5

Becoming a Language Professional in Higher Education: A Psychosocial Case Study

Donata Puntil

1   Introduction

This chapter is an overview of a pilot study conducted in 2018 as part of a Doctorate in Education. It focuses on the complex and intertwined correlation between personal and professional instances in the trajectory of language professionals in the context of British Higher Education (HE). The three participants of this investigation are mainly referred to as *language professionals* throughout the chapter, rather than language teachers, although at times these definitions are interchanged. The focus on *professionals* reflects the emphasis of this study on the participants' journey into *professionalization* in the field of language teaching. In addition, particular attention is given to the interaction between past and present in the process of professional identity formation in which fantasies of the past are constantly negotiated at unconscious, individual and social level, as highlighted by Bainbridge and West (2012). Personal and emotional aspects

D. Puntil (✉)
King's College London, London, UK
e-mail: donata.puntil@kcl.ac.uk

of teachers' investment in change, in their agency in professional growth and in their relationship to knowledge in their discipline also represent a key focus of this research in line with a *psychosocial* approach to research in education (Frosh 2010).

The choice to position this study within a *psychosocial* framework is closely linked to my own professional background and to my personal journey since, besides being a language educator, I am also a qualified psychoanalytic psychotherapist, member of the British Psychoanalytic Council. The professional background in psychoanalytic psychotherapy represents a strong aspect of my own professional identity and informs the ontological and epistemological framework of this research, as well as the methodological choices employed for the study.

The three main research questions underpinning the study are as follows:

1. How is the professional identity of HE language teachers constructed?
2. What is the role of personal critical incidents in language teachers' professional journeys?
3. What is language teachers' relationship to knowledge, to the taught subject?

The methodology used for this study is auto/biographical narratives framed within a case study context (Yin 2009) within a qualitative insider researcher framework (Hellawell 2006) aiming at emphasizing the validity and legitimation of participants' individual voices (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2013) in the narrative process.

Written, oral and visual narratives are analysed within a thematic framework; the psychoanalytical perspective, following the *psychosocial* approach of the study, supports the formulation of themes and of critical instances in teachers' personal and professional accounts, paying particular attention to the discursive mode of the narration, to contradictions, changes of tone, avoidances, silences that might shed light to psychodynamic unconscious defences towards anxiety-provoking instances (Frosh 2010; Hollway and Jefferson 2013). In addition, the psychoanalytical stance brings a further dimension to the analysis of autobiographical narratives, as outlined by De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2013), since it places

its focus not only on the *told* story, but also and mostly on the *untold*, on what is implied and referred to, but not explicitly narrated.

The context in which this study takes place is a Modern Language Centre (MLC) within the UK university in which I also work holding a senior position. The choice to situate this research within the same department I belong to is closely related to my professional role within that department where I am responsible for training and staff development. Within this context, I progressively reflected on the impact personal trajectories have on professional pathways and how they represent important motivational factors in the journey into professionalization. Within the context of UK higher education, Language Centres are often marginalized in the academic discourse since they are usually positioned outside the mainstream research-based frameworks and consequently the voice of language teachers is often considered peripheral in the academic discourse (Worton 2009). As a language professional myself and as a language educator, I am aware that this reality might have a negative impact on teachers' motivation and interest in further professional development, potentially undermining their professionalism and professionalization and closing up new opportunities for career progression.

Despite this demotivational reality, the language professionals I closely work with, including myself, are profoundly engaged and committed to their professional role, therefore one of the main aims of this study is to investigate the personal motives beyond the professional choices in order to give voice and legitimization to those under-represented stories. There is also an assumption that the engagement in the research process might promote participants' self-reflection on their agency in professional change and transformation and might empower them to embark in new personal and/or professional projects, as emphasized by West and Merrill (2009).

The following paragraphs outline the theoretical framework underpinning the study and describe in detail the methodology that has been employed to collect and analyse data within an auto/biographical perspective, followed by a final discussion on the outcomes of the study.

2   Theoretical Framework

2.1   On Nomadic Identity: A Post-structuralist Approach

The study presented in this chapter is mainly aligned within a post-structuralist approach to knowing and to experience with particular reference to authors like Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 1994, 2000), Giddens (1991), Braidotti (2011a, 2014) and Bauman (2000) who underpin the research questions and shed light into my investigation into human life.

I particularly refer to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of time as non-linear, as circular and fragmented and to their consideration of time as *becoming*. In their main body of work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2000) the authors clearly refer to Bergson's concept of time as a universal non-linear feature and as a dimension that is structured along the coexistence of different *durations*, different *becoming* that coexist and juxtapose in a non-linear sequence of events. Their consideration of time as *becoming*, is closely related to the notion of memory as both a conscious and unconscious, fragmented recollection of un-sequential events. The authors describe memory as multiplicity, as an involuntary and creative *rhizome*, as an *assemblage*, as an act of recollecting deterritorialized events. In line with their philosophy, I also refer to Braidotti (2011a, b, 2014) notion of *nomadism*, considered not only as a physical displacement between different territories, but also as an existential positioning between different internal representations of one's identity.

In the last two decades, there has been a shift within the context of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research moving towards an interdisciplinary conception of language learning and teaching referring to post-structural socio-cultural theories and practices. We could consider the seminal articles by Norton (1995, 1997, 2000, 2010, 2013), Pavlenko (2001, 2006, 2007), and Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) as the turning points in SLA research towards a post-structuralist paradigm by which research on language learning started to shift towards identity as the core of investigation. This shift of SLA research on identity had also an impact on investigating language teachers as critical participants in the process of professional identity formation (Morgan 2004; Varghese et al. 2005; Tsui 2007;

De Costa and Norton 2017; Barkhuizen 2017; Miller et al. 2017; Wolff and De Costa 2017; Zheng 2017; Mercer and Kostoulas 2018). This position places language teachers as agentic in their professional self-negotiation crossing borders between languages, cultures, social contexts and professional paradigms and considers these passages as having profound effects on one owns' perception of oneself and on professional practices.

The study discussed in this chapter aligns within this epistemological shift in SLA towards post-structuralism while presenting at the same time a key innovative aspect in its *psychosocial* framing (Frosh 2010; Bainbridge 2018; Holloway and Jefferson 2013) employing psychoanalytically informed positioning and methodological tools to question conscious and unconscious factors at the centre of teachers' personal and professional trajectories.

At present, there are only few studies that employ tools of investigation towards a psychoanalytical stance (Block 2007; Mansfield 2000; Morgan and Clarke 2011). By drawing on post-Kleinian object-relation psychoanalytical theories (Klein 1963, 1975; Winnicott 1971, 1975; Bion 1959, 1962), this investigation challenges binary notions of bi-culturalism, arguing that language teachers not only navigate in between different territories constantly reconstructing their professional identity depending on the context they operate within, but also come to terms with complex and non-linear notions of identity and diversity within themselves, being mediators of cultural and linguistic change within their identity formation (Kristeva 1991; Coffey 2013).

2.2   On Becoming a Language Educational Professional

While engaging with the work of the post-structuralist thinkers mentioned above and particularly with Braidotti (2011a, b, 2018) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who underpin my ontological positioning, I progressively reflected on my nomadic journey as a language learner, educator and researcher. I therefore started to acknowledge that this study begun unofficially forty years ago when I was eight-years-old and had my first

direct experience of being in a language class. I was fascinated and mesmerized by the English language teacher. I wanted to become a language professional. While immersed in the research described in this chapter, I came progressively to realize that it is this nomadic dialogue with myself that I am carrying on with this study, a dialogue I started many years ago; a research that begun, before it officially begun, as many researches do, and that makes me aware that I have always been in the middle of it.

I grew up in a small village in the Dolomites in North Italy, an area which is very close to Austria and Slovenia, linguistically very rich and mixed, hosting few communities of minority languages. Being exposed since a young age to linguistic diversity, to code switching and to complex intercultural experiences, played a significant role in my perception of languages as part of one's own identity and as pathway to a professional journey. The professional trajectory that characterized my development as a language teacher, and later on as a language educator, is closely related to these early experiences, to an ongoing internal dialogue with my past, as well as to rational and career-driven decisions. I can now confidently state that in my nomadic experience of life abroad, I decided to become a language professional mainly to maintain that contact with my origins, with my mother-tongue, with my *internal objects*, considered in psychoanalytical terms, as the key figures who had an impact on my personal and professional choices (Klein 1963).

As previously stated, the interaction between past and present in professional trajectories is the main focus of this study. As Goodson argues "definitions of our professional location and of our career direction can only be arrived at by detailed understanding of people's lives. Studies of professional life and patterns of professional development must address these dimension of the personal" (2003, p. 61). In these words, as alongside his entire body of work on teachers' lives, Goodson highlights the relevance of *critical incidents*, as crucial events in teachers' lives that can affect career choices and professional practices. He endorses a shift in education research from investigating *teacher-as-practice* to researching *teacher-as-person* (2003, p. 60). The same stance is taken by Hargreaves (1994, 1998, 2000, 2001) who advocates for a shift of perspective in research on teacher development from practice-based to the realm of the personal and of the emotional. Both Goodson and Hargreaves claim that

teachers' *life cycle*, determined by professional and personal choices, is an important aspect of professional development and that it should play a central role in educational research.

Based on these assumptions, I chose to position my study within a *psychosocial* epistemological paradigm as a suitable underpinning frame to represent the interrelation between personal and professional in the unfolding of language teachers' nomadic stories of professionalization.

2.3   On Professional Identity Formation: A Psychosocial Perspective

Holloway and Jefferson (2013), in their innovative methodological approach to social research based on a psychoanalytical framework, define the inter-relation between intra and intersubjectivity in the analysis of participants' data as *psychosocial*:

> […] tracking this relationship relies on a particular view of the research subject: one whose inner word is not simply a reflection of the outer world, not a cognitively driven accommodation of it. Rather, we intend to argue for the need to posit research subjects whose inner words cannot be understood without knowledge of their experiences in the world, and whose experiences of the world cannot be understood without knowledge of the way in which their inner words allow them to experience the outer world. This research subject cannot be known except through another subject; in this case the researcher. The name we give to such subjects is psychosocial […]. (2013, pp. 3–4)

Holloway and Jefferson (2013) use the term *psychosocial*, as does Frosh (2010), to describe the application of psychoanalytical thinking to social and educational contexts and to frame the analysis of data as the interplay of participants' conscious and unconscious motives, emphasizing the insider position of the researcher:

> Psychoanalytically inclined researchers start from the position that unconscious processes infiltrate the narrative accounts given by research participants, so that interpretative strategies aimed at uncovering these unconscious processes will be needed. […] This renders psychoanalysis as usefully explaining the way in which external events become incorporated 'into' the psyche or self, notably through concepts such introjection and identification. (2010, p. 200)

In psychoanalytically framed research, the emphasis is placed on the agency of the subject, on its internal world and on the relationship between researcher and participants in the meaning-making narration of events, without disregarding the reality of external circumstances in context. Within this perspective, the use of psychoanalysis as a methodological tool can enrich data analysis by offering a *thickening* and in-depth interpretative understanding of data, particularly in relation to personal narratives.

The notion of *becoming,* referring back to Deleuze and Guattari and to Braidotti, is also central to psychoanalytical inquiry, in which early and subsequent experiences are constantly intertwined in a multiplicity of levels in which present, past and future are dynamically interconnected. Klein (1975), Winnicott (1971), and Bion (1962) described in different ways the early relationship between infant and mother as the outset for the adult relationship to knowledge and to learning. In Bion's view, the baby capacity of thinking and learning is closely related to the mother's *reverie*, viewed as her containing capacity to process the infant's instinctive, irrational thoughts and to give meaning to them. The capacity to think (Bion 1962), to learn and to relate to other human beings, is deeply rooted in early relationships to significant others. Winnicott's (1971) view on playing as a creative meaning-making act, can also be considered as an expression of learning and of personal development. Every step within the journey into education could be considered, in Winnicottian terms, as a transitional process, as a step into growth, independence and empowerment (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al. 1983).

Professional lives, including the ones investigated within this research, can therefore be considered as act of *becoming*, as life-long and life-deep processes involving the relationship to learning, to emotional investment, to the meaning of choices and to the value of motivations, as outlined by

Bainbridge and West (2012) and by Hunt and West (2006). The framing of this study within a *psychosocial* perspective employing psychoanalytical tools of investigation considers participants as agents in their meaning-making choices into professional journeys and views their trajectories into learning and becoming professionals as transformative, embodied and emotional process in which phantasies, dreams, fears and conflicts play a central role (Britzman 2009; Youell 2006).

3 Methodology

As previously outlined, this study employs auto/biographical narratives as physical and symbolic spaces of self-reflection and as co-operative meaning-making investigative tools where knowledge is co-constructed between researcher and participants (Formenti 2017; Hollway and Jefferson 2013; West and Merrill 2009).

The use of narrative methodology is mainly based on Bruner's (1986, 1987, 1990, 2002) account of self-narratives as discursive constructions allowing individuals to organize and to represent concepts of themselves. Within this perspective, narrative inquiry is referred to as an act of co-construction (Bamberg 1997; Riessman 2003), drawing from Bakhtin (1981) notion of the dialogic self. Narrating one's life is therefore not only viewed as a re-telling of past events, but as an act of identity making in the here and now, as a dialogic text in its *becoming* in which past, present and future are all contained in the act of narration (Brockmeier 2000).

Narratives are key tools of investigation also within psychoanalytical theories and clinical practice where the act of narrating is considered as an act of identity-making in its own right. In the encounter between patient and therapist, the here and now within the therapeutic encounter holds the same value as past events narrated through accounts of memory and is investigated within the parameters of transference and countertransference interactions. In narratives, as well as in psychoanalysis, critical instances and turning points in one's account of one's life are considered crucial points of investigation invested with symbolic meaning (Bruner 2001). The analysis of turning points should allow to distinguish what is *normal*

from what is *extraordinary* within the account of one's life; the extraordinary events are usually interpreted as agents of change, as it emerges in the data collected for this study and outlined in following paragraphs (Hollway and Jefferson 2013; West & Merrill 2009).

3.1   Data Collection

Data collected and analysed in this study are based on the auto/biographical accounts of three participants within the department described in previous paragraphs, as well as on my reflective diary and on my psychoanalytic dialogue with a clinical supervisor, as outlined in the following sections of this chapter.

The participants described below chose a fictional name to represent themselves within this study, as outlined in Table 1.

The data collection took place during three months in 2018 and was divided into five stages: a first stage in which participants wrote a short account of their professional life following an open question. The written autobiographical accounts were followed by a second stage in which unstructured interviews were conducted. Participants were asked to bring either an object, or/and a picture, to the interview as a representation of themselves as language professionals. Asking participants to bring on object/photo to the interviews is based on Winnicott (1975) and on Bollas (2009) psychoanalytic consideration that "an evocative object" might trigger new self-negotiations and might allow participants to engage in different emotional discourses about their professional selves.

The interviews were conducted using free association psychoanalytical techniques, by which participants were guided as little as possible, allowing space and time for free associations to emerge as part of the narration. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) define this approach as Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI). My own countertransference experience as a researcher during the interview was considered as part of the data. Transference and countertransference are key concepts within the psychoanalytical encounter; they represent the relationship between analyst and patient and within a *psychosocial* framework they shape the relationship

Table 1 Participants' demographic data

Participants	Age	Gender	Ethnic background	Nationality	Languages	Type of employment	Length of employment
Alia	50–59	F	Middle Eastern	British	Arabic English French	Full-time	15 years
Priya	40–49	F	South-Asian/Indian	Indian	Hindi English Urdu Spanish Sanskrit (read) Harijavani (read) Punjabi (receptive) Gudjuratu (") Dogri (") Bangla (")	Hourly-paid	4.5 years
Lila	50–59	F	Latin-American	Argentinian	Spanish Galician English Italian	Full-time	17 years

between researcher and participants based on the notion that: "Psycho-analytic exploration of fieldwork pays particular attention to […] how unconscious processes structure relations between researcher, subject and data gathered" (Hunt 1989, p. 9).

The third stage of the data collection process was a second interview with participants in which the researcher engaged them in a cartography activity (Braidotti 2011a, b). Participants were sent in advance the written transcript of their interview and the cartography activity was based on them drawing their life trajectory and extracting key themes from their own narratives. The activity's main aim was to actively engage participants in the data validation and interpretation and to give them agency and ownership in the research process.

The fourth stage consisted of a group meeting in which all three participants were involved in a reflecting writing activity on the research process and on their position within it.

Stage five represents my on-going reflective activity consisting of keeping a diary to annotate field-notes, thoughts, emotions and flow of events during the research process in order to promote reflectivity (Bryman 2016). In line with psychoanalytical clinical practice, I decided to have a clinical supervisor, besides my Doctorate academic supervisors, in order to monitor my emotional and personal responses to the research process, with a particular focus on my relationship to participants, following Frosh (2010) and Hollway and Jefferson (2013) *psychosocial* approach.

Table 2 visualizes the main stages of data collection.

3.2   Data Analysis

Written, oral and visual narrative data were analysed within a narrative methodological perspective (Smiths and Watson 2010) focusing on the concept of life as a journey and on its reconstruction through the narrative process. The analysis also focused on transference and countertransference dynamics, as highlighted by Blanchard-Laville and Chaussecourt:

> […] the clinical approach values the subjects' subjective engagement and the effects of this in terms, for instance, of the countertransference effect

Table 2 Stages of the data collection

Stages	Description	Aims
Stage 1	Short questionnaires and written biographical accounts	To elicit demographic data and to prompt a first stage of self-reflection and of biographical data collection
Stage 2	Unstructured, free associative interviews (about 1 hr each) based on the written account and prompted by a participant's object/photo	To expand on biographical data with a focus on personal instances
Stage 3	Cartography activity	To validate researcher's data analysis and to include participants in the data interpretation
Stage 4	Group meeting and writing activity	To include participants in the research process and to reflect on the research methodology
Stage 5 (ongoing)	Researcher's reflectivity: • Field notes • Diary keeping • Clinical supervision	To promote an on-going self-reflective process in all stages of the research

on the researcher. This subjective engagement provides a useful resource for building important knowledge. The subjectivity of the researcher is completely integrated as part of the investigation: it is 'grist to the mill' for studying psychic phenomena between people. (2012, p. 55)

Table 3 outlines the eight key themes that have been identified in relation to the participants' autobiographical accounts.

Further to the above eight themes, the following three narrative categories were taken into consideration while analysing data (Table 4).

A proforma was conceptualized for each participant, following the model suggested by West and Merrill (2009) and by Hollway and Jefferson (2013), and a participant's portrait in which the researcher annotated demographic data, first impressions, thoughts and interview dynamics immediately after the interviews, paying particular attention to countertransference reflections and to the emergence of unconscious manifestations.

Table 3 Main themes in the narrative accounts

Themes	Description
1. Family	Both in relation to the family of origins, as well as the a newly-created family in a different context from the country of origin
2. Professional journey—relationship to the subject	In terms of education and professional training both in the country of origin and in other contexts and relationship to knowledge
3. Critical incidents	Described by the narrator as events that had an impact on their life and professional choices
4. Significant others	Identified as key important people/mentors that had an impact on the participants' life and personal trajectories
5. Values	Life and professional values identified as important by the participants in their life and professional practices
6. Languages	Described by participants as having an impact on their self-representation
7. Journey	Described by participants both in terms of spatial and symbolic journeys that had an impact on their identity formation and professional life
8. Relationship to students/colleagues/institution	Expressed by participants as crucial in their pedagogical practices and in their professional identity

4   Discussion

The three vignettes below are an account of my reflections based on the thematic analysis of the participants' written, oral and visual narratives, combined with the participants' self-reflections and with my personal notes.

Table 4 Narrative categories

Categories	Description
a. Setting and transference instances	In terms of the physical setting of the interview and the relationship between participant and researcher—unconscious aspects are also taken into consideration
b. Narrative mode	Considered as the narrative voice and other relevant extra-linguistic features
c. Researcher's reflexivity—countertransference instances	Based on field notes, reflective diary and auto/biographical thinking—unconscious projective processes might also be considered

4.1 Participant 1: Teaching as a Second Life

Alia is a Middle East woman aged between 50 and 59. During the interview she seems fully in control of the situation, very confident and outspoken in her answers with a very assertive narrative tone. Her narrative voice is clearly in the first person, with full ownership of her statements. Alia lived in different places throughout her life due to her husband working situation, mainly in the Middle East where she successfully worked in management and moved to UK in her late thirties to follow her daughter's education. When in England, she started to engage with the possibility to become a teacher of Arabic. Her husband seems to have been the major influence in her first steps towards a second career; throughout her narrative he is portrayed as a key figure in her decision-making processes, together with other members of her family. Her husband's death, as described in the interview, represented a critical incident in her personal life and a decisive turning point in her professional trajectory. The object Alia brought to the interview was a photo with her extended family; a photo Alia is describing to me with pride and emotion, highlighting the multicultural and multilingual traits that characterize her family. When asked who were the important others in her professional life, Alia mentions her husband, her mother, her daughter and her step-daughter.

The gender-generational discourse seems to be central in Alia's perception of herself as a language teacher, particularly in her relation to what

she defines as being her 'teaching mission', that of deconstructing western stereotypes about Middle Eastern women:

> […] I am a girl from the Middle-East. An Arab girl from the Middle-East. And on its own it carries a rather stigma if you put it on its own a Muslim Arab girl, that in itself is a stigma. And for me I am carrying the flag of a modern, Muslim, Arab Girl who is breaking the norm and doing something to improve the image of that person and this is something very dear to my heart.

Teaching her native language is very clearly a mission for Alia, not only a profession. It is something deeply embedded in her identity as a Middle Eastern woman with "deep, resilient roots". When asked about her initial decision to start teaching, she replied that "it was sheer accident"; an accident that changed completely her life: "I think it's a discovery and I was lucky that teaching found me. I didn't find teaching, the teaching job has found me. […] it was a second life". Alia seems to be very proud of her capacity to have embraced this *second life* and to have subsequently trained as a language professional, stating that "it is still a learning journey".

In the cartography activity Alia drew a tree described as having strong and deep roots, a tree that is ever-green and keeps blossoming, a tree from the Middle East with, at its core, notions of growth, resilience, change and transformation through learning and teaching. When asked about the interviewing stages and about her participation into the study, she said it was "overwhelming ….reading yourself…it's like re-discovering yourself […] the questions make you think…so you suddenly start to look at yourself as an outsider…".

4.2   Participant 2: A Tutor Is for Life

Priya is originally from India; her age is in the range of 40–49. She moved to UK in 2007 to pursue her studies in art. She is a mixed-media artist; in India she graduated in art and languages, studying also literature and linguistics. She speaks many Indian languages and dialects, besides English and Spanish and she states that languages are very important in the formation of her identity. Significant others in her personal and professional life

are female figures in her family, who transmitted the passion for reading, studying and for teaching. Priya seems to be very proud in telling her grandmother's story and the fact she was graduated, which was an exceptional reality in India in her generation. There is a strong sense of pride that permeates Priya's narrative of learning and later on of teaching. Priya came to teach languages later in her life, after she moved to UK where she met her husband who, in her words, encouraged her to teach Hindi.

Priya seems to be very proud of her journey into teaching, although many times in her narration she states that "it was a challenging experience". From Priya's narration, it slowly emerges that teaching is invested with deep personal and professional values stemming mainly from the cultural and social position teachers are related to in India, which resonates of sacred and almost religious connotations:

A. Yes, very, very important I think and it comes from my culture, because in my culture a tutor and your student relationship is almost sacred […].
Q. Yes…
A. It's considered really, really high. So that's why students have loads of respect for teachers, for tutors. […]

The association of teaching to *something sacred*, something precious not only in religious terms, is a recurrent theme in Priya's narration, highlighting the value she attributes to her professional life and to what it stands for. Priya's narrative is characterized by a developing sense of ownership and pride in her teaching profession, accompanied by an increasing confidence and passion for teaching, which slowly emerges to play a central role in her identity formation: "It's for life. A tutor is for life". And later on in her interview: "[…] So, and then you realise that and when you teach and there are good results it gives you a boost…. […]… like a sanctuary, yes…."

The photo Priya brought to the interview, is a picture depicting her students in India; a picture at first glance I thought represented her family. Through her narrative it emerges that language teaching means something more than being a "good teacher"; it is invested with personal meanings that resonate her personal transformative story of being a woman from India who moved from the security of her cultural and social background

to new territories and new possibilities: "[…] teaching in this country has given me a lot as a person, I think that, and it has also created another entire new identity for me, in a way […]". Moving to UK seems to represent for Priya a critical incident that had important consequences for her professional development, since it is in UK that she met her husband and started embracing the idea of re-training as a language teacher.

Her drawing in the cartography activity was that of a ladder with strong large foundations, moving upwards towards new possibilities. In the drawing Priya used words in different languages, placing her Hindi identity as a woman at the base of the ladder and her migration to UK as a central step into the ladder.

When asked about her participation in the research process, she stated it was an "introspective experience".

4.3   Participant 3: Teaching as a Social Act

Lila is a Latin-American woman aged between 50 and 59. She is a very experienced teacher with more than twenty years' experience in teaching English and Spanish both in UK and in Latin-America. She seems to be quite confident and outspoken during the interview, with a clear sense of ownership of her teaching profession and of pride in her achievements as a language teacher. As for the previous two participants, teaching for her started almost by chance when she was in her early twenties and moved to London following her boyfriend. In London she worked in a volunteering project with Latin-American refugees. She describes this project as being very interesting and rewarding, although emotionally demanding. In her narrative there is a strong sense of identification with the fragility and displacement of refugees.

The identification with students is a recurrent element throughout her narrative, as if by identifying with them she is in a certain way defending herself from her own sense of fragility and displacement. Lila's personal and professional history is characterized, in her narrative, by a sense of struggle, of resilience, of complex migration between countries and by challenging personal circumstances that had a profound impact on her professional choices.

After her first three years in UK, Lila moved back to her original country where she worked in primary schools. Lila decided later to move back to UK. It seems that this period represents a crucial event in her personal life and a turning point also in her professional career, by which she seems to have come to terms with her professional identity as a language teacher:

> […] definitely (assertive tone of voice)….absolutely….in terms of professional identity, that's my identity…because there are many things that I like, I do a little bit, but the identity it's that of a language teacher….

Lila remained to live and work in UK and she is still very committed and engaged with the teaching profession, above all with the social and political implications related to teaching her native language. Teaching Spanish represents for Lila the possibility to keep a close contact with her native language and country. By projecting aspects of her own identity and personal history into her teaching practices, Lila seems to have come to terms with her sense of loss and of displacement that characterized her life experiences of migration:

> I really think it makes a difference when you teach your own language…definitely…yes, because it's about …it's also about your identity…it's everything…it's the stereotypes, the culture, you are part of that in the class, so you are… 'the real thing' (laughs)….

Throughout her interview, Lila refers very often to teaching as a safe place to be, as a position where she can go when feeling down and when unsure of where she belongs to, as if teaching her native language offers her a reconnection with her sense of identity and of belonging, opening new possibilities of self-negotiation: "so yes, in difficult times it gave me sense of, you know, to have a responsibility into my life, a place where to go to…". We can clearly see that teaching for Lila, as for the two previous participants, is not just a professional practice, but it is an expression of her identity, an activity that reconnects her with her cultural and linguistic belonging, with her experience of migration and of coming to terms with an internal process of transformation. In the cartography activity, Lila drew a winding road with many turning points, with images of change,

endurance and transformation; she also placed some key figures along-side this journey. Her participation in the research, was referred to as interesting, overwhelming and introspective.

5   Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the data described in previous paragraphs, this study gives evidence of language professional journeys into teaching as characterized by complex personal dynamics of migration and negotiation of identities in new cultural and linguistic landscapes and by a clear sense of personal investment in the teaching profession. As suggested by Block (2003, 2007, 2014), we can see that professional choices, are very clearly intertwined with personal lives and with critical incidents, like in the case of the three participants, in which loss of important people and migration to new countries, determined personal and professional turning points. In the case of the second participant, particularly the migration into a new country with a different cultural and social framework, seemed to represent the major step into a re-negotiation of her professional identity into new paradigms.

The process of *becoming* for all three participants seems to resonate Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Braidotti (2011a, b, 2014) post-structuralist view of the subject as multiple, *nomadic*, fragmented and in constant re-negotiation of their lifestyles and believes among a variety of options. Data emerging from this study also seem to substantiate Giddens (1991) and Baumann (2000) definition of *ontological insecurity* as characteristic of the post-modern era, in which key central figures seem to represent stable points of reference in the precariousness of *liquid modernity*. This view refers back to psychoanalytical theories and in particular to Winnicott's believes stating that the foundation of human subjectivity and of a sense of security at the basis of human development and learning, are generated by the trust invested in *caretakers* and by the progressive presence of secure and stable *transitional objects.*

We can clearly see from the data collected in this study, that the presence of key secure figures in the participants' personal lives, had a determinant effect on their stories of migration and on their professional choices. In

addition, we can see that teaching *the mother-tongue* clearly represents something much more than just teaching a subject; it is an act invested with profound personal meanings, with cultural, social and moral values that are embedded in past experiences. We could consider that teaching the first language, *the mother-tongue*, like in my personal and professional biography, is a sort of Winnicottian *transitional space*, in which participants seem to project aspects of their self-identity, of their personal stories of migration in order to keep a connection with their original physical and symbolic place of belonging and of security, with their *mother-land*. Teaching one own's language seems to be a place for self-negotiation.

The data analysis clearly indicates that language teaching is indeed *identity at work* and that the journey into *becoming a language professional* is characterized by nomadic experiences of transformation (Braidotti 2011a, b) and by a complex interaction between conscious and unconscious fantasies between the margins of the personal and of the professional. The *nomadic* and *psychosocial* approach to language teachers' trajectories, allowed space to non-linear thinking, to be attentive to disruptive elements in the narrative discourse of people's lives, to consider unconscious elements in the unfolding of experiences and to give space to the circular dimension of time in teachers' accounts of themselves. This approach also allowed me to reflect on my own diasporic journey into the uncertainty and non-linearity of becoming a language professional and a researcher. In this way, *nomadology*, besides being an ontological framework of reference, also becomes a methodology, that, particularly through the cartographic activity, empowered participants to visually and physically represent their complex and fragmented personal and professional journeys in a disruptive and unconventional way.

Learning and developing as a language professional, do not seem to follow linear and predicted trajectories into knowledge and professional life, particularly those language journeys linked to nomadic and diasporic experiences of migration and of life in liminal zone of proximity. The narrative accounts co-constructed with participants seem to give voice to scattered and fragmented experiences of transformation in which personal and professional knowledge are intertwined, connected and interrelated in a non-linear *assemblage* of occurrences and circumstances that define the multiplicity of the self. Learning and becoming a language professional

seems to be a *rhizomatic*, non-linear journey across boundaries and across time and space.

The findings of this initial study will be further developed and new data will be collected for the completion of the Doctorate in Education and will hopefully contribute to a larger debate on language teachers' identities with the aim to gear training opportunities towards more holistic approaches. The outcomes of this study also indicate that the *psychosocial* methodological framework informed by a psychoanalytical stance towards data collection and analysis, can be considered as a valid investigative tool to provide in-depth data analysis in relation to research on identity. We can also conclude that a consenting engagement in a research project articulated within a psychoanalytical framework, might, like therapy itself, make participants, including the researcher, more aware of their inner conflicts to learning and to professionalization and might potentially initiate transformative journeys, as outlined by Bainbridge and West (2012).

References

Bainbridge, Alan. 2018. *On Becoming an Educational Professional: A Psychosocial Exploration of Developing an Educational Professional Practice.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bainbridge, Alan, and Linden West. 2012. *Minding a Gap, Psychoanalysis and Education.* London: Karnac.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Bamberg, Michael. 1997. *Narrative Development.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Barkhuizen, Gary. 2017. Investigating Language Tutor Social Inclusion Identities. *The Modern Language Journal* 101 (1): 61–75.

Bauman, Zygmund. 2000. *Liquid Modernity.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bion, Wilfred. 1959. *Experiences in Groups.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Bion, Wilfred. 1962. *Learning from Experience.* London: Heimann.

Blanchard-Lanville, Claudine, and Philippe Chaussecourte. 2012. A Psychoanalytically Oriented Clinical Approach in Education Science'. In *Minding a Gap,*

Psychoanalysis and Education, ed. Alan Bainbridge and Linden West, 51–63. London: Karnac.

Block, David. 2003. *The Social Turn in Second Language Acquisition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Block, David. 2007. The Rise of Identity in SLA Research, Post Firth and Wagner (1997). *The Modern Language Journal* 91 (5): 863–876.

Block, David. 2014. *Second Language Identities*, 2nd ed. London: Bloomsbury.

Bollas, Christopher. 2009. *The Evocative Object World*. New York: Routledge.

Braidotti, Rosi. 2014. Writing as a Nomadic Subject. *Comparative Critical Studies* 11 (2–3): 163–184.

Braidotti, Rosi. 2011a. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, 2nd ed. New York: Columbia University Press.

Braidotti, Rosi. 2011b. *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Lisa Braidotti*. New York: Colombia University Press.

Braidotti, Rosi. 2018. A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities.*Theory, Culture, Society*, 1–31.

Britzman, Deborah. 2009. *The Very Thought of Education: Psychoanalysis and the Impossible Profession*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Brockmeier, Jens. 2000. Autobiographical Time. *Narrative Inquiry* 10: 51–73.

Bruner, Jerome. 1986. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, Jerome. 1987. Life as Narrative. *Social Research* 54 (1): 11–32.

Bruner, Jerome. 1990. *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, Jerome. 2001. Self-Making and World-Making. In *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*, ed. J. Brockmeier and D. Carbaugh, 25–37. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Bruner, Jerome. 2002. *Making Stories, Law, Literature, Life*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Bryman, Alan. 2016. *Social Research Methods*, 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Coffey, Simon. 2013. Strangehood and Intercultural Subjectivity. *Language and Intercultural Communication* 13 (3): 266–282.

De Costa, Peter, and Bonny Norton. 2017. Introduction: Identity, Transdisciplinarity, and the Good Language Teacher. *The Modern Language Journal* 101: 3–14.

De Fina, Anna, and Alexandra Georgakopoulou. 2013. *Analyzing Narrative, Discourse and Sociolingusitic Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1994. *What Is Philosophy?* New York: Columbia University Press.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 2000. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Formenti, Laura. 2017. *Formazione e Trasformazione. Un Modello Complesso.* Milano: Raffaello Cortina.

Frosh, Stephen. 2010. *Psychoanalysis Outside the Clinic, Interventions in Psychosocial Studies.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Giddens, Antony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Goodson, Ivor. 2003. *Professional Knowledge, Professional Lives.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Hargreaves, Andy. 1994. *Changing Teachers, Changing Times, Teachers' Work and Culture in Postmodern Times.* London: Continuum.

Hargreaves, Andy. 1998. The Emotional Practice of Teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 14 (8): 835–854.

Hargreaves, Andy. 2000. Four Ages of Professionalism and Professional Learning. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 6 (2): 151–182.

Hargreaves, Andy. 2001. The Emotional Geographies of Teaching. *Teachers College Record* 103 (6): 1056–1080.

Hellawell, David. 2006. Inside Out: Analysis of the Insider Outsider Concept as a Heuristic Device to Develop Reflexivity in Students Doing Qualitative Research. *Teaching in Higher Education* 11 (4): 483–494.

Hollway, Wendy, and Tony Jefferson. 2013. *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: A Psychosocial Approach.* London: Sage.

Hunt, Celia. 1989. *Psychoanalytic Aspects of Fieldwork.* University Paper Series on Qualitative Research Methods, 18. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hunt, Celia, and Linden West. 2006. Learning in a Border Country: Using Psychodynamic Ideas in Teaching and Learning. *Studies in the Education of Adults* 38 (2): 160–177.

Klein, Melanie. 1963. *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946–1963.* New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Laurence.

Klein, Melanie. 1975. *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921–1945.* New York: Free Press.

Kristeva, Julia. 1991. *Strangers to Ourselves.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Mansfield, Nick. 2000. *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway.* St Leonards: Allen & Unwin.

Mercer, Sarah, and Achilleas Kostoulas. 2018. *Language Teacher Psychology*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Miller, Elizabeth R., Brian Morgan, and Adriana L. Medina. 2017. Exploring Language Teacher Identity Work as Ethical Formation. *The Modern Language Journal* 101 (1): 91–105.

Morgan, Brian. 2004. Teacher Identity as Pedagogy: Towards a Field-Internal Conceptualization in Bilingual and Second Language Education. *Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 7 (2 and 3): 172–188.

Morgan, Brian, and Clarke Matthew. 2011. Identity in Second Language Teaching and Learning. In *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, ed. Eli Hinkel, 817–836. New York: Routledge.

Norton, Bonny. 1995. Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning. *TESOL Quarterly* 29 (1): 9–31.

Norton, Bonny. 1997. Language, Identity and the Ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly* 31 (3): 409–429.

Norton, Bonny. 2000. *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education/Longman.

Norton, Bonny. 2010. Language and Identity. In *Sociolinguistics and Language Education*, ed. Nancy Hornberger and Sandra Lee McKay, 349–369. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Norton, Bonny, and Brian Morgan. 2013. *Poststructuralism: In Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Pavlenko, Aneta. 2001. In the World of the Tradition, I Was Unimagined: Negotiation of Identities in Cross-Cultural Autobiographies. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 5: 317–344.

Pavlenko, Aneta. 2006. *Bilingual Minds*. London: Multilingual Matters.

Pavlenko, Aneta. 2007. Autobiographic Narratives as Data in Applied Linguistics. *Applied Linguistics* 28 (2): 163–188.

Pavlenko, Aneta, and Adrian Blackledge. 2004. *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*. Clevedon: Mulitlingual Matters.

Riessman, Catherine K. 2003. *Narrative Analysis*. London and Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Salzberger-Wittenberg, Isca, Elsie Osborne, and Gianna Williams. 1983. *The Emotional Experience of Learning and Teaching*. London: Karnac.

Smiths, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. 2010. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Tsui, Amy. 2007. Complexities of Identity Formation: A Narrative Inquiry of an EFL Teacher. *TESOL Quarterly* 41 (4): 657–680.

Varghese, Manka, Brian Morgan, Bill Johnston, and Kimberly Johnson. 2005. Theorizing Language Teacher Identity: Three Perspectives and Beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education* 4: 21–44.

West, Linden, and Barbara Merrill. 2009. *Using Biographical Methods in Social Research*. London: Sage.

Winnicott, Donald W. 1971. *Playing and Reality*. London: Routledge.

Winnicott, Donald W. 1975. *Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena: Through Pediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*. New York: Basic Books.

Wolff, Dominik, and Peter De Costa. 2017. Expanding the Language Teacher Identity Landscape: An Investigation of the Emotions and Strategies of a NNEST. *The Modern Language Journal* 101 (1): 76–90.

Worton, Michael. 2009. *Review of Modern Foreign Language Provision in Higher Education in England*. Higher Education Funding Council for England. https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180319114655/; http://www.hefce.ac.uk/data/year/2009/Review,of,Modern,Foreign,Languages,provision,in,higher,education,in,England/. Accessed 12 November 2018.

Yin, Robert K. 2009. *Case Study Research: Designs and Methods*, 4th ed. London: Sage.

Youell, Biddy. 2006. *The Learning Relationship: Psychoanalytic Thinking in Education*. London: Karnac.

Zheng, Xuan. 2017. Translingual Identity as Pedagogy: International Teaching Assistants of English College Composition Classrooms. *The Modern Language Journal* 101 (S1): 29–44.