An Investigation of the Role of Identities in Foreign Language Teaching: The Case of Graduate Teaching Assistants

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Abstract

This study investigates the complexities associated with graduate language instructors' identities. It particularly sheds light on whether or not and to what extent eight teaching assistants (TA) of German at a large southwestern US university identify as teachers of German. The participants included novice and advanced instructors teaching different levels of German. Findings illustrate that TAs' identities are negotiated in interaction with others and in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Discussing their identities, TAs used various interpretive repertoires, underscoring their individuality and their experiences. The study's findings suggest that TAs' identities as German instructors are still in progress and that TAs continue to need professional development and support from the departments to fully identify as part of the profession.

Introduction

As educators "in an educational institution like the university, our shared goal as teachers should be to encourage individuals to develop 'identities' generally, whatever they may be" (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 133). However, we should not forget that teachers carry their own identities and bring them into their classrooms. Teacher identities have become an important research area in applied linguistics, but relatively little discussion has centered on teachers of foreign languages (other than English) in the US.

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Research on teacher identities has concentrated on English as a Second Language/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) teacher identities (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Johnson, 1994; Menard-Warwick, 2008). From these, two main dimensions emerge: First, biographical identities, which incorporate teachers' previous learning, teaching, and cross-cultural experiences. The second dimension is contextual identities, which include the classroom, the institution, and the textbook.

Although these two dimensions of ESL/EFL teacher identities might be applicable to foreign language other than English (FL) teachers identities, the research on the latter is scarce. Foreign languages differ from any other subject in that the subject that is taught should be also the medium of instruction, which can often complicate the construction and development of teacher identities. Language teaching, more than any other area in education, requires that instructors constantly renegotiate their identities (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). However, research is lacking in how graduate language instructors' identities affect FL teachers' classroom practices and professionalization. This study aims to fill this void by investigating the development of teacher identity of FL graduate teaching assistants of German and how this identity formation influences their approach to and affiliation with teaching German. Therefore, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions: (1) How (if at all) do TAs of German develop their teacher identities?, (2) How (if at all) do these developed identities impact their actual teaching?, and (3) How (if at all) do TAs of German identify as teachers of German?

Review of Literature

In the field of applied linguistics and especially in FL education, identity is an emerging field of research. Identity constructs encompass many various elements. Attributes, such as age, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and race have been important, yet not adequate enough to define identity. To understand and define identity better, Bakhtin's (1981) perspective connects "biographical" and "discoursal" identities (Ivanic, 1998). Bakhtin sees the self "constituted as a story, through which happenings in specific places and at specific times are made coherent" (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p. 158). Identity negotiation then happens within discourses and through interaction with others. This is a central point to Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, in which the emphasis lies on the interaction with the "other."

Another way of looking at discourse and interaction, especially in the context of teaching, is Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice, which aids in understanding how identities are formed within communities and groups. We identify, or are identified, as people who belong to social groups, roles, and categories. The community of practices includes multiple identities and participation levels. A central concept is participating in communities, which can range from full membership to non-participant membership (Wenger, 1998). Wenger argues that we define ourselves "by what is familiar" and through the different practices in which we engage. He insists that we decide "who we are *not* by what is familiar," thus concluding that our identities are not formed only "through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through practices we do not engage in" (p. 164). Participating in practices leads to membership in these practices and not partaking in other practices reflects

what Wenger (1998) refers to as non-participant membership. To become a full member of the community entails more than just participating; it is also dependent on motivation, access to resources, and support. As teachers, we participate and choose not to participate in many different communities, and thus negotiate our identities within these participations/non-participations; therefore, these aspects need to be considered when it comes to identity negotiation and language teaching.

In the context of language teaching, Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005) maintain that "[i]n order to understand language teaching and learning we need to understand teachers: the professional, cultural, political and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them" (p. 22). Duff and Uchida (1997) summarize the key to understanding language teacher identity by stating:

> Language teachers and students in any setting naturally represent a wide array of social and cultural roles and identities: as teachers or students, as gendered and cultured individuals, as expatriates or nationals, as native speakers or nonnative speakers, as content-area or TESL / English language specialists, as individuals with political convictions, and as members of families, organisations, and society at large. (p. 451)

As already mentioned, identity formation occurs in interaction with others, with our surroundings, and within different communities of practice (Bakhtin, 1981; Ivanic, 2006; Wenger, 1998). Most research on teacher identities has used sociocultural theories and emphasized that these identities needed to be examined within a social and cultural context (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 1997), considering the community, institution, teachers' background, and background of the students. Identities depend on institutional and interpersonal contexts (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Johnson, 1994; Menard-Warwick, 2008; Pennycook, 1994). These contexts play an important role in the formation of identities among teachers and students.

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In Duff and Uchida's (1997) investigation of four EFL teachers in Japan, the authors conclude that teacher identities emerge in two dimensions. The first dimension is the biographical/professional identity. This concept of identity aligns with other research on teachers utilizing their own learning experiences in their development as teachers of EFL (Johnson, 1994). The second dimension is contextual identities. The researchers argue that "[t]he teachers were continuously negotiating the curriculum, the institution's expectations of them, their own teaching/learning preferences, and their comfort level in dealing with (cross-) cultural issues and materials" (Duff & Uchida, 1997, p. 469). Although Duff and Uchida's (1997) study foregrounds biographical and contextual factors, which are important in research of teacher identities, the researchers have neglected the significance of the interaction between teachers' identities and different factors, such as colleagues, students, and in the case of TAs, their lives as graduate students. Their study, however, illustrated the complex, interwoven, and multifaceted nature of teachers' identities.

Confirming Duff and Uchida's (1997) first dimension of biographical identity, Beijaard et al. (2000) indicate that biographic/life experiences greatly influence the professional teacher identity, as evidenced in an investigation of twelve secondary school teachers from four different subject fields (languages, science/math, social studies, and art) in the Netherlands. Factors at play in this study are teaching experience, teachers' biography, and teaching context. Even though the teachers embrace different perceptions of professional identity, the significance of teaching experience still emerged as a main finding of the study.

In a comparative case study of two English language teachers, Menard-Warwick (2008) also discovers the identity dimensions that Duff and Uchida (1997) point out. Menard-Warwick's (2008) participants include a Chilean EFL teacher, who worked in the United States a long time before returning home, and a California ESL teacher, who originally came from Brazil. Menard-Warwick (2008), as well as Pennycook (1994), call for more research on teacher identities and their influence on teaching practices by using reflection on their teaching and cultural trajectories. Following the importance of investigating teacher identities by using reflection, Vásquez and Urzúa (2009) address identity work in a longitudinal, four-year-study, which was performed by analyzing novice language teachers' use of direct reported speech versus direct reported mental states in a university intensive English program. The researchers concentrate on teachers' utterances and how novice teachers communicated and interacted professionally while developing and negotiating themselves as teachers. Vásquez and Urzúa (2009) discover that teachers who describe their teaching in direct reported speech projected "an image of a future professional" with "a strong sense of agency, [...] certainty, confidence, and assertiveness," concluding that direct reported speech "is most often used as a resource to depict the self as a capable, competent, resourceful professional and one who is clearly in control of her classroom and her students" (p. 13). In contrast, teachers expressing their mental states stress "uncertainty or insecurity, lack of knowledge, or even negative feelings and emotions" (p. 13). These results underscore the struggle that teachers can experience during their careers, feeling confident and competent on the one hand, and experiencing insecurity and maybe even incompetence on the other hand.

Vásquez and Urzúa (2009) have contributed to the important call for reflection on teaching. As Goodwin (2005) recommends,

> The personal and professional is unified by central core values or philosophies subjectively felt by individual teachers. Teaching is beneficially understood in the larger life context taking the lives of teachers seriously form an inner perspective. (p. 234)

Considering all these factors allows for an in-depth understanding of teachers and successful implementation of teacher education. To be able to consider all these factors, it seems that utilizing narrative and critical reflections as research methodologies might illuminate teacher identities the most.

In her article "The Emerging Beliefs and Instructional Practices of Pre-Service ESL Teachers," Johnson (1994) discusses teachers' beliefs and the influence of

these beliefs on teachers' perceptions and how these affect what teachers said and did in their classrooms. Further, she claims that teachers' beliefs influenced how they learned to teach and summarized the importance of understanding teachers' beliefs in order to improve teaching practices and training programs. Johnson's participants have been students for a long time and their experiences and beliefs as students have affected the way they have approached teaching. Two additional kinds of knowledge that influence teachers' perception and understanding of their teaching are (1) knowledge of subject matter and curriculum and (2) teachers' teaching theories, which refers to "their personal and subjective philosophy and their understanding of what constitutes good teaching" (Richards, 1998, p. 51). These beliefs and this knowledge are part of negotiating language teachers' identities and affect teaching practices in the classroom.

Teaching practices, however, differ across fields, and as Neumann (2001) points out, there are different teaching practices across disciplines at the university level, i.e., "hard" disciplines, such as engineering, which have cognitive goals and learning facts, whereas "soft" disciplines, such as the humanities, emphasize general knowledge and effective thinking skills. Hammadou and Bernhardt (1987) state that being a FL teacher is even more different:

> Being a foreign language teacher is in many ways unique within the profession of teaching. Becoming a foreign language teacher, too, is a different process from that which other future teachers experience. This reality is rooted in the subject matter of foreign language itself. In foreign language teaching, the content and the process for learning the content are the same. In other words, in foreign language teaching the medium is the message. (p. 302)

Borg (2006) emphasizes Hammadou and Bernhardt's (1987) five characteristics that distinguish a FL instructor from teachers of other subjects:

1. the subject matter (students do not understand the medium of the subject yet)
2. necessary interaction patterns (e.g., group work to guarantee effective instruction), which one can argue that more subjects are leaning toward this type of instruction in today's age. However, in FLs this is an absolute must to achieve the goals of communication, whereas in other subjects this might still be only an option.
3. continuous increase in knowledge, due to the nature of language and culture changing continuously.
4. isolation from other teachers of other subjects, e.g., being the only FL teacher at a school,
5. outside support to learn the subject, e.g., enough funding/grants to do continuous professional development.

In his study, Borg (2006) examines five group participants in order to observe whether the participants realized any of the above-mentioned characteristics of language teachers and to note whether participants' perceptions related to their background (e.g., teaching experience). He reports that the participants perceived

themselves as unique due to being language teachers. Some themes that emerged in his study are the following:

1. dynamicity of the language
2. complex content of language teaching
3. materials and methods available to language teachers
4. special and close relationship to students
5. issue of native/non-native speaker (NS/NNS) language teachers.

The present study's aim is to illustrate how some of these characteristics—specifically, the complex content of language teaching, the materials and methods available to language teachers, and their relationship to their students, intertwine with teacher identities and how graduate instructors of German experience identifying as a FL teacher.

The Present Study

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the perspective of graduate TAs of German as they experience the process of forming identities as teachers at a large southwestern university and the impact on the participants' approach to teaching German in the classroom and their identification with the field of teaching German. The following questions were used as a guide in the study:

1. How (if at all) do TAs of German develop their teacher identities?
2. How (if at all) do these developed identities impact their actual teaching?
3. How (if at all) do TAs of German identify as teachers of German?

Participants

Eight graduate instructors participated in the study, three of whom were female and five male. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. At the time of the study, Linda and Ingrid were in their mid 20s; Matthew and Paul in their late 20s; and Franc, Joseph, Justin, and Vanessa were in their 30s. Five of the instructors taught first-year German courses: Linda and Justin taught first-semester German; and Paul, Ingrid, and Vanessa taught second-semester German. The remaining three instructors taught second-year German courses: Matthew taught a third-semester, Franc a fourth-semester, and Joseph taught a second-year accelerated course. Six instructors had been teaching German for several years; the other two were in their first- or second-year of instruction. (See Table 1.)

Data and Analysis

This study employed a descriptive and qualitative design, using five data-collection tools: (1) three questionnaires (see Appendix), (2) field notes from classroom observations of each participant, (3) three self-reflective journal entries from each participant, (4) a focus-group interview with all of the participants, and (5) semi-guided interviews with each participant. Using Glaser's (1992) grounded theory and discursive psychology (Edley, 2001) allowed the discovery of how the

Table 1. Overview of participants

Participants	Gender	Age range	Course
Linda	female	18-25	first-semester German
Justin	male	26-33	first-semester German
Matthew	male	26-33	third-semester German
Paul	male	26-33	second-semester German
Franc	male	34-40	fourth-semester German
Ingrid	female	18-25	second-semester German
Joseph	male	34-40	second-year accelerated German
Vanessa	female	26-33	second-semester German

participants talked about themselves, and described themselves and their identities. For all tools, the data were analyzed similarly. By reading and re- reading the responses and comparing them to one another, various themes and categories, such as instructional context and interpersonal relationships, emerged. Within these themes, categories, such as self-image, role of students, function of instructional context, motivation for teaching (see Findings), materialized through the words and phrases the participants used. The analysis mainly revolved around the issues that participants raised (emergent theme analysis).

Questionnaires. Three questionnaires, which consisted of multiple-choice, Likert-scale items (1-5), and open-ended items, were administered online and addressed the following topics: (1) personal demographic information, (2) classroom teaching experience, and (3) classroom teaching of culture. The open-ended items of the questionnaires were qualitatively analyzed, using emergent theme analysis (Glaser, 1992). This analysis determined common constructs across participants' responses.

Field notes from observations. The observations allowed the collection of information about instructors' actual teaching practices and the comparison of what instructors practiced in the classroom to what they reported. These observations

helped triangulate teacher-reported data in order to better understand teacher identification.

Reflective journals. Participants in the study were asked to write self-reflective journals. Open-ended questions served as guidance for the entries. Discursive psychology, which is concerned with "language as its topic" investigating ways in which people express attitudes, emotions, and memories (Edley, 2001, p. 90), aided in studying how participants understand and decipher a situation, and how they present themselves and their ideas in a narrative. Qualitative analysis as well as analysis of data through discursive psychology do not function as generalization or prediction, but rather as description of a particular phenomenon.

Focus group and individual interviews. Participants also met for a 60-minute, videotaped focus group discussion, with individual follow-up interviews, which were audiotaped.

Findings

This study focused on illustrating the nature of teacher identities of graduate instructors of German and how these identities affect the professionalization of teachers in and outside of the classroom. In this context participants' narratives revealed three emergent main themes: (1) instructional content, (2) interpersonal factors, and (3) intrapersonal factors. All emphasis in the quotations by the participants has been added by the researcher.

Instructional Content

This first theme emerged when the participants described part of their self-image as an instructor. Understanding all aspects of their instructional content and how to deliver that content was one important part of their seeing themselves as teachers, which underscores Vásquez and Urzúa's (2009) findings of teachers' struggle with feeling competent, of which a crucial component is knowing the subject matter. In the first self-reflective journal and on the questionnaire, participants described themselves as teachers, among other things. In this narrative, the material and the course content were highlighted.

> Being a teacher, especially a language teacher, is so much *more than just presenting materials written in a textbook* [emphasis added]. (Vanessa/Self-reflective journal entry)

> It can be *rather difficult* to walk the line between *explaining* how "Germans" do something or think about something without creating stereotypes. There's a lot of nuance there and as a non-native I often find it *difficult* to deal with prescriptive situations like going to a doctor or life in the university that I barely experienced (if at all) while in Germany... my personal experience with German culture and my use of German since high school has almost no overlap with what we teach. (Justin/Questionnaire I)

> Sometimes it [teaching] puts me under pressure of *"knowing it all."* It does happen that a student asks a question *I do not know* the answer to. I don't feel like I am failing, but it does give me a *bad feeling*…. (Ingrid/Self-reflective journal entry)

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Using different interpretive repertoires, these instructors described themselves as teachers in part by stating the importance of conveying instructional materials to their students, knowing/not knowing the material, and having difficulty explaining their subject matter. Giving students more than just information or knowledge seemed to be very important to them as a way of illustrating their concern and awareness of duties as teachers. The material and subject matter of their discipline belong to their identity as language teachers, which Duff and Uchida (1997) also found. The instructors elaborate more on this theme in the interview as well by emphasizing that to be able to convey the content as FL instructors, they need to stay continuously informed on the subject. A language and its culture(s) change over time, and constant engagement with the language and culture becomes part of the teacher identities.

> Language teachers should *read the news in order to be able to talk to the students* about current events (culture!!!). (Vanessa/Self-reflective journal entry)

> I think language teachers should be required to *inform themselves about what is going on in a culture, since there are always changes,* [...] but I think that's up to the teachers themselves to actually keep on track on what is going on. (Ingrid/Interview)

Borg (2006) and Hammodou and Bernhardt (1987) have shown that being a language teacher differs considerably from being a teacher of other subjects. Three distinguishing characteristics identified in their research were the unity of content and medium, the interactive nature of the language being taught, and the challenges of language change. In other words, the constant examination of the material and content, the medium (the language), and the attempt to add more information than what is given by textbooks and curricula become part of the instructors' identities.

As the participants in the current study pointed out, language teachers need to keep themselves informed and updated on a regular basis to be able to continue their effective teaching of the language and culture. Ingrid went as far as to state that teachers should be required to stay updated and regularly check on the new issues that evolve within the language and the culture. Vanessa echoed this when she pointed out that a regular update on news enables her to teach currently relevant cultural issues. This ongoing engagement with the subject field interacts with foreign language teachers' identities in the present study also, supporting Borg's (2006) findings.

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Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships—with respect to the students and the function of the instructional context—formed the second facet of teachers' identities in this study. Teachers' interpersonal relationships with their students highlighted the

formation of teachers' identities through dialogic interaction between the two groups. At the same time, the function of the instructional context illustrated the participants' negotiation of identities vis-à-vis the department and its policies. Evidence of identity negotiation in regards to other instructors was not found.

Teacher-student definition of identity. The majority of the participants defined their self-image as an instructor in relation to their students and described it with a variety of expressions such as "working relationship with the students," "reach," and "interaction."

I see teaching as a constant *interaction* between students and the teacher […]

I would characterize my *working relationship with the students* as casual (jokes, fun activities, informal mode of interaction), yet professional (firm deadlines, clearly stated policies and expectations, enforcing of policies). (Joseph/Self-reflective journal entry)

A language teacher has to make sure to "*reach*" all students. (Vanessa/ Self-reflective journal entry)

The instructors emphasized the relationship between them and the students by highlighting their image of successful teaching as engagement with their students. It is important for the participants to connect with their students in order for them to consider their teaching meaningful. They see their task to be "reaching" their audience (Vanessa), interacting with their students and establishing a relationship (Joseph). By describing themselves through their students in words such as "interaction" and "relationship with," the instructors portray their teacher identity as being co-constructed and maintained with and through their students. Identity is co-constructed not only in interaction with one's self, but also with others, as shown by many researchers (e.g., Bakhtin (1981) and Ivanic (2006)). The co-construction with their students seemed significant in the participants' self-representation as teachers of foreign languages.

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Another central descriptor relating to the students seemed to be the instructors' role as facilitator, which the instructors emphasized when they described FL teaching.

As a teacher I take on a role of kind of *mediator*. I try to transmit knowledge in an easy, fun, interesting, engaging and teaching way to my students. I try to get everyone involved in the learning process.... (Ingrid/ Self-reflective journal entry)

And the teaching side, I would say, is just kind of *facilitating* [...] is helping [the students] kind of realize those goals, helping them achieve these competences with the language and with the culture and with the everyday situations, with values, with you know, everything [...] teaching is just the *facilitating* [of the students'] acquisition or their learning.... (Matthew/Interview)

> As a teacher I try to convey the information that students need to know in order to succeed. However, I do not just give them the answers to the questions. [...] I see my job as *guiding* them in their learning process. (Franc/Self-reflective journal entry)

With this role that the instructors take on, they stress the importance of their students' progress in the subject matter. The reflection on how their students perform is significant to these instructors, reflecting a collaborative learning environment and becoming part of their identity as teachers. Their duties to guide the students (Franc), mediate information (Ingrid), and facilitate experiences (Matthew) become an essential facet of identity construction. Additionally, when the instructors describe their role as facilitator or mediator, they are positioning themselves not as a lecturer. Matthew emphasized this point further in the focus group interview.

> It's maybe also they way we talk about ourselves. You [addressing Paul] said: "Language teachers." Maybe we should stop calling ourselves 'language teachers,' I mean, we should also stop saying that we are teaching [...] maybe we should start calling ourselves *facilitators of cultural interactions*.... (Matthew/Focus group interview)

When Matthew suggested the term "facilitator" as opposed to "teacher," the other participants agreed by either nodding or not resisting the idea. Matthew also emphasized being "facilitators of cultural interactions," which implies the instructors' underlying pedagogical belief that they are teaching not just language, but also culture. By contrasting themselves with their students either as a teacher or as a facilitator, the participants are negotiating themselves and their identities in relation to their students and their role toward their students. This subject position of how the instructors describe themselves, using different repertoires, and how others (e.g., in this case the students) might perceive them is part of their identities and their development and negotiating of these identities. Franc added a different role besides being the facilitator by describing roles he does *not* play.

> I am *neither their friend nor their father* but I also think that I don't have to rule with an iron fist. I see *my job* as *guiding* them in their learning process. (Franc/Self-reflective journal entry)

By emphasizing what he is *not*, namely "friend," Franc indicates that he will not allow students to take advantage of an overly permissive instructor, while not being their "father" might signify that Franc also does not believe in being too authoritarian. By identifying with what he is *not*, he clearly separates himself from the "laissez-faire" and the "authoritative" teachers, portraying a non-participant membership to either category (Wenger, 1998).

    Identity as a function of instructional context. How instructors defined and described themselves often depended on the instructional context in which they teach. The influence of the university and especially of the department in which the participants teach can and does have an impact on how these instructors understand their teaching and themselves as teachers regarding the goals of their teaching.

When describing instructional outcomes for their FL classrooms, some participants related these goals to departmental goals.

> Well, my goal is the *department's goal.* So, my goal is to introduce them to German…. (Linda/Interview)

> Most important, if I had to rank it, I think, *we are forced here*, or anywhere in sort of university setting *to convey the facts of the language*, I guess, that's the most important thing. (Joseph/Interview)

Linda and Joseph negotiated the goal of their teaching according to the department's goal or at least to what they *think* the goal of the department is. Linda's definition of the departmental goal is very broad and non-specific. These instructors perceive the department's goals as a priority that they must follow. The department definitely sets goals for its language courses. However, not all goals seem to reach the instructors. The main goal for the department is for students to use the language in a communicative way. To achieve this overall goal, objectives, such as students will be able to speak and write in German meaningfully and accurately according to their level, comprehend and recognize cultural differences and similarities, are set in place. The objective to incorporate culture in language teaching is clearly stated; however, knowledge of the "facts of the language" (which is basically metalinguistic knowledge) is not mentioned as a learning objective for lower-division courses. Joseph, specifically, seems to believe that the university setting necessitates that his main goal as a FL teacher is to transmit language facts. In making reference to instructional objectives, these instructors negotiate part of their identity in conjunction with the department. Linda elaborates on this issue further in the second questionnaire.

> I think what the university (and all universities) really wants students to get out of a 2 yr. foreign language requirement is a more open mind toward other cultures and peoples, but since it's a 'foreign language' requirement, the *focus tends to be on proficiency in the language*, and the curriculum doesn't clearly reflect this goal. I think we need to be more specific about what aspects of culture we want to teach students. (Linda/Questionnaire)

Linda believes that universities set their goals to be more than just reaching a certain level of proficiency of the language, but adds that the requirement pushes instructors to focus mainly on language proficiency. It seems that Linda needs more clarification and understanding of what she should be teaching, since the goals of the university (according to her) and that of the actual curriculum of FLs do not correlate. Linda finds it difficult to comprehend and capture what the curriculum is asking of her. She tries to negotiate her identity and her subject position in relation to the curriculum and the instructional context. The expectations of what she should teach seem unclear to her, especially when it comes to teaching culture. Many of the participants negotiated their identities as instructors in interaction with their students and their department, illustrating how important these factors are when it comes to forming an identity within this profession.

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Intrapersonal Factors

A final facet of teacher identity emerging in this study is intrapersonal space. Various aspects of intrapersonal space emerged from the participants' responses. This report will highlight two aspects: (1) motivation for teaching and (2) self-perceived characteristics of the role of teachers.

Motivation for teaching. To be able to discuss their image as teachers, some participants emphasized their motivation for teaching.

> How is teacher defined? When I am in *the classroom* I am a teacher because that is *my job*. I get *paid* to "teach" students whatever the subject is that I am teaching at that particular time. In that respect I am a teacher during class time. (Franc/Self-reflective journal entry)

> "Teacher" can be simply the *label* of who/what I am *for my students*.... (Ingrid/Self-reflective journal entry)

> ...teaching is a more important component for the *type of career* I would like to pursue. (Justin/Self-reflective journal entry)

> What I love about teaching is its *diversity*. (Vanessa/Self-reflective journal entry 1)

> Part of my motivation as a teacher is to get *students interested and excited* about the *topics I love to teach*. (Joseph/Self-reflective journal entry)

The instructors' motivations may relate to the classroom either directly, as we see in Franc's comment; by connecting it with students and their perception of what a teacher might be, as Ingrid mentioned; by linking it to the profession, as in Justin's case; or by being excited to introduce topics to students, as in Joseph's view. According to Varghese's (2000) study, a key element of teachers' identities is whether these teachers participated as full members or acted as non-participants in accordance with Wenger's (1998) model of participation and non-participation. Although Varghese's (2000) participants were full-time novice bilingual teachers (Spanish/English) in bilingual schools, her results can be transferred to the FL graduate instructors in this study. In the present study, several participants mainly aligned themselves with being in the classroom and having students label them as "teachers." Thus, for the most part, for Ingrid, Justin, Vanessa, and Joseph, the results do not seem to reflect full member participation yet, which can be due to the instructors' competing lives between being a teacher, a graduate student, and a researcher. At this point of their career the participants work part-time as instructors and then have to fulfill expectations as graduate students and researchers, whereas Varghese's (2000) participants were full- time teachers. Becoming full members of the teaching community is not an impossible goal for the participants. Once they finish graduate school, some of them will probably pursue careers as professors or teachers, and they may become full members of a community of practice at that time.

Self-perceived characteristics of the role of teachers. As seen above, the role of the instructor already appeared in the interpersonal section, in which the participants associated their identity in interaction with their students. Instructors also described their role as teachers as an intrapersonal process, emphasizing two characteristics: (1) the responsibilities of a language instructors and (2) the level of formality in the classroom. The following excerpts from the participants' self-reflective journal entries offer examples of each of these features.

...being the teacher is a *highly demanding* and important role that asks for a lot of *responsibility*…. (Ingrid/Self-reflective journal entry)

When describing her role as a teacher, Ingrid portrays a serious attitude toward her choice of career. Other instructors described their role as teachers differently.

I guess teachers have to have multiple personalities or at least *multiple interests*. [...] (Vanessa/Self-reflective journal entry)

Vanessa emphasized the importance of having numerous interests and pointed out the responsibility of staying up-to-date on current events. This view reflects Borg's (2006) assertion that foreign language teachers differ from other teachers of other subjects, in that they always need to be current in their subject because their subject is also the medium for the transmission of the subject.

The second characteristic within the theme of teacher roles was the level of formality in the classroom. Many instructors commented on the formality of their classroom and how it influenced their role as teachers.

As a teacher I see myself **as** *very informal*.... (Linda/Self-reflective journal entry)

I try *not* to be *authoritative* or *laissez-faire*.... (Ingrid/Self-reflective journal entry)

Linda reflected on being very informal in the classroom and as a teacher. Independent observation of Linda supports this perception. She is an easygoing teacher and is indeed very informal. She appears more like a peer to her students, rather than the teacher, e.g., she begins her class by asking her students whether they should start class now. Ingrid, on the other hand, said that she is trying to balance herself to be neither too "authoritative" nor too "laissez-faire." In the classroom, however, she tended to be informal. This led many times to students going off task. Thus, her use of the verb "try" aptly describes her efforts of finding a balance for her classroom management. Finding the right level of formality to keep control of one's own classroom can be very difficult. Ingrid and Linda are the two instructors with the least amount of teaching experience, yet both displayed a different style and identity when it came to formality in the classroom. This might be due to the fact that Linda's attitude and personality in general seem to be very relaxed, and she is confident of herself. She portrayed this relaxedness in the interview, in the focus group interview, as well as in her teaching. Whatever she encounters does not seem to bother her, e.g., in the classroom, when a few of her students caused a disruption, she ignores the issue and continues her lesson. She seems very secure and does not seem to overanalyze any issues whether they pertain to teaching or

research. In her interview, she described how she managed questions to which she did not know the answers, offering evidence as to her source of confidence:

> If I don't know the answer, well, of course, I *acknowledge it* and say, you know: that is a good question. I've never thought about that before, or whatever the case may be [...] it *doesn't catch me off guard*. But I've also, I mean in other jobs, too, I had experience where I was the least experienced. So, cooking with my grandparents who have been doing something for 50 years and I know nothing about it. It's a good skill to have, to be able to say: Let me find out for you, you know, just one second, ah, very good question. (Linda/Interview)

Linda's experience and understanding that it is acceptable not to know everything helps her be successful in the classroom, managing a relaxed and confident teaching stance.

Ingrid, on the other hand, seems to want to give the right answers all the time. In the interview, her responses were fairly short, but she seemed to have to think about them for a while. She further used "I guess" a lot, which made her seem unsure of her answers or she might have been seeking validation. In the focus group interview she did not participate much, but whenever she did, it seemed as if she were thinking about her response for a longer time. Ingrid appeared to be very insecure when observed in the classroom; she seemed to work hard so that her students would like her and feel comfortable. She even stated it in her reflection that she strives to make her students' learning experience successful.

> ... It happened, that I had to change my entire teaching plan for a session, because my preparations were based on a [homework] assignment that 50% or more [of my students] did not do. Then I feel a little uncomfortable because I cannot do what I had prepared. I do not like to *yell* at them or *give punishments*, because it would in a way harm the comfort level of all. (Ingrid/Self-reflective journal entry)

As can be seen, Ingrid would rather not disturb her students' level of confidence by being perceived as demanding. Wanting to balance her level of formality between being too formal and too lenient makes it difficult to make some micro-decisions in the classroom. In order not to punish her students, she chose to feel less comfortable herself which then made her more informal than she might have wanted to be. This, in turn, might have led to difficulties in asking her students to focus. The observations supported Ingrid's self- reporting as well, in that in the three visits to her classroom, the students lost their concentration. Although she showed some minor frustration, Ingrid expressed this disappointment with laughter and walked around the classroom, seemingly unsure of what to do next. Trying not to be too strict on her students, Ingrid seemed to have a difficult time stirring her students to focus again.

Identifying as instructors occurs for the participants through an internal "interaction," as can be seen by their self-perception of their roles as teachers. This self-perception includes their responsibilities as language educators, but also

in the self-perception of their formality as teachers in the classroom. Often the understanding of who they are does not match the reality, but part of negotiating an identity is the perception of one's self, which these instructors undergo.

Pedagogical Implications

To ensure successful teaching, identities of FL graduate TAs need to be considered by the departments in their preparation as teachers. As individuals with different identities, training for these instructors should address the various concepts and struggles that teachers encounter, which sometimes are mentioned in a TA methodology class briefly in their first-semester. Having touched upon these issues once at the very beginning of their careers is not enough. Any topics highlighted and studied in a TA's methodology class is only a basis and needs to be complemented with continuous and ongoing professional development. Many instructors in this study expressed the interest and desire to have an ongoing discussion and engagement in issues on teaching. Findings from this study suggested that training programs for graduate instructors should include the following components:

> To ensure successful teaching, identities of FL graduate TAs need to be considered by the departments in their preparation as teachers.

1. a clear statement of departmental expectations and goals regarding teaching language and culture,
2. ongoing discussions about issues pertaining to teacher identity, such as confidence and authority,
3. ongoing workshops on important topics in FL education, such as teaching culture and intercultural competence (ICC),
4. collaboration among the graduate instructors through regular meetings, and
5. regular reflections on teaching, such as journal entries and discussions about pedagogical issues.

In order to improve teaching and learning, we have to understand teacher identities and offer effective and valuable training programs. Professional development should occur regularly and should discuss various topics within the field of FL teaching, for example, new approaches, teaching culture and ICC, assessment, standards, technology, and learner variables. Stating the expectations clearly will allow graduate instructors to prepare better for their classrooms and give them the opportunity to inform themselves about unclear topics. To avoid this misunderstanding, a continuous dialogue through workshops and meetings that will reiterate the goals and offer collaboration will benefit these instructors. What needs to be taught and how it should be taught plays an influential part in teacher identities and thus needs to be incorporated into their training. In addition to regular meetings and workshops, one might offer a mandatory one-credit hour course once a year for TAs, in which pedagogical topics as mentioned above would be discussed. Part of this training should be regular reflections on identity constructs, such as confidence, authority, roles as instructors versus graduate students, struggles the instructors encounter and possible solutions, and

time management. This training needs to an ongoing process and occur regularly throughout the TAs' careers. Only through this continuous engagement with teaching can the instructors grow, collaborate, learn, and self-reflect.

Conclusion

The present report has proven insightful in demonstrating the negotiation of teacher identification in regard to FL graduate TAs in German and how the identification influences teaching. All participants' identities seem in development and progress, and they constantly negotiate their identities in dialog and within communities of practice as research suggested (Bakhtin, 1981; Wenger, 1998). Moreover, these identification constructs interplayed, and participants concerned themselves with different constructs at the same time, illustrating a circular, interactional development in teaching and teacher identification.

All instructors engaged with similar identity issues, such as the instructional content, the interpersonal, and the intrapersonal factors, but discussed these issues using different repertoires, with only a few overlaps. In reference to the instructional content, the participants negotiated their identities in an ongoing matter and in an examination of their subject matter and the knowledge thereof. Concerning interpersonal aspects, instructors described themselves through their students and negotiated their identities in part through this relationship, using different interpretive repertoires. The participants further co-constructed their identities by assigning roles to themselves, either explicitly as mediators or facilitators, or implicitly by indicating in what role they did not engage, and the way they promoted the classroom environment for their students. With respect to intrapersonal factors, the graduate instructors described their identities in regard to their own self-perception as teachers and their motivation for teaching. Although they are all instructors of German at the same university negotiating similar aspects of teacher identities, the usage of diverse repertoires by the participants suggests that their experiences are very individual.

Furthermore, not many instructors identified fully as members of the FL teaching profession, which might be due to their not having access to an active professional vocabulary and discourse on pedagogy and instruction. They seem to be searching for a language for instructional professionals and their negotiations are comparable to a kind of interlanguage. Becoming a full member is not exclusively participation in the community, but also involves motivation, access to resources, and support (Wenger, 1998). The participants in this study clearly had the motivation, partial access to resources, and support. Some participated more than others in the community of FL educators; however, this study illustrated that more research needs to be done on population of FL graduate instructors. A study across FLs would provide a good picture as to the needs of FL TAs. Additionally, conducting a comparative study with an experimental group receiving the above-mentioned pedagogical training and a control group without treatment would shed light onto TAs' identities and needs.

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRES (1 – 3)

INSTRUCTORS' QUESTIONNAIRE I

1. Personal Information

Please answer the following questions about yourself.

1. Please provide your email address
2. Please check: _____ Female   _____ Male
3. Age: _____ 18-22 _____ 23-30   _____ 31-40   _____ 41-50
4. What is your nationality?
5. Where were you born?
6. What is (are) your native language (s)?
7. Please list any other languages that you speak
8. Please list all the different places you lived in for at least six months and include the beginning and end dates of your stay there.
9. If German is not your native language, have you ever lived in a German-speaking country?   _____ Yes   _____ NO
   If yes, list the country and the dates and length of time.
10. If you are a non-native speaker of German, how did you acquire German (e.g. formal classes)?
11. If you were not born in the United States, how long have you been living here?

2. Classroom Teaching

Please answer the following questions on classroom teaching.

1. How long have you been teaching German?
2. Why are you teaching German?
3. For each pair, please choose the one statement that closest describes your belief as an instructor.

3.1. (a) I want my students to like me.
  (b) I want to accomplish the goals.
3.2. (a) I want my students to learn skills, knowledge, and attitudes that they can use for life.
  (b) I want my students to love German
3.3. (a) I want my students to learn skills, knowledge, and attitudes that they need to advance/promote/expand their proficiency in German.
  (b) I want to be part of the students' way to adulthood.
3.4. (a) I want my students to learn from me.
  (b) I want to be available for my students' personal problems.

4. In your opinion, what are the objectives of foreign language teaching? Please rank the following objectives on a scale from 1 – 5, with 1 being the most important and 5 least important.

4.1. Make learning a foreign language a positive experience for my students.

  1   2   3   4   5

4.2. Help my students to acquire proficiency in the foreign language.

  1   2   3   4   5

4.3. Familiarize my students with the culture of the countries where the language is spoken.

  1   2   3   4   5

4.4. Encourage an open-mind and a positive attitude towards foreign languages and cultures.

  1   2   3   4   5

4.5. Aid my students in understanding their own culture and identity better.

  1   2   3   4   5

3. Culture

Please answer the following questions on culture.

1. How important is "culture teaching" in a foreign language classroom on a scale from 1 – 5, with 1 being very important?

  1   2   3   4   5

2. What is "culture teaching" in your opinion? Please rate the following statements on a scale from 1 – 5, with 1 being the most important and 5 least important.

2.1. Students learn about history, geography, and politics of the foreign culture.

  1   2   3   4   5

2.2. Students learn about daily life.

  1   2   3   4   5

2.3. Students learn about values and beliefs of Germans.

  1   2   3   4   5

    2.4. Encourage an open-mind and a positive attitude towards foreign languages and cultures.

        1   2   3   4   5

    2.5. Handling intercultural situations.

        1   2   3   4   5

Comments:

3. How much time to you dedicate to teaching language and teaching culture.

    a. 100 % - 0 %   b. 80 % - 20 %   c. 60 % - 40 %

    d. 40 % - 60 %   e. 20 % - 80 %   f. 100 % language and culture

4. With which of these statements do you agree?

    a. We should spend more time on teaching culture.

    b. We already have a good balance of teaching culture and language.

    c. We should spend less time on teaching culture, to leave more time for actual language learning.

INSTRUCTORS' QUESTIONNAIRE II

1. Personal Information

Please answer the following questions about yourself.
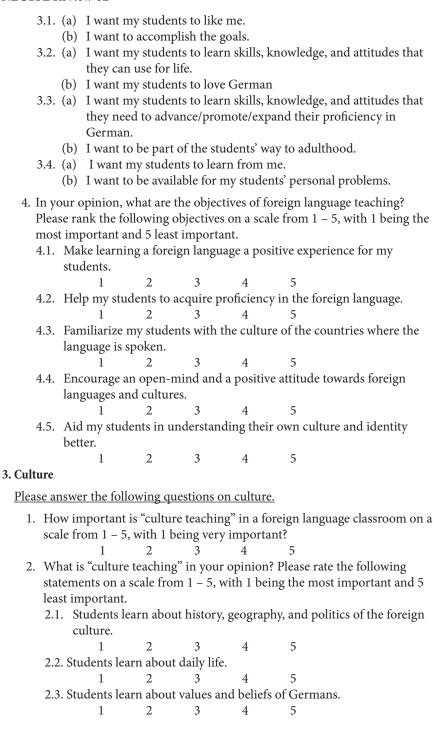
1. Please provide your email address

2. Classroom Teaching

Please answer the following questions on classroom teaching.

1. How long have you been teaching German?
2. Why are you teaching German?
3. For each pair, please choose the one statement that closest describes your belief as an instructor.

    3.1. (a) I want my students to like me.

        (b) I want to accomplish the goals.

    3.2. (a) I want my students to learn skills, knowledge, and attitudes that they can use for life.

        (b) I want my students to love German

    3.3. (a) I want my students to learn skills, knowledge, and attitudes that they need to advance/promote/expand their proficiency in German.

        (b) I want to be part of the students' way to adulthood.

    3.4. (a) I want my students to learn from me.

        (b) I want to be available for my students' personal problems.

4. In your opinion, what are the objectives of foreign language teaching? Please rank the following objectives on a scale from 1 – 5, with 1 being the most important and 5 least important.

    4.1. Make learning a foreign language a positive experience for my students.

        1 2   3   4   5

4.2. Help my students to acquire proficiency in the foreign language.

      1   2   3   4   5

4.3. Familiarize my students with the culture of the countries where the language is spoken.

      1   2   3   4   5

4.4. Encourage an open-mind and a positive attitude towards foreign languages and cultures.

      1   2   3   4   5

4.5. Aid my students in understanding their own culture and identity better.

      1   2   3   4   5

3. Culture

Please answer the following questions on culture.

1. How important is "culture teaching" in a foreign language classroom on a scale from 1 – 5, with 1 being very important?

      1   2   3   4   5

2. What is "culture teaching" in your opinion? Please rate the following statements on a scale from 1 – 5, with 1 being the most important and 5 least important.

    2.1. Students learn about history, geography, and politics of the foreign culture.

       1   2   3   4   5

    2.2. Students learn about daily life.

       1   2   3   4   5

    2.3. Students learn about values and beliefs of Germans.

       1   2   3   4   5

    2.4. Encourage an open-mind and a positive attitude towards foreign languages and cultures.

       1   2   3   4   5

    2.5. Handling intercultural situations.

       1   2   3   4   5

Comments:

3. How much time to you dedicate to teaching language and teaching culture.

a. 100 % - 0 %   b. 80 % - 20 %   c. 6 0% - 40 %   d. 40 % - 60 %

e. 20 % - 80 %   f. 100 % language and culture

4. With which of these statements do you agree?

a. We should spend more time on teaching culture.

b. We already have a good balance of teaching culture and language.

c. We should spend less time on teaching culture, to leave more time for actual language learning.

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INSTRUCTORS' QUESTIONNAIRE III

</div>

1. Personal Information

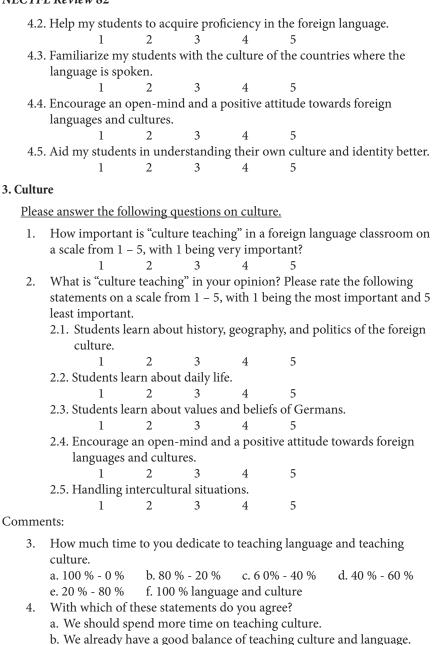Please answer the following questions about yourself.

1. Please provide your email address

2. Classroom Teaching

Please answer the following questions on classroom teaching.

1. How long have you been teaching German?
2. Why are you teaching German?
3. For each pair, please choose the one statement that closest describes your belief as an instructor.
   3.1. (a) I want my students to like me.
        (b) I want to accomplish the goals.
   3.2. (a) I want my students to learn skills, knowledge, and attitudes that they can use for life.
        (b) I want my students to love German
   3.3. (a) I want my students to learn skills, knowledge, and attitudes that they need to advance/promote/expand their proficiency in German.
        (b) I want to be part of the students' way to adulthood.
   3.4. (a) I want my students to learn from me.
        (b) I want to be available for my students' personal problems.

4. In your opinion, what are the objectives of foreign language teaching? Please rank the following objectives on a scale from 1 – 5, with 1 being the most important and 5 least important.
   4.1. Make learning a foreign language a positive experience for my students.
        1   2   3   4   5
   4.2. Help my students to acquire proficiency in the foreign language.
        1   2   3   4   5
   4.3. Familiarize my students with the culture of the countries where the language is spoken.
        1   2   3   4   5
   4.4. Encourage an open-mind and a positive attitude towards foreign languages and cultures.
        1   2   3   4   5
   4.5. Aid my students in understanding their own culture and identity better.
        1   2   3   4   5

3. Culture

Please answer the following questions on culture.

1.   How important is "culture teaching" in a foreign language classroom on a scale from 1 – 5, with 1 being very important?
        1   2   3   4   5

2. What is "culture teaching" in your opinion? Please rate the following statements on a scale from 1 – 5, with 1 being the most important and 5 least important.

2.1. Students learn about history, geography, and politics of the foreign culture.

       1   2   3   4   5

2.2. Students learn about daily life.

       1   2   3   4   5

2.3. Students learn about values and beliefs of Germans.

       1   2   3   4   5

2.4. Encourage an open-mind and a positive attitude towards foreign languages and cultures.

       1   2   3   4   5

2.5. Handling intercultural situations.

       1   2   3   4   5

Comments:

3. How much time to you dedicate to teaching language and teaching culture.

a. 100 % - 0 %   b. 80 % - 20 %   c. 6 0% - 40 %   d. 40 % - 60 %

e. 20 % - 80 %   f. 100 % language and culture

4. With which of these statements do you agree?

a. We should spend more time on teaching culture.

b. We already have a good balance of teaching culture and language.

c. We should spend less time on teaching culture, to leave more time for actual language learning.