

Chapter 1

Introduction to Research and Practice in Second Language Teacher Identity



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Abstract Second Language Teacher identity (SLTI) has been a burgeoning area of research over the last decade or so within the field of language teacher education in general and second language education (including TESOL) in particular. Given that overall teaching effectiveness and teachers' classroom practices partially rely on teachers' understanding of who they are, personally and professionally, delving into the construct of teacher identity, how it is constructed, developed and shaped as well as the way it interacts with other teacher characteristics has attracted a good deal of research attention recently. This chapter first situates second language (L2) teacher identity within the broader context of second language teacher education (SLTE) and then reviews a sample of the latest research on the topic. It then briefly introduces the content of the rest of the book and highlights its outstanding features.

Keywords Language teachers · Language teacher identity · Professional development · Teacher education · Teacher identity development

1.1 Introduction

Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) is a well established discipline within Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching/Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Richards & Burns, 2009). The first book on SLTE (with the same title) was edited by Richards and Nunan (1990) and published by Cambridge University Press some 30 years ago, and since then different books (such as *Cambridge Guide to SLTE*, by Richards & Burns, 2009) and increasingly numerous papers have appeared on various aspects of SLTE in various journals. Given the numerous branches (like knowledge base of SLTE, standards in SLTE, technology in language teacher education, reflective practice, action research, teacher motivation, teacher cognition, teacher agency, teacher identity, and the like) covered in

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SLTE books and due to insufficient tackling of these important issues in the same volume, authored books and edited collections specifically devoted to the mentioned issues are in high demand to examine the intricate and complex nature of these aspects of second language teachers' professional lives. We use the term 'second language' or L2 in this volume in the broadest sense possible, and as a cover term, to encompass both English and other foreign or modern languages such as Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, and so on that are taught and learned in contexts both where the L2 is spoken outside the classroom (such as teaching/learning English as an additional language in a dominantly English speaking country) and where only a limited (or no) use of the language is feasible outside its instructional setting (like learning Persian, Kurdish or Turkish in a UK language centre). Furthermore, 'second language' does not denote second in terms of order; an L2 may be the third, fourth or nth language one is learning/teaching.

One important aspect of second language teachers is their identity (who they are and what they do). Understanding how second language teachers' identities are formed, developed and shaped is key to learning how and why teachers succeed in their profession or burn out. Interest in understanding the nature of second language teacher identity has been on the rise recently (sepcillay within the last decade or so) and the topic has attracted the attention of a growing number of researchers in the field of SLTE, second language education, and TESOL. Further research on this construct (in English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), modern languages and other foreign languages taught in non-English settings) is required since teacher identities can impact teachers' professional lives, including their interaction with students, administrators, and peers, as well as their classroom practices and other aspects of their teaching life. That is why an understanding of these identities and how they are developed and shaped can immensely help L2 teachers become more effective facilitators of language learning which is the ultimate aim of second language teaching enterprise. This edited volume accordingly aims to bring together the current theory/research and practical perspectives in different parts of the world on second language teacher identity in an attempt to better understand what kinds of identities L2 teachers develop, how these are shaped/ altered, and the various links between teacher identities and a host of teaching/ learning/classroom/educational and societal variables affecting the formation of identities and/or being affected by them.

1.2 Research on Teacher Identity

While research on teachers and teacher education has been in vogue for several decades, research on teacher identity does not have a long history, and only a very limited number of studies attended to issues in teacher identity before 2000. Compared to other SLTE subjects, there has been less attention to identity of of language teachers and even less so as far as second language (L2) teachers are concerned. A simple search in Google Scholar, for example, hits nearly 900 records for 'teacher

identity' keyword, but only 6 results for 'language teacher identity' between 1980 and 2000. A similar proportion is found between 2001 and 2010, with 170 documents for 'language teacher identity' and 6630 for 'teacher identity', with documents on the former growing to 2700 and the latter to 22,000+ between 2011 and 2021. These simple figures indicate that the amount of research on teacher identity has been on a steady rise, especially during the last decade, such that in 2021 there were more than 450 works published on 'language teacher identity' and around 4000 works on 'teacher identity'. These figures tell two things: First, interest in research on teacher identity is growingly attracting researchers' attention on a yearly basis; second, comparably more research is being conducted on 'language teacher identity' such that while 3 and 4 decades ago (between 1980 and 2000), research on 'teacher identity' surpassed research on 'language teacher identity' by 150 times, and by less than 40 times between 2001 and 2010, in 2021, research on the latter has taken a great leap reaching almost one tenth of research on the former. Despite this surge of interest in research on language teacher identity, the number of studies devoted to 'second' language teacher identity remains tiny (11 in 2021 and 81 between 2011 and 2021 at the time of drafting this chapter, December 2021). Fairly covering research on L2 teacher identity within the most recent decade will require a full chapter (and the second chapter in this volume does this to some extent); however, in the short space available in an Introduction chapter, we briefly examine a small sample of the seminal works (both books and papers) published after 2010 in a chronological order.

The earliest volume (since 2010) devoted to second language teacher identity is a monograph by Kiernan (2010), where the author interviewed Japanese English teachers to explore the multidimensional nature of L2 teacher identity (narrative identity) through analysing stories told by teachers. In a study of second language teachers' role identities, Farrell (2011) studied three English as a Second Language (ESL) college teachers in Canada and identified 16 main role identities, divided into three major clusters: manager, teacher as professional, and teacher as acculturator, concluding that teacher as acculturator role is unique to ESL teachers. In the second edition of her significant, groundbreaking classic *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation* (originally published in 2000), and with its focus on L2 learning and learners, Bonny Norton (2013) provided a compelling account that bridged the gap between identity research and practice, considered the relationship between societal structure and human agency, offered insights on the links between Second Language Acquisition (SLA), identity, and social justice, and in short, set the scene for future identity research not only on L2 learning but on L2 teaching and teachers.

Advances and Current Trends in Language Teacher Identity Research by Cheung et al. (2015) is another seminal treatment of key issues in second language teacher identity with topics ranging from the effects of apprenticeship in doctoral training on novice teacher identity to the challenges faced by teachers in the construction of their professional identities, to teacher identity development of beginning and pre-service teachers, to the role of emotions in the professional identities of non-native English speaking teachers, among others. With a focus on gender and identity, Nagatomo

(2016) investigated the development of personal and professional teacher identity among western female teachers (with Japanese spouses) living and teaching in Japan. Kalaja et al.'s (2016) *Beliefs, Agency and Identity in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching* is an insightful exploration of the relationships between the key concepts in the title of the book in the context of teaching and learning second and foreign languages.

A surge on L2 teacher identity research has followed Gary Barkhuizen's (2017) *Reflections on Language Teacher Identity Research*. With its 40+ contributions from some of the most well known scholars in the field, this anthology offers a comprehensive overview of language teacher identity (LTI) from a variety of perspectives in the form of narratives and guided reflections and sets the scene for methodological approaches and future research on LTI. Some of the major topics covered in the book are: teacher autonomy, teacher agency, teacher educator identity, multilingual identity, investment, self disputes, study abroad, researcher identity, ethics, critical teacher identity, race, and gender, among others. The publication of several books on (language) teacher identity in 2018 is a clear indication of a growth in interest in this fledgling field. Yazan and Rudolph's (2018) *Criticality, Teacher Identity, and (In)equity in English Language Teaching*, Schutz et al.'s (2018) *Research on Teacher Identity: Mapping Challenges and Innovations*, and Misfud's (2018) *Professional Identities in Initial Teacher Education: The Narratives and Questions for Teacher Agency* are three prime examples of this expansion in teacher identity research. The first volume offers readers a space to explore critical-practical approaches to identity, (in)equity, and interaction (both within and outside the classroom) envisioned through and beyond binaries like native speaker English teacher (NSET) versus non-native speaker English teacher (NNSET). With its 21 chapters, *Research on Teacher Identity* provides a comprehensive collection of perspectives from international contexts on various aspects of teacher identity such as its social and contextual dimensions, and identifies challenges and innovations of teacher identity research. The research monograph by Misfud draws on narrative data from postgraduate students and explores the perception, construction and performance of professional identities in initial teacher education through school placement, career choice motivations, professional standards, and the like.

Interest in teacher identity research, especially with language teachers (second, foreign, and modern) has grown steadily since 2018. In 2019, for example, Teng (2019) and Gallardo (2019) published *Autonomy, Agency, and Identity in Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* and *Negotiating Identity in Modern Foreign Language Teaching*, respectively. The first book aims at providing English as L2 teachers with frameworks connecting the three key concepts of autonomy, agency and identity to equip them with a deeper appreciation of the challenges in teaching and learning EFL, while the second book (an edited collection) examines modern foreign language teachers' identity construction in the context of UK higher education institutions and offers a range of complex and dynamic views on the contributors' identities, agency, attitudes, relationships and emotions. More recently, two edited volumes by Yazan and Lindahl (2020), and Rudolph et al. (2020) have done due justice to language teacher identity research. In

Language Teacher Identity in TESOL: Teacher Education and Practice as Identity Work, Yazan and Lindahl (through 15 contributions coming from various contexts like Europe, the USA, and Asia) explore the interaction between language teacher identity and professional development in TESOL and elucidate how teacher identity can act as a framework for classroom practice and teachers' professional and personal growth. The focus of *The Complexity of Identity and Interaction in Language Education* by Rudolph et al. is on both learner and teacher identities: the contributors examine such issues as the monolingual bias in English Language Teaching (ELT) in the context of Pakistan, 'other' identities in teaching, French as a second language, translanguaging identities between English and Spanish, intercultural identities in French and German primary teachers, shifting identities, and so on.

In addition to published books on language teacher identity, and as stated above, there are increasingly a growing number of papers published on the topic, the number of which in 2021 amounts to 500 works (according to Google Scholar). Nazari and de Costa (2021), for example, investigate the role of a professional development course based on critical incidents in identity development (and in particular, agency and emotions) of 10 L2 teachers. Transition from an imagined teacher identity to an imposed one by a novice EFL teacher in the context of Turkey is the theme of Goktepe and Kunt's (2021) study. The constructs reported to have shaped this shift include: beliefs about teaching and learning, pre-service education, dynamic relations in communities of practice, and contextual factors. In a Japanese context, Aoyama (2021) studies Japanese English teachers' identity through a multilayered analysis of identity and discourse by analysing their portrayal in national English education policy in Japan as well as their roles as teaching professionals vis-à-vis students and 'nonnative' teachers vis-à-vis imagined 'native' speakers of English. And finally in the context of Korea, Choe and Seo (2021) explore identity negotiation of black teachers of English, examining the intersection of race, ethnicity, and identity and the interplay of sociocultural and political issues in positioning oneself as an authentic teacher. Despite a growing body of research on understanding who second language teachers are, and given a multitude of contexts L2 teachers find themselves working in as well as an array of factors (contextual, internal, and external) shaping their professional and personal development and also due to multiplicity of constructs involved in identity (emotions, agency, investment, etc.), much is still unknown about the process of becoming language teachers; accordingly, further research is still required to help us better understand the nature of L2 teacher identity and ourselves as teachers if we wish to perform our educational duty and deliver to the next generation in the best way possible.

1.3 The Structure of the Book

In addition to this introductory chapter, *Theory and Practice in Second Language Teacher Identity: Researching, Theorising and Enacting* is made up of a Foreword by Jack Richards (University of Sydney and RELC), an Afterword by Peter de Costa

(Michigan State University) and 19 invited chapters by established and active scholars/teacher educators from reputed universities on various aspects of in-service and pre-service second language teacher identity development. The book is made of 3 Parts as follows: Theoretical Stances; Identity Development of Pre-service L2 Teachers; and Pandemic, Technology, and In-service L2 Teachers' Identity Development. The first Part is devoted to conceptual and theoretical considerations in research conducted on second language teacher identity, with a systematic review of second language teacher identity (by Karim Sadeghi and Akbar Bahari), and chapters on local teacher identities at a time of globalization (by David Hayes), identity formation (by Ian Thomson), a synthesis of reflections of applied linguists on teacher identity (by Ng and Cheung), language teacher agency (by Jenelle Reeves) and teacher identity narrative in the context of intercultural communication (by Lesley Harbon). Parts II and III are more practical in nature dealing with reports of studies conducted on L2 teacher identity at various contexts, with Part II primarily focusing on pre-service teachers and Part III on in-service teachers as well as the role of technology in shaping L2 teacher identity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapters in Part II are devoted to a discursive construction of pre-service L2 teachers' identities (by Li Li), co-constructing intercultural identity of pre-service TESOL teachers (by Ping Yang), teacher students' investment in their professions (by Anne Pitkänen-Huhta and Maria Ruohotie-Lyhty), the researcher-teacher's ideologies, tensions and identity negotiations (by Bedrettin Yazan) and identity construction of a Chinese ESL teacher candidate (by Feifei Fan and Ester de Jong). The 8 chapters in the final Part of the book (Part III) tackle a range of issues from pandemic to technology integration to gender and race as well as motivation and their contributions to L2 teacher identity development. More specifically, Anne Burns investigates changes in teacher identity at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic; Frank Gong, Andy Gao and Chun Lai look at the link between technology integration and teacher identity in Chinese as L2; Andwatta Barnes and Donald Freeman offer insights to teacher identity development from the lives of black American women working in the UAE; Luke Lawrence and Yuzukio Nagashima report a similar study within a Japanese context investigating the relationship between race, gender and second language teacher identity; Matilde Gallardo uses visual self-representations to explore lifelong journeys of modern language teachers in the UK context; Anna Sanczyk and Elizabeth Miller consider the interplay between agency and teacher identity; Kate Shea, Li Shi, and Hayriye Kayi-Aydar bring into spotlight the role of emotions in teacher identity development; and finally Karim Sadeghi, Teymour Rahmati and Farah Ghaderi report a study on the role of vision formation in L2 teachers' identity construction.

This edited volume is both similar to the books already published and different from them in several respects. The similarity is that the works are all tackling the central theme of (language) teacher identity. Our volume is however distinct in that, first, it is one of the few books to concentrate on both theoretical and practical issues of teacher identity in second language contexts. Most other books focus on either teacher identity in general (in other fields) or on English as L1 and/or a second

language with little attention paid to other L2s or English in EFL contexts; ours includes second languages (like Chinese) other than English (which is examined at both ESL and EFL contexts) as well as modern and world languages. Second, our book includes both theoretical and pedagogical aspects of L2 teacher identity. While many of the books above look at teacher identity as well as other relevant concepts (like belief, interaction, etc.) in the same volume (and therefore making it difficult to delve properly into teacher identity issues), our book is one of the few devoted exclusively to second language teacher identity. Also, given the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in general and L2 education in particular, our book has a unique chapter examining how the pandemic has affected L2 teachers' identity development. Furthermore, some of the above books either concentrate on learner identity or consider both teacher and learner identity together while this volume targets L2 teachers only whose identity development is investigated either by teachers themselves through action research or with the assistance of university professors and teacher educators. A systematic review of research on L2 teacher identity is one further unique feature of the book. Although a book of this nature has to be limited in scope and coverage and despite its unique features, we are aware that our book has some shortcomings and there is room for improvements in a future edition. We have, for example, been unable to keep a balance between studies on modern languages and English as an L2. One reason for this imbalanced representation is perhaps that we could not secure studies from all geographical places and especially from the Global South, despite our invitations extended to contributors working in these contexts. These less represented parts of the world offer linguistically rich environments for investigating identity development of teachers of languages such as Spanish and Portuguese, which we call for future researchers to attend to.

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