultural and social contexts which they inhabit. The analysis of the narratives has provided the following findings which respond to the initial questions I raised in this chapter:

1. Teachers' conceptualised identity appears as an aggregate of the private (the personal) and the public (the professional) spheres in which they exist. However, it is the multidimensional aspects of their identity as teachers that define them.
2. Language is a distinct a marker of identity and, as competent pluri-language users, learning a new language is an achievement and a source of personal satisfaction. It is also an opening to developing new cultural identities, and confirms that teachers' sense of self is not fixed by a particular culture or language. In addition, it highlights their acceptance of *change* as intrinsic to the idea of identity, as a dynamic, ever-evolving aspect of life.
3. In contrast, narratives revealed feelings and experiences of *otherness*, *difference* and visions of the *homeland*, which affect teachers' integration into the host society as much as their sense of *belonging* to the home society to which they often return. This tension generates a constant process of rethinking their identity, as well as engendering a critical view of assumed notions of national identity and memory.
4. Teachers' beliefs about the multifaceted identity of the teaching profession evidences their role as agents in the process of adaptation, performing their role and developing awareness of their learners' needs. Teachers also highlight their active role in developing subject and

pedagogical knowledge through membership of professional communities and through collaboration with other teachers.

The findings of this study show that, in spite of the educational changes, uncertainties and difficult conditions of service that affect many professionals, transnational language teachers' sense of identity is strongly connected to their practice and the relationship with their learners and other practitioners. They also show their sense of agency in managing conflicting attitudes and values across diverse sociocultural and linguistic worlds. Narrative Inquiry has facilitated the process of reflection and enabled me as a researcher to develop a critical approach to experience the experiences of the participating teachers.

While this study presents many limitations due to the small number and range of languages and of participating teachers, it also reveals the value of this research and highlights the need for more research on transnational MFL teachers. Questions which need exploring include: what motivates them to become language teachers? What critical life experiences contribute to shape their professional identity? How do these experiences influence their attitudes and beliefs about themselves as members of social and cultural groups?

Similarly, more research is needed about transnational language teachers as agents of change in society and as transporters of ideas, histories and ideologies which are transferred, confronted and negotiated in the language classroom.

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