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Teacher's Language and Identity Construction in an EFL Context: A Case from Korean Context

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ABSTRACT

Language choices are often enactment of who's in charge and 'whose values will prevail' (Holmes, 2004, cited in Brian Partridge, 2012 P. 20). And it also applies to language learning particularly EFL learning; however, people tend to focus more on language learning process and pay not so much attention to teacher's language choices in EFL learning, and that might cause a lack of adequate studies in exploring the relations between teacher's language and teacher's identity. To address this concern, this study attempts to investigate how a teacher's identity can be constructed through interactions with the Ph. D program students in a Korean EFL context. A transcript about the interactions of onsite recordings is made and interactional approaches of discourse analysis are adopted to analyze it in detail. Findings indicate that teacher's identity is shaped and constructed in the reoccurring patterns of the teacher's linguistic features.

Keywords: *Language Performance; Teacher; Identity; EFL Learning; Korean National University*

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1. Introduction

At the beginning of third semester of the PHD program, I was told that there would be a challenging Ph. D course for us at the Department of English Education of the University, and finally it came with a name of *language, culture and identity*. I didn't realize how challenging it was until I began my first reading of the course. At the beginning, no matter how I attempted to grasp the main idea of each required reading article, I usually ended up with some vague ideas and puzzling perceptions about them due to the complicatedness of the articles and also my unfamiliarity with them. Honestly speaking, I kept finding myself struggling with the related theories in the field of anthology, sociolinguistics, semiotics etc., and in addition to that, I had also much difficulty in dealing with various terms that I had never heard before. But with the passage of time, I came to recognize the reward of the course and began to reconsider its value and its significance, actually, all the required readings are among the classics of the related field, and knowing and becoming familiar with such readings would usually take a long time, but my efforts seemed

worthwhile, and gradually I came to understand some of the theories, and to my astonishment, eventually I could even make an attempt to apply some of the theories to the brief analysis of some of the language phenomena particularly the conversations. What follows is an initial project of my practice in this area.

2. Literature Review

Identity is considered as one of the fundamental concepts in language learning and teaching (A., & H, 2018, p. 606). And Language teacher identity is an emerging subject of interest in research on language teacher education and teacher development due to the recognized reciprocal relationships between professional identity and professional knowledge and action (Le, 2013, p. 1). In last two decades, there was an increasing interest among scholars in identity. Even though there are different voices such as Rozanov (2016) who argues that the relationship between language and identity is one that has been thoroughly discussed in applied linguistics, sociology, communications and other related scholarly fields, however, many more scholars hold that this field demands further studies, for an

instance, Figueras & Masella (2013) presents that much of the recent research related to language and identity is focused on “the ways identity is constructed in all acts of personal and public communication”. Of the various communications between teacher and student, their interactions inside classroom might be a good choice for language and identity study. In addition, teacher-student interaction has been considered as one of the most important determinants of classroom discipline and climate (Jong., & Wubbels, 2012, p. 948). And it might be safe to assume that the more we learn about teacher-student identity and the interactions between teacher and student, the more progress we might be able to make much more progress in terms of classroom language learning particularly EFL learning. There have been a number of studies on teacher-student identity and interactions between teachers and students, such as Sharma (2013), Prabjandee (2016), H. (2017). Fraser (2018), but as for such studies, they either investigate the identity development of teachers like Prabjandee (2016), H. (2017) and Fraser (2018) or the enactment of teacher identity and its effectiveness in dealing with the conflicting issues among students like Sharma (2013), however, few of the studies focus on exploring the teacher identity development in EFL context, so in order to address this concern, this present study seeks to explore how a teacher's identity is constructed through interactions with students within an EFL language class in a Korea Academy.

In this regard, researches questions are:

- 1) How is a teacher's identity shaped through interactions with students in an EFL context?
- 2) What are the features of teacher identity development in an EFL context? What would be the implications of teacher identity development on EFL learning?

First question is the main research question and to address this question, a case study is designed to explore the construction of the teacher's identity via the interactions between the teacher and the students. In order to address the second question, we will extend the data analysis of the case study to the teacher's corresponding function in EFL class. Based on the data analysis, the teacher's identity features are summarized, and its pedagogical implications are given.

3. Methodology

The case study was designed to focus the following aspects such as the selection of the subject, site, and participants to address

the main research question. Data collection was conducted with the onsite recordings and afterward transcriptions. Among the onsite three recordings with a length of seven and a half hours in total, and a recording of two and a half hours were selected for this case study based on the initial evaluation with a criteria with its appropriateness and its feasibility in terms of research questions. Then, the interactional approaches of discourse analysis were adopted to analyze the linguistic cues of the interactions between the subject and the other participants with the application of the related sociolinguistic theories.

3.1 Subject

Since this case study focused on Dr. K's language performance during her interactions with the Ph. D students; therefore, it is necessary to state the reason why the professor, Dr. K is considered as the subject of this study. Even Dr. K is a new face to the Department of English Education of this Korean national university (There is background information that Dr. K came to join the faculty team just one and half years ago), she has already become a quite experienced and competent English professor with the consideration of her former teaching experience in other colleges and universities. Although she is relatively young as a professor, she has already gained respect and popularity from the students including the Ph. D program students with her fluent English and her excellent studies in the field of quantitative research, and more importantly, she is particularly patient in and outside the classes and she is kind to every student who ever turned to her for help. So as for Dr. K, as an EFL teacher and professor, I believe her language performance through the interactions with the Ph D students can demonstrate a professor's identity and it can also reflect the similar process through which how an EFL teachers' identity is constructed. To learn more about the relations between a teacher's language performance and identity in an EFL context could also enable us to contribute to EFL teaching and learning.

3.2 Site

Since Dr. K is an EFL professor and her teaching post is in the Department of English Education of the university, so my focus site of this case study is the Multimedia Classroom of Department of English Education, where a new Ph. D course (also an EFL class of this spring semester is held every Wednesday



afternoon, and the conversations were recorded on March 21st, March 28th and April 11th respectively of 2017.

Table 1: A Timeline for the Recordings

	Date	Length of Time	Selected Transcript
First recording	March 21st	2:28:25	No
Second recording	March 27th	2:48:10	Yes
Third recording	April 17	2:55:31	NO

3.3 Participants

Six Ph. D students (D1, D2, H, N, G and S) and one professor (J-Dr. K) were the main participants in this transaction. A Chinese Ph. D student S was the key informant for the study, J also Dr. K is a Korean EFL professor who got her Ph. D from a university of U.S.A and she speaks English just like a native English speaker since she stayed in U.S.A for almost eight years. And this semester she gave a Ph. D course named *Language, Culture and Identity*. And Dr. K is the focus of this case study. D1 is a Korean female Ph. D student, D2, H and S are three Chinese male Ph. D students, N and D are two Uzbekistan female Ph. D students. Since all interactions of this study were carried out in English, it is quite necessary to state that as a rule, all the Ph. D students' particularly international PH. D students have to submit their qualified certificate of English proficiency before they get admitted by the Ph. D program of Department of English Education of this Korean national university.

3.4 Data Collection and Procedure

Since the Ph. D course was usually held every Wednesday afternoon 1:00pm to 3:40 pm, I (S) was situated in this study site as a participant as well as an observer and a key informant, the recordings work went all through the Ph. D class. Totally three recordings of the conversation about three classes with seven and a half hours were made and a recording of two and a half hours was selected for this case study based on the initial evaluation of the recording, 10 minutes' featured conversation was chosen (1:15:26 to 1:24:45) for the detailed analysis. To ensure the authenticity of the transcript, it was cross checked and revised by the participants including D1, C, N and G via emails attached with the recording.

4. Data Analysis

With the theoretical base of Woodward (1997) on identity construction's and Goffman (1979) on "footing", interactional approaches are adopted for the conversation analysis which emphasizes on the investigation of the relations between the subject's language performance and her teacher identity.

4.1 Theoretical Foundations on language and identity

Woodward (1997) makes a case study that argues that identity is constructed through the marking of difference. The difference, a participant holds, takes place "...both through symbolic systems of representation, and through forms of social exclusion. In this study, the marking of difference through the interaction between Dr. K and the Ph. D students is to be analyzed from the general framework of the sampled conversation and its linguistic features.

For this case study, Goffman's theory is also beneficial; Goffman (1979) uses a nice metaphor, "footing", to describe participants' interactional positions in any encounter. Whenever people interact, verbally or not, they take up some sort of position with respect to others.

4.2 The application of interactional approaches and a general analysis of the transcript

Since Interactional approaches have been instrumental in understanding the constitutive role of talk in learning and social life at school, which is central to all discourse work on schooling ((Tannen& Hamilton& Schiffrin, p. 858), the interactional approaches to adopted to analyze the selected transcript of this case study.

The current transcript mainly illustrates the Ph. D students' interaction with Dr. K. And it can be found that most of time, the conversation is guided by Dr. K as she makes requests, gives instructions, suggestions and requirements on the Ph. D course as well as students' preferences. As for this course, cooperation also plays an important role; therefore, exchanging views points between Dr. K and her Ph. D students is also important. While reading this transcript, two general questions that I came up with are given as the following: firstly, what was the nature of this transaction? Second, how did Dr. K position herself to display different kinds of (authoritative, leading) stances in terms of social hierarchy (or ideology)? Consequently, how did the

Ph. D students socially position themselves to Dr. K, altogether, how is Dr. K's identity is constructed through the interactions?

The reasonable base of asking such questions was the regular pattern seen in the Ph. D students' counter response to Dr. K's speaking. Although different situations and different cultural contexts call forth various responses from each participant, reoccurring pattern was seen throughout this transcript in which the participants appeared to respond to certain presupposed socially habitual notion of student/ teacher relationship (Ph. D student/ professor relationship)

There were patterns where the Ph. D students responded to Dr. K's somewhat authoritative remarks ("just let me know", "you don't have to be") with deference ("ok", "yeah", and here, it might be questionable about the responses like "ok", "yeah" function as such a feature, it might be that such kind of responses might be due to their incapability of expressing themselves in English, however, most of Ph. D students who are enrolled here at least with an IELTS score of 6, so I have a reason to argue such Ph. D students might have some problems of expressing some of their ideas sometimes, but usually it is not a problem for them among conversations). I also noticed that this general pattern was often highlighted in the use of pronouns. For instance, pronouns (e.g. "I", "you") indicated different interactional positioning, which sometimes seemed stable and sometimes appeared to shift. Focusing on the different layers of interpretations from the students and teacher's point of view, student/ teacher relationship appears to be the general framework in this transcript. In doing so, I intend to examine how the participants during the interaction position themselves in the presupposed models that strengthen the Ph. D student/ professor relationship. Therefore, I find Wortham's note on interactional positioning and deictic mapping along with Goffman's notion of different footing beneficial in seeing the interactional patterns in the conversation. Also important is Silverstein's notion of the dialectic process in the different layers of interpretation when speakers making meaning of each utterance. Thus, borrowing from Silverstein's idea, I am interested in understanding how the micro-social frame of this particular transcript can be accessed to demonstrate the conflict or cooperation with the macro-social frame of Ph. D student/ professor relationship.

4.2.1 The reoccurring patterns indicate an authoritative figure

It can be found that the reoccurring patterns in the speech acts of alternating participant roles elicited a general kind of interaction. To be exactly, it is, a seemingly authoritative figure, Dr. K interacts with her Ph. D students. While this transcript seems to be more about an agreed structure on who gets to speak and what or when he or she needs do something. And which is quite different from a socially habitual two-way dialogue. If we usually consider that the ideologically driven relationship where in any academic institution the professor holds more authority to give and take information to and from students (and authority is to decide whether the students can graduate or not), there seems to be a relatively subtle power relationship between professor and students in this transaction. For example, Dr. K has more licenses to control how she prefers to position herself with the students. In Line 40, Dr. K situates herself as the authoritative voice, "If You want to tell me 50/50 what day you want to present, I will put it down up here." And also, in Line 53, Dr. K maintains a similar voice, ": If you, just let me know and anyone can do it for you." It can be found that sentences such as Let me know, if you..., I will..." as a kind of index which tend to point to Dr. K's authoritative positioning in many of the speech events. On the contrary, the Ph. D students do speak, but their speeches generally conform to a kind of interaction in which their voice will often have less power to shift the dynamic of the conversation. Such verbal cues like "yeah", "ok", index agreement and deference in response to Dr. K's authoritative position. These verbal cues in turn also help to strengthen Dr. K's deference authority discourse. The example given below might reflect the structure that is elaborated in the Ph. D students' deference in response to Dr. K's typical authoritative requirement.

The segment of the transaction given below is about Dr. K is to begin a talk about one aspect of the changes in China and the students responds actively to her talk.

(line 24- 31)

J: presentation, as for pedagogy, only so much can do

S: **Yeah**

J: how to analyze the number, that's it? But this kind of open as to learn language like English seems to open ...wider ...perspectives

S: **Yeah**



J: even if you don't use it

H: I, I guess it is suitable for us, because...blurring

J: China because...is still relatively homogeneous and a single community

H: **yes**

4.2.2 The use of pronoun indicates Dr. K's authoritative voice

As for the other ways that Dr. K establishes her authoritative voices is reflected in the use of personal pronoun. The first-person pronoun "I" indexes agency and power in which Dr. K appears to usually have ownership of, which seems to indicate that Dr. K's use of I positions herself as an authority. And the rest of students are frequently referred to as "you", and also Dr. J frequent use of second person pronoun "you" (which appears like a pattern)

The conversation clips given below is about students' responses to the required presentation list of the Ph. D course

(line 72-84)

D2: except me, I think Maya she has not registered ... Yes, registering, she's already said

J: **you** can pick and ...

J: Steven's presentation is already set there, yeah, **you** can pick, choose and decide, let me know If **you** Can do it twice or once. Because you are not registered, so... it might be helpful that **you** and also your classmates...

D1: N, have you, have you chosen the list? Which one, which one do you. one, two, three, four, five?

N: yes

J: if **you** notice the C10 and C11, those ...tend to be short, C10 and C11. We see only one or two reading, it is a reason because it is the, the hardest reading

N: which one?

D1: which one?

J: C10

D1: C10, c—10 the difficult one. Hah

J: yeah, but they may not be that long, it might be that even two hours **you** probably end earlier it might be the reason that **I** left that open, because it is very, very dense. Aha even I cannot go, **I** read it two times reading I cannot fully understand it well

N: laughing

J: in an hour...then **I** was thinking if that happens, **I** might add another reading but **I** still didn't add it yet. Good, **I** might, or **I** might not.

In this interaction, as for the students are required to take turns to put their names on the presentation list, Dr. K also gives her

comment, and we can see that the pronouns "I" which indexes agency and power is more frequently used by Dr. K and that helps to build and strengthen her authoritative position. However, students are referred more as "you" and therefore are distanced from the authoritative and leading position.

4.2.3 Linguistic cues also indicate Dr. K's authoritative and cooperative roles

Just as Kiesling presents that people's instances in interactions are thus responses to the speech situation and the reactions of his interlocutors, and it can also be found according to the following lines of the transcripts, as a professor, Dr. K is supposed to create an authoritative position by employing linguistic means in the interaction, while she also tends to be politely, friendly and cooperative to the Ph. D student, it can found that the interactions also shows that Dr. K is willing to discuss with the students and to think in the students' positions, to reach agreement with the students. Expressions like "you don't have to", "If you want to" "if you have..." etc. tend to demonstrate that even Dr. K as a professor can put her requirement in a rigid and strict way, however, in this interaction, Dr. K also take the students' opinions into her consideration and even discuss with them to reach agreement.

The clip given below is not only about students' responses but with Dr. K's comment.

D1: Then everybody will finish the first round.

J: **you don't have to**

D1: you can choose the first, I will choose the last, aha

J: **if you want to**

D2: I think I will do it later ...I mean I want...

J: **yeah, that is why I am wondering, if you have. Everyone will be grateful for you. So maybe**

D2: except me, I think Maya she has not registered ... Yes, registering, she's seemingly already said that

J: **you can pick and ...**

Having elaborated on a few of the different layers of interpretation from the perspective of a typical student/teacher discourse, I return to the second question: how did Dr. K position herself to display different kinds of stances in terms of social hierarchy? And how did the Ph. D students socially position themselves in response to Dr. K's remarks.

4.2.4 The students' responses further support and strengthen Dr. K's stance

Let's see how Dr. K begins the interaction with mentioning a piece of news and how the students respond to it. When Dr. K talks about the news, S answers with "yes", H responds with "really", and D echoes with a surprising way by expressing his cooperation with "oh, Hawking, I know I know, a very famous", which means all the three students tend to be very cooperative in this interaction to express their support to professor. While successfully begin a talk, then Dr. K merely responds with very short answer like "Today", "physicist", "yeah" etc. Even it might not be so clear that which students' positions can be reveals by this interaction, but Dr. K's authoritative stance can be seen very clearly by her centered position. Because those three different students' responds to Dr. K actively and cooperatively, while Dr. K brief answer also strengthens her stance as a professor.

The clip is about how Dr. K begins a conversation with a piece of news and it also includes both the students' and Dr. K's responses.

J: Stephen Hawking? Stephen?

S: Stephen Hawking, yes.

H: Time? Really,

J: **Today.**

it was a big deal today

D1 : oh, Hawking, I know I know, a very famous

J: **physicist**

D1: yeah, physicist and disabled

J: **Yeah,**

H: He made some forecast last year about the future

J: **yeah,** he is a kind of

D1: He has warned all Chinese do not contact with the ET.

J: **Yeah**

But there is not a noticeable shift that can be found in the conversation, even Dr. K started the dialogue with the students with a piece of news in a friendly way and with a soft voice, what Dr. K has said all seem to indicate she is to instruct and lead the class. And she continues to maintain her stance by talking about the arrangement of the presentation list for the Language, Culture and Identity class. As for the students, it seems that they have the sense of shared support and a respectful attitude towards Dr. K.

4.3 A reflection on the overall characteristics of the teacher's identity and its implications

In order to address the second research question, we would like to reflect more on the overall characteristics based on the above discussions, which indicates that as a professor in an EFL class in a Korean university as well as the subject of this case study, Dr. K has her own characteristics of being young but experienced, authoritative but also cooperative. On the one hand, being young as a teacher could be an advantage to help her gain a popularity from the EFL students and on the other hand, being experienced as a professor, she would be more likely to become a good example for the EFL students to follow. And of course, as far as EFL learning is concerned, to be cooperative could make Dr. K more welcome in EFL classes and to be authoritative would also give her a base to tell and to teach. Eventually, a combination of such features helps make the subject of this case study a new role which is ordinary but also particular, its ordinariness is in the sense that she can be considered as an example of a typical EFL teacher whereas her particularity owes much to her role as a professor young but experienced, authoritative and also cooperative, patient and also friendly. And all of these characteristics could contribute to optimizing the EFL teaching and learning.

Limitations and Future Research

Firstly, since this case study is a practice of applying the related sociolinguistic theories to the study of language and identity, one sample transcription was analyzed in details, such data might not be adequate to support the argument that could demonstrate how an authoritative identity is constructed through the interactions, therefore, more data might needs to be collected and the factors including the non-verbal cues should also be considered to demonstrate how the identity is constructed and shaped through the interactions.

Secondly, the content of the interactions between teacher and students might also have their direct influences on the language performance of the participants in terms of the participants' cooperativeness, since the detailed analysis of this study just exemplified the casual talk, more interactions about various contents might be needed for further studies to find out how responsive the students could be towards teacher's initiation of a conversation.

5. Conclusion

In the context of EFL teaching in a Korean Academy, the transcript analysis



could be generalized to reflect how a teacher's identity is constructed. Even these examples mentioned above are only small snippets of the different embedded layers of meaning in this conversation, I do hope that with more ethnographic information how Dr. K responds to any other students from other ethnic background, a more and detailed analysis might be found. However, this given transcript does provide an example in which a professor uses language to demonstrate her identity with respect to the Ph. D students in her class. According to Holmes (Holmes, 2004, Cited in Brian Partridge, 2012 P. 20), language choices are often enactment of who's in charge and 'whose values will prevail'. And in this micro analysis it cannot be seen that whose value will prevail, but it can be found that who is actually in charge and it is through the interactions with the Ph. D students that Dr. K's identity as a teacher, an EFL professor is clearly constructed and an authoritative and cooperative role of a Korea professor stands out with her language performance. In this particular transcript we can also infer that how the identity presented by Dr. K was somewhat consistent throughout the conversation. It also shows that even identity is seemly fluid and shifting sometimes in reality and in practice, while according to this case study, it can also indicate that identity is still constrained by presupposed cultural models: Identity of Ph. D students and Identity of professor and Identity of Language Teaching & Learning etc. Accordingly, Dr. K's performance of an authoritative figure inside a Ph. D language course in the EFL context seems to be a response to some cultural models which upholds scholars in higher education as embodiment of knowledge, which implicates knowledge hierarchy. In addition, Dr. K's cooperative role together with her authority in EFL class could contribute to optimizing the EFL teaching and learning in this Korean university.

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